



## Factors contributing to mismanagement in National Sport Federations

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### Abstract

The concept of management is used as an essential factor in the management of sports organizations worldwide. There has been extensive research focusing on its importance and implications. However, as indicated by previous research, this phenomenon has not been explored specifically in the Sri Lankan context for national sports federations. This research aims to fill this gap. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to identify the key challenges and difficulties in carrying out management tasks of national sport federations in Sri Lanka. Moreover, we seek to identify key management challenges faced in the functioning of national sport federations in Sri Lanka and explore possible initiatives for restructuring. The study is based on a qualitative research approach. Fifteen (15) national sport federations of Sri Lanka were selected by using purposive sampling method. The study examined Data were obtained through 30 officials, administrators, athletes and committee members via interviews, supported by textual analysis. Data was interpreted by using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that outdated governance structures, weak human resource management, internal political interference, inadequate accountability mechanisms are the primary obstacles to effective administration. This study emphasizes the need for governance reforms, improve accountability and an enhanced capacity of national sport federations in Sri Lanka to establish long term sustainable sporting culture policy reforms, transparency and adapting international standards as essential to the betterment of these bodies.

**Keywords:** Sport, management, national sport federations, sri lanka, governance, policy

### Introduction

Sport has emerged as a vital component of social, cultural, and economic life in contemporary Sri Lanka. Beyond its recreational and health dimensions, sport plays a significant role in nation-building at various social levels, from individual inclusion and agency development to shaping national and international perceptions; human development, identity formation, and global diplomacy (Mielke, 2015; Chaka & Adanlawo, 2022; Postlethwaite *et al.*, 2022; Ettinger, 2023) [3, 7, 15, 19]. National sport governing bodies (NSGBs) are distinct from other non-profits in the way that they are mechanisms instituted to govern other sport organizations that deliver the services in their respective sports (Chelladurai, P., & Zintz, 2015) [5]. The responsibility for organizing, promoting, and regulating sport disciplines at the national level lies primarily with the National Sport Federations (NSFs). These federations are autonomous bodies recognized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) and affiliated with the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) as well as their respective International Federations (IFs). They act as the primary institutional mechanisms through which athletes are trained, competitions are organized, and representation in international events is coordinated.

In the global context research on managing NSFs reveals several key frameworks and considerations. Kasale *et al.* (2018) [12] developed a holistic performance management model for National Sports Organizations (NSOs) using macro, meso, and micro frameworks, emphasizing that NSOs' ability to respond to external environmental dynamics through appropriate organizational processes and structural designs influences their performance management effectiveness. Comparative analysis shows significant

differences between ISFs and NSFs in organizational structure, governance, funding, and sports development roles, with ISFs operating internationally through democratically elected Executive Boards while NSFs focus on national-level activities through elected Executive Committees (Sharma & Singh, 2024) [22]. Viollet *et al.* (2023) [24] proposed a conceptual model for NSFs sport policy through integrative literature review, providing an analytical tool for policy design, implementation, and assessment. Meanwhile, Furtado *et al.* (2022) [9] found that Brazilian Olympic NSOs show moderate-weak adherence to modernization practices, with government and Olympic Committee pressure driving governance improvements. Though, it was identified that there was little focus in research exploring the management challenges of NSFs in global scenario.

In the local context research on sport governance in Sri Lanka suggests that while certain federations have made attempts to apply good governance practices, significant challenges persist, Rathnayaka and Nquyen (2019) [21], in their investigation of national sport federations, found that the adoption of good governance principles is uneven, with transparency, accountability, and stakeholder participation often lacking despite formal commitments. Integrity concerns remain a pressing issue, as Madhushani (2019) [14] identifies corruption and inadequate preventive mechanisms as key barriers to governance in the Sri Lankan context. Adding to this perspective, Rathnayaka and Dhokrat (2025) [22] argue that non-governance driven by power struggles and personal prestige continues to undermine institutional effectiveness, suggesting that the country's sport system requires stronger frameworks and cultural shifts to ensure genuine good governance. However, no research has been

inquired about the scope of management functioning challenges and prospects of NSFs in Sri Lanka.

Despite its importance, academic literature on the management of NSFs in Sri Lanka remains relatively underdeveloped compared to research in Western contexts. Much of the available knowledge stems from media reports, government audits, and policy documents rather than systematic scholarly inquiry. This gap underscores the need for rigorous research that not only identifies the challenges faced by NSFs/NSAs but also explores prospects and potential reforms. The present study is designed to fill this gap by examining the management of NSFs/NSAs in Sri Lanka with a focus on challenges and prospects. Specifically, the research seeks to (a) identify key management challenges faced in the functioning of national sport federations in Sri Lanka and (b) explore possible initiatives for restructuring. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute to the growing discourse on sport management in Sri Lanka and provide insights that may inform policymakers, administrators, and scholars.

In sum, NSFs/NSAs occupy a pivotal position in shaping Sri Lanka's sporting system. However, their effectiveness is hindered by governance deficits, financial constraints, and organizational inefficiencies. At the same time, opportunities for reform exist through the adoption of professional management practices, diversification of funding, and adherence to good governance principles. Investigating these issues is essential for understanding the present condition of Indian sport governance and identifying pathways for a more effective and accountable system.

### **The Case of National Sport Federations in Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, National Sports Associations (NSAs) or National Sports Federations (NSFs) are governed by the Sports Law No. 25 of 1973 and its subsequent amendments, including the NSAs Regulations of 2025. These laws mandate a strict registration process for NSAs/NSFs with the Ministry of Sports, requiring the submission of detailed constitutions and financial records. As of 25 June 2025, the number of registered NSAs/NSFs in Sri Lanka stands at seventy-four (74).

Each NSAs/NSFs is required to register the relevant rules outlined in Sections 28 to 35 of Chapter Three of Act No. 25 of 1973. According to the interpretation section of the Act, a 'National Association of Sports' is defined as 'an association, federation, or body which is the controlling or governing body of a sport or group of sports named under Section 28.'

The Ministry of Sports has introduced detailed regulations, such as the National Sports Associations Regulations No. 01 of 2025, to oversee the governance of NSAs/NSFs. This latest legislation replaces a series of regulations dating back to 2016 and aims to establish a transparent, accountable, and well-regulated framework for NSAs/NSFs. The Act was amended through the Gazette Extraordinary titled National Sports Associations Regulations No. 01 of 2025, No. 2437/24 of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, dated 21 May 2025. At their annual general meetings, each NSAs/NSFs in Sri Lanka appoints its key office-bearers. These typically include the President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, and members of the General Committee.

In Sri Lanka, NSAs and NSFs that represent Olympic sports are required to obtain membership in the National Olympic

Committee of Sri Lanka (NOC SL). This membership entails compliance with the Statutes of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which emphasize autonomy, good governance, and adherence to global standards of sport administration. As of mid-2025, twenty-nine national sports associations hold such membership, thereby forming the institutional link between Sri Lanka and the international Olympic movement.

The governance and management of NSAs/NSFs operate under a hybrid structure in which the associations themselves exercise primary responsibility, while supervisory authority rests with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. The operational models vary considerably: some NSAs/NSFs employ permanent staff or contract personnel on a paid basis, whereas others rely heavily on voluntary contributions, with office-bearers themselves performing much of the administrative work. Given their non-profit status, these organizations are often financially dependent on external support, particularly from the Ministry, International Sports Federations (ISFs), sponsors, clubs, and other private entities. This dependency has produced persistent structural weaknesses, including inadequate financial sustainability, reliance on voluntary labor, and the absence of professional expertise. In many cases, deficiencies in record-keeping, limited access to technological resources, and insufficient infrastructure have compounded the challenges of organizational management. These institutional shortcomings have been widely recognized in Sri Lanka, where debates surrounding the governance of NSAs/NSFs have persisted for decades. Central issues include the effectiveness of management, the integrity of policy implementation, the accountability of office-bearers, and the transparency of decision-making processes. While NSAs/NSFs are formally granted autonomy under the Olympic Charter, their heavy reliance on government recognition and financial assistance has created a dualistic relationship marked by both interdependence and tension. This situation has led to recurrent criticisms of NSAs/NSFs for management failures, corruption scandals, misallocation of resources, lack of accountability, and resistance to reforms. In some instances, these failures have resulted in temporary suspensions of NSAs/NSFs, both domestically and internationally, undermining the credibility of Sri Lanka's sport governance system.

The consequences of such governance weaknesses are evident in the experiences of athletes, who often face discouragement, inadequate facilities, and insufficient institutional support. Reports in recent years highlight that athletes have been disadvantaged by conflicts of interest within federations, organizational inefficiencies, and poor funding allocation. While isolated sporting successes have been achieved such as medal wins at the 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou, the 100th Australian Para Athletics Games, and the Dubai Grand Prix Fazza International Championships, alongside the triumphs of the Sri Lankan Women's Cricket Team these achievements remain exceptions rather than indicators of a robust system (Annual Performance Report, 2023). The overall trend suggests that systemic inefficiencies within NSAs/NSFs have hindered the sustained development of athletes and limited Sri Lanka's capacity to compete effectively at international levels.

These challenges underscore the broader governance dilemma of reconciling autonomy with responsibility in sport administration. On the one hand, NSAs/NSFs require sufficient independence to align with the Olympic Charter and manage their affairs free from undue political interference. On the other hand, their dependence on state resources and recognition necessitates mechanisms of accountability, transparency, and oversight. The lack of balance between these two dimensions has contributed to recurring governance failures and eroded public trust in sports institutions.

Considering these dynamics, the management and governance of NSAs/NSFs have become matters of national concern and scholarly inquiry. Weaknesses in implementing national sports development policies, coupled with mismanagement within federations, have fueled controversies that extend beyond sport into broader questions of institutional credibility and state–society relations. The issue is particularly salient given the increasing global emphasis on principles of good governance in sport, such as transparency, accountability, integrity, and stakeholder engagement, which have been strongly advocated by the IOC (2008) and other international bodies. These principles provide both a benchmark and a framework for evaluating the management practices of Sri Lankan NSAs/NSFs, highlighting the need for a systematic investigation into their current structures, management practices, and alignment with international standards.

### Methodology

Qualitative research gathers non-numerical data and seeks to provide deeper insights into real-world problems, (Chai *et al.*, 2021; Oranga & Matere, 2023) [4, 16]. It explores how individuals live, think, and respond to different situations, focusing on the meanings they attribute to their experiences. This approach is particularly suitable when addressing questions of ‘why’ and ‘how’. In this study, a qualitative research paradigm was employed to explore, understand, and gain comprehensive knowledge of the challenges and complexities faced by NSFs) and National NSAs in Sri Lanka. The purpose was to capture rich, detailed perceptions of phenomena through the perspectives of key stakeholders.

The scope and depth of qualitative data collection depend on the research question, the study’s objectives, and the need for credibility and utility. The central purpose of this research was to identify the key challenges and difficulties in carrying out management tasks within Sri Lankan NSFs and NSAs. Therefore, the primary method of data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, complemented by a review of secondary sources. Informants were chosen based on their direct experience and knowledge of organizational tasks and responsibilities. Secondary sources included a variety of materials such as published academic articles, books, public reports, newspapers, as well as audio and video resources, which provided contextual understanding and triangulation of findings.

A purposive sampling method was used to select 15 NSFs/NSAs across Sri Lanka. At the request of the participants, the specific names of federations are not disclosed; instead, they are coded as NSF/NSA P1 to NSF/NSA P30. Data was obtained from 30 individuals, including officials, administrators, athletes, and committee members. All participants were currently working within the selected federations. Among them, 8 were male and 7 were

female, and all agreed voluntarily to participate in the study. Their willingness created a comfortable environment for the interview process. At least two key stakeholders were chosen from each NSFs/NSAs, although not all federations were represented equally across the four stakeholder categories due to availability constraints.

Interviews were conducted online via Zoom. All sessions were audio-recorded, and detailed interview notes were prepared to support the later stages of analysis. The interviews were carried out in Sinhala and subsequently translated into English for interpretation. Data collection occurred across three rounds. The first round lasted approximately 40 minutes per session, while the second and third rounds, depending on participant availability and the need for clarification, lasted more than 20 minutes each. Many interviews were conducted during weekends in the evenings, which was a convenient time for participants.

For data analysis, thematic analysis was applied, a widely recognized method in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006) [2]. This approach involved systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data. Considerable attention was given to aligning the themes with the scope and objectives of the research. The process included selecting significant quotations, identifying recurring concepts, and grouping them into overarching themes that captured the essence of participants’ perspectives. Thematic analysis allowed for the interpretation of both explicit statements and underlying meanings, thereby ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by sport federations in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, for data visualization this research also used different types of thematic approaches such as thematic table, thematic charts and themes.

Ethical considerations were central throughout the research process. Prior to each interview, participants were informed of the study’s objectives, and their informed consent was obtained. They were assured of confidentiality, and anonymity was maintained using codes (NSAs/NSFs – P1-P30) instead of names. In addition, proper citation and acknowledgment of all secondary sources were ensured, and any potential conflicts of interest were disclosed. Participants were reminded that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. These measures safeguarded the integrity of the research and respected the rights of all participants.

In summary, this methodology adopted a qualitative design to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders in Sri Lankan NSFs and NSAs. Through purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, secondary document analysis, and thematic analysis, the study sought to provide meaningful insights into the governance and management challenges within the country’s sport federations. The systematic approach to data collection and analysis, combined with careful attention to ethical standards, ensured credibility, reliability, and validity of the findings.

### Findings and Discussion

This research has studied the management failures of NSFs/NSAs in Sri Lanka. We also address its challenges and prospects. This research has not covered all the NSFs and NSAs in Sri Lanka. It has been limited to only 15 selected NSFs and NSAs. In obtaining research data, experts in the field as well as people with less than five years of experience have also contributed to obtaining this data. Therefore, the information obtained through the interviews to collect the data has not been presented one by one in a

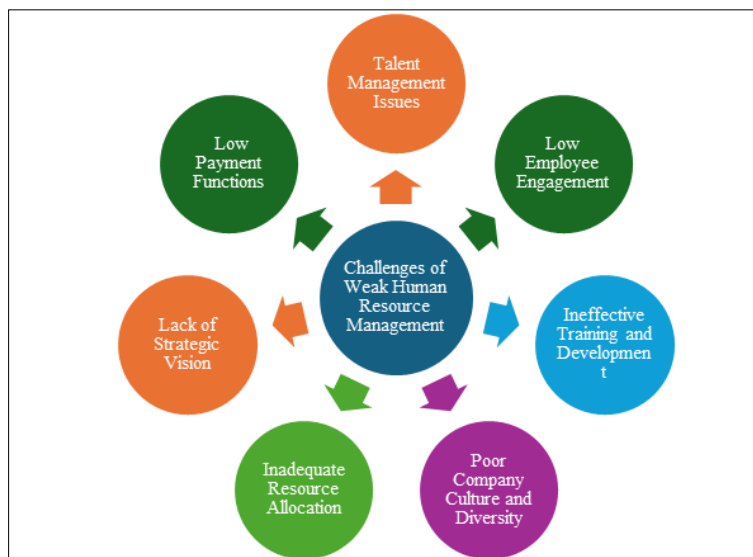
way that allows us to gain an understanding of the management of NSF/NSAs in Sri Lanka as a whole. However, an attempt has been made to summarize and present the interviews of all 30 participants in general. Accordingly, after categorizing the entire data, we were able to achieve the research objectives according to four themes. Accordingly, the summary data presented has been arranged in this section.

**Weak Human Resource Management**

In carrying out formal management of an organization, the educational skills, abilities, and attitudes of the employees assigned to it are also affected. It will vary from field to field. Especially in the sports sector, when focusing on human resources, knowledge, experience, and willingness about sports as well as the ability to adapt to the work environment in a sports organization will also directly affect it. Accordingly, the human resources of NSF/NSAs are unique and affect the management, activities, and nature of the association. According to Chelladurai (2006), there are three different groups of people who compose human resources in sport and recreation organizations: paid professional workers, volunteers, and the clients themselves. This research revealed that many NSF/NSAs in Sri Lanka use voluntary human resources. NSF/NSAs P1-P17 said that they had been voluntarily contributing to the management process of the NSF/NSAs for almost three years (NSF/NSAs P1-P18). Some people stated that they joined the NSF/NSAs out of interest in the human resource management profession. Most people say that ‘working in a sports organization is not easy’, (Everyone) ‘new problems arise every day’ (NSF/NSAs P22-P28). But it is difficult to involve the people who make the necessary decisions for

that. It is while doing other jobs that we take up positions in the NSF/NSAs. Most of the time, we are helpless’ when we work a lot of years (NSF/NSAs P7, 10,13,16, 22, 26,29). Otherwise, those who do not want to work think that ‘we are not doing the relevant work’ or ‘are avoiding it’. We know several people who worked in this position because they were more interested in human resource management in the sports sector than in money, but it is ‘difficult to work here’ (majority). The person who is here today ‘will be gone in a few days. The information about the work they did is not properly documented, and if they worked responsibly, it would not be like that. Whether or not someone is there, it is difficult to fulfill their duties (everyone). But what we see is that the main thing that is ‘needed to properly manage this NSF/NSAs is not recruiting good human resources’ (everyone).

When summarizing the opinions of a few others, it was as follows. We are paid a certain amount of money. Although that amount is not much, not everyone could gain experience in the field of sports. Therefore, we are happy with this job even if the salary is low (everyone). Even though we have not played, we are learning while working here. It was said that when working for a long time, decision-making is delayed because it takes some time to learn the task. In an environment that is growing day by day in sports, correct decisions and quick decisions are often made. In such circumstances, education about sports and the use of human resources in practical practices is an area that should be paid attention to in the management of sports associations in Sri Lanka, but the lack of attention paid by many NSF/NSAs to it was clear. Figure 1 illustrates the factors that influence weak human resource management in NSF/NSAs in Sri Lanka.



Source: Developed by researchers based on research data

Fig 1: Factors that Influence Weak Human Resource Management in NSF/NSAs in Sri Lanka

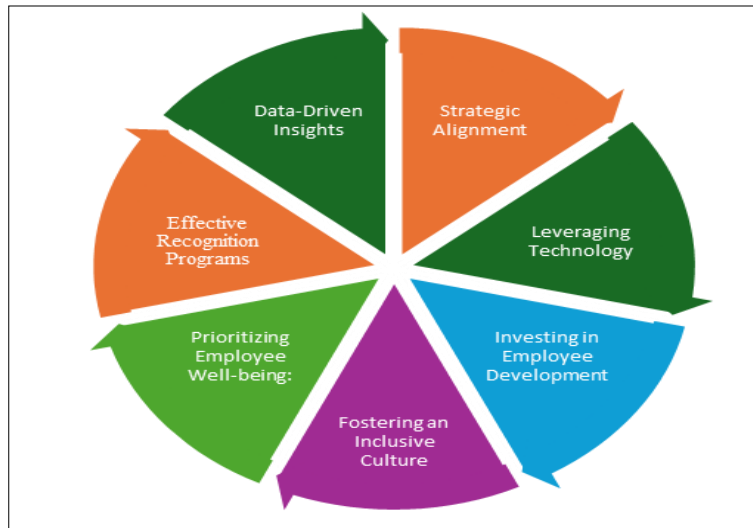
Research also revealed that the management of the NSF/NSAs can be streamlined through formal policy formulation in the recruitment of volunteers. ‘Those who are recruited to our association come willingly. After a maximum of a month or two, they do not come to work (everyone). The tasks assigned to them are left half-way. Often those documents are also misplaced. Due to lack of money, it is a serious problem that we must make associations work on a voluntary basis. For this, we are studying various methods’ (majority). However, these are the challenges faced by most NSF/NSAs in Sri Lanka in

general. We think it is timely for the government to intervene to introduce professionalism in this.

Thus, It was revealed that the poor management of these associations was mainly due to the resignation of senior officials in some cases, the absence of a permanent staff, the recruitment of employees based on friendship rather than qualifications, the lack of knowledge and minimal practices regarding modern methods, the reluctance to implement the instructions given by senior officials who lack practical knowledge, the disruption of the work of the association due to the rise of incompetent people even when qualified

people are in power, the rejections, the uncertainty of services due to short-term changes, the obstacles in the recruitment of the association's staff according to the needs of the key officials in the pursuit of the national and international goals of the entire sport. The main challenges

identified were the ease of carrying out day-to-day tasks and the lack of financial capacity (everyone). However, the impact of poor human resource management in some associations with financial capabilities on the management of the association was also clear.



Source: Developed by researchers based on research data

Fig 2: Prospects for eliminating weak human resource management

As the researchers have pointed out, the literature review revealed that the most important functions of human resource management have expanded significantly in the sports sector. Accordingly, attention has been paid to studies on how human resource management in a sports organization differs from other non-profit organizations/institutions. Accordingly, in this research, the timely importance of Sri Lankan NSFs/NSAs paying attention to several key areas that should be paid attention to in the human resource management of a sports association has been shown in the figure 1 according to this research data. Accordingly, by paying attention, we were able to identify that human resource management is an area that needs further attention figure 2.

The organizational structure of a sports organization directly affects the governance and management of the organization. In the research conducted in this regard, researchers have focused on traditional hierarchical models and their reforms, as well as the good and bad aspects of those hierarchies. Moreover, research has also focused on the relationship between those governance structures and their impact on the organization/institution and performance (Hu & Shu, 2024)<sup>[10]</sup>; (Parent & Hoye, 2018)<sup>[17]</sup>; (Stieger *et al.*, 2025)<sup>[23]</sup>; (Krieger, 2018).

In this research, the key terms that were most frequently mentioned in the comments of all those involved in the interviews were organizational structure, governance structure, authority, and decision-making. Accordingly, the data is summarized as follows (Figure 3).

**Outdated Governance Structures**

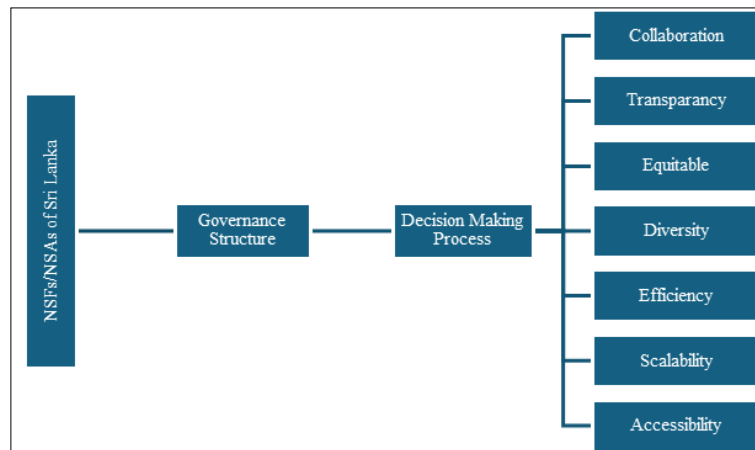


Source: Developed by researchers based on research data

Fig 3: Effects on Outdated Governance Structure

A governance structure in NSF/NSAs has been prepared in the management process of every association. It was emphasized that it should be paid attention to in every activity of the NSF/NSAs. They feel that it helps in gaining a correct understanding of the NSF/NSAs. They further stated that this can be verified through the official website of the NSF/NSAs and through documents. They also stated that the functioning of the governing body also takes precedence when participating in special national and international sports festivals. But we would like to present the views expressed by all of them based on their experiences. We know that even though there is this hierarchy in any sports association, it has taken various forms in decision-making, the way in which the power and preferences of many decisions are given priority according to their own preferences, the habit of making many

decisions based on the traditional decision-making methods rather than consulting the opinions of the employees working in the NSF/NSAs, the reluctance to lean towards the new world of management decision-making and those processes, and the fact that the traditional governance structure is strongly implemented in the NSF/NSAs of Sri Lanka, therefore, work is done in accordance with the management of distances in contemporary approaches. The key officials of the NSF/NSAs who expressed their views further in this regard was that although the importance of adapting to the new organizational structures has been emphasized, there is a lot of room for many people to be offended by working outside the ways in which these NSF/NSAs operate. Therefore, it is necessary to get used to the existing system.

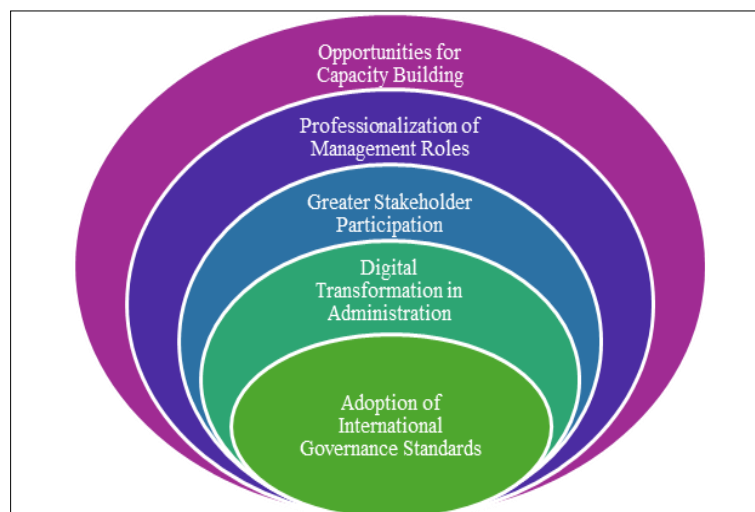


Source: Developed by researchers based on research data

Fig 4: Governance Innovations through Organization Structures

Emphasizing the injustices faced by athletes and coaches in particular and the fact that many of the inconveniences they face are due to the governance structure, they suggested that since governance structures play a crucial role in shaping power relations and decision-making processes within organizations, traditional governance models have long favored hierarchical structures, and that the ways in which ownership and management concentrate authority in fulfilling the expectations of the sports association no longer help to reduce management distances. Therefore, the need for governance structures that can adapt to the management approaches of the modern world by moving away from traditional structures to some extent was emphasized.

Accordingly, it was explained that it is appropriate to restructure the traditional governance structure in a way that allows for the participation of multiple stakeholders. This emphasizes promoting consistency in management approaches and practices, minimizing conflict, enhancing stakeholder participation, and creating an environment for fair and accurate decision-making. Figure 4 shows the approaches that were the primary focus of the research data summaries. These interviews helped to understand how management is also weakened due to obstacles to the decision-making process in NSF/NSAs due to outdated governance structures.



Source: Developed by researchers based on research data

Fig 5: Prospects for Improving Governance Structures in NSF/NSAs.

Outdated governance structures present significant challenges to the effective management of national sport federations. Concentrated decision-making, lack of transparency, politicization, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited stakeholder engagement undermine both organizational performance and stakeholder trust. However, interviews with officials and staff members also highlight several promising avenues for reform. Aligning with international governance standards, embracing digital technologies, engaging stakeholders, professionalizing management, and investing in capacity building offer concrete prospects for renewal (Figure 5). If pursued, these measures could enable federations to transform from politically dominated and inefficient bodies into transparent, accountable, and athlete-centered organizations capable of thriving in the modern sport environment.

Internal political interference is one of the most pressing governance issues facing NSF/NSAs. While NSF/NSAs are ideally designed to serve athletes, coaches, and clubs, the persistence of factional politics and power struggles within their internal governance structures undermines their effectiveness. Interviews with NSF/NSAs officials and staff members reveal that political interference manifests in decision-making, leadership elections, financial management, and daily operations, creating an unstable environment. At the same time, interviewees pointed to opportunities for reform and strategies to mitigate the negative effects of internal politics, offering prospects for more transparent and athlete-centered governance. A thematic table 1 shows that the challenges and prospects of internal political interference in national sport federations, based on interview insights.

**Internal Political Interference**

**Thematic Table 1:** Internal Political Interference in NSF/NSAs

Theme	Challenges (from Interviews)	Prospects (from Interviews)
Leadership Struggles & Power Consolidation	- Elections dominated by rival factions seeking influence. - Patronage politics: promises of positions or benefits to secure votes. - Sport development becomes secondary to political battles.	- Revision of constitutions to include term limits and independent election committees. - Transparent election procedures to reduce factionalism.
Policy Continuity	- Frequent reversal/abandonment of programs after leadership changes. - Long-term projects disrupted, causing loss of credibility with athletes and sponsors.	- Establish clear governance safeguards to protect long-term strategies regardless of leadership changes. - Policy frameworks that ensure continuity beyond political cycles.
Marginalization of Professional Staff	- Technical and administrative staff sidelined in decision-making. - Professional advice overridden by politically motivated directives. - Morale of staff negatively affected.	- Professionalization of management roles: hiring administrators and experts on merit. - Separation of political leadership from operational management.
Financial Mismanagement & Patronage	- Budgets manipulated to reward loyal factions or affiliated clubs. - Cuts in grassroots development funding to accommodate political expenditures. - Sponsors lose confidence due to lack of accountability.	- Establish independent audit committees and ethics panels. - External oversight from government audit agencies to ensure accountability.
Athlete Disempowerment & Loss of Trust	- Athlete selection processes influenced by political loyalties. - Athletes feel their voices are ignored, leading to disillusionment. - Legitimacy of federations questioned.	- Athlete commissions and stakeholder forums with voting rights. - Broader representation to ensure athlete-centered governance.
Influence of International Standards	- Failure to meet governmental requirements risks sanctions, loss of recognition, or funding.	- Alignment with IOC and international federation governance codes (e.g., transparency, anti-corruption). - Use of external pressure as a driver for reform.

**Source:** Developed by researchers based on research data

Internal political interference is one of the most damaging factors undermining the management of national sport federations. Leadership struggles disrupted policy continuity, marginalization of staff, financial mismanagement, and the loss of athlete trust all flow from politicized governance structures. Yet, as interviews with officials and staff members reveal, there are prospects for positive change (Table 1). By strengthening constitutional safeguards, introducing oversight mechanisms, enhancing stakeholder representation, professionalizing management, and aligning with international governance standards, federations can reduce the grip of internal politics. These measures not only safeguard organizational integrity but also restore focus on the core mission of sport development and athlete welfare. The challenge lies in the willingness of leaders to prioritize the long-term interests of sport over short-term political gain.

**Inadequate Accountability Mechanisms**

Accountability is a cornerstone of effective governance in NSF/NSAs, ensuring that leaders, officials, and

administrators are answerable for their decisions and actions. Yet, interviews with officials and staff members reveal that accountability mechanisms within many federations remain weak, outdated, or inconsistently applied. This lack of robust accountability not only undermines organizational performance but also erodes trust among athletes, stakeholders, and the broader sporting community. Despite these challenges, interviewees identified prospects for reform that could strengthen accountability frameworks and enhance the overall credibility and effectiveness of federations.

**Challenges**

One of the most prominent challenges identified in interviews was the absence of clear reporting standards and procedures. Staff members noted that annual reports, where they exist, are often delayed, incomplete, or inaccessible to the public. Officials admitted that outdated constitutions do not obligate federations to publish detailed financial or operational reports, leaving decision-making processes opaque. This lack of structured reporting makes it difficult

for stakeholders whether athletes, government bodies, or sponsors to evaluate the federation's performance. For athletes, this absence of transparency creates skepticism about how resources are allocated, while sponsors view it as a signal of poor governance, reducing their willingness to invest.

Another key issue relates to financial accountability. Interviewees highlighted that budgets are often prepared and approved internally with little external oversight. Staff members described how expenditure decisions were sometimes made informally by executive committees without adequate documentation or justification. In some cases, funds earmarked for athlete development or grassroots programs were diverted to cover administrative costs or travel allowances for officials. These practices foster suspicions of mismanagement and create a perception that federations prioritize the interests of office-bearers over athletes. The absence of independent financial audits further exacerbates this problem, as irregularities go unchallenged and opportunities for corrective action are missing.

The interviews also revealed weaknesses in decision-making accountability. Officials acknowledged that executive committees frequently make critical decisions without consulting broader stakeholders, such as athletes, coaches, and affiliated clubs. Staff members observed that once decisions are made, there are no formal mechanisms to review or evaluate whether those decisions were effective or in line with the federation's objectives. This 'top-down' model of governance reduces accountability to a small group of insiders while excluding the voices of those most directly affected. As one staff member put it, 'Decisions are taken behind closed doors, and we are expected to simply implement them without question.' Such a culture discourages debate, reduces organizational learning, and risks perpetuating ineffective practices.

Another recurring theme in the interviews was the lack of consequences for misconduct or poor performance. Officials pointed out that even when leaders or staff fail to deliver on their responsibilities, there are few formal mechanisms to hold them accountable. Elections, when they occur, often reward political loyalty rather than performance, meaning that ineffective leaders may remain in office. Staff members reported that complaints from athletes or affiliated clubs about unfair treatment, biased selection processes, or financial irregularities were often ignored, with no clear grievance procedures in place. This absence of accountability mechanisms undermines trust and fuels perceptions of favoritism and corruption.

The impact of inadequate accountability also extends to external relationships. Government agencies and international federations increasingly demand evidence of good governance as a condition for funding and recognition. Interviewees admitted that the inability to demonstrate accountability has strained relationships with these external stakeholders. In some instances, federations risk losing financial support or international credibility because they cannot provide sufficient documentation of transparent practices. This places further strain on the federation's capacity to deliver programs and support athletes effectively.

## Prospects

Despite these challenges, interviewees also highlighted several promising prospects for strengthening accountability mechanisms in NSFs/NSAs.

First, officials recognized the importance of introducing independent oversight structures. Establishing audit committees, ethics panels, and independent grievance mechanisms were identified as practical measures to monitor financial transactions, evaluate decision-making, and address complaints. Such structures would provide a layer of impartiality and ensure that leaders and staff are answerable for their actions. Staff members believed that external audits would build credibility with sponsors and government agencies while also reassuring athletes that resources are used fairly.

Second, many respondents emphasized the role of constitutional and regulatory reform. Updating federation constitutions to mandate annual reports, financial disclosures, and independent evaluations was seen as essential to building accountability. By embedding accountability requirements into governing documents, federations can move away from discretionary practices and establish binding obligations for leaders and committees. Interviewees pointed to the potential of digital platforms for publishing reports and making information more accessible to stakeholders, thus enhancing transparency.

Third, staff members identified stakeholder engagement as a critical avenue for improving accountability. Establishing athlete commissions, consultative forums, and advisory groups would create opportunities for broader participation in governance. This would not only make decision-makers more accountable to those they represent but also ensure that policies reflect the real needs of the sporting community. Officials acknowledged that involving athletes and coaches in decision-making would increase trust and make federations more responsive to feedback.

Another prospect lies in the professionalization of management practices. Interviewees argued that hiring trained administrators and finance officers would reduce the risks of informal decision-making and financial mismanagement. Professional staff could establish modern reporting systems, monitor compliance with regulations, and provide evidence-based recommendations to leaders. In this way, federations could institutionalize accountability rather than relying on the goodwill of office-bearers.

Finally, external pressure from international sport bodies and funding agencies was identified as a potential catalyst for reform. Respondents noted that compliance with international governance principles, such as those promoted by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), often requires federations to adopt stricter accountability standards. While some officials expressed concern about losing autonomy, most acknowledged that external pressure provides both motivation and a framework for internal reform. Aligning with international standards could help federations secure funding, enhance legitimacy, and rebuild stakeholder trust.

Inadequate accountability mechanisms pose a serious challenge to the management of national sport federations. Weak reporting systems, lack of financial oversight, exclusionary decision-making, absence of consequences for misconduct, and strained external relationships all reflect systemic shortcomings in accountability frameworks. Yet, the insights from officials and staff members also highlight

pathways for improvement. Independent oversight structures, constitutional reforms, stakeholder engagement, professionalization of management, and alignment with international standards offer promising prospects for strengthening accountability. By embracing these reforms, federations can shift from opaque, insider-driven organizations to transparent, trustworthy, and athlete-focused institutions. Ultimately, addressing the accountability deficit is not only essential for organizational integrity but also for ensuring that sport federations fulfill their mission of promoting athletic excellence and community development.

### Conclusion

This study highlights the urgent need for governance reforms, improved accountability, and enhanced capacity within Sri Lanka's NSFs/NSAs. Evidence from officials and staff members shows that outdated governance structures, weak accountability practices, and political interference have limited the effectiveness of these organizations. Without addressing these weaknesses, federations risk losing legitimacy, undermining athlete development, and missing opportunities to attract sponsorship and international recognition.

A central conclusion is the importance of building a sustainable sporting culture. Federations must move away from short-term political agendas and instead establish governance systems that ensure continuity, fairness, and long-term strategic planning. Embedding accountability mechanisms such as mandatory reporting, independent audits, and clear oversight processes will help institutionalize transparency and prevent governance from depending solely on the will of individual office-bearers. By creating a culture of accountability, federations can strengthen trust among athletes, stakeholders, and the public.

The study also points to the necessity of policy reforms that align with international standards. Global sport bodies, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), have established principles of good governance transparency, accountability, democracy, and inclusivity that are increasingly required for recognition and funding. For Sri Lankan NSFs/NSAs, adopting these standards is not only about compliance but also about demonstrating credibility and professionalism. Doing so would help federations secure resources, strengthen partnerships, and enhance their presence in international sport.

Transparency emerged as a recurring concern during interviews. Many respondents described opaque financial practices, selective decision-making, and the absence of publicly available information. Increasing openness in budgeting, reporting, and program delivery is essential for rebuilding credibility. Digital tools could assist by making reports, decisions, and updates more easily accessible, reducing opportunities for mismanagement and increasing stakeholder confidence.

Another critical conclusion is the need for capacity building. NSFs/NSAs frequently lack adequately trained administrators and managers capable of handling the complexities of modern sport management. Investing in education, training programs, and professional staff appointments would help reduce the dominance of political actors in daily management. Professionalization also ensures that technical expertise guides decision-making, improving

efficiency and safeguarding long-term institutional development.

While this study provides important insights, it also points toward areas requiring further research. Comparative studies across multiple federations could determine whether these challenges are systemic or unique to organizations. Including the perspectives of athletes, coaches, and sponsors would also enrich understanding of accountability and management. Longitudinal research could assess the effectiveness of reforms over time, while regional comparisons with neighboring South Asian countries might offer lessons and best practices relevant to Sri Lanka.

In conclusion, strengthening Sri Lanka's NSFs/NSAs requires a comprehensive reform agenda that integrates governance improvements, accountability systems, transparency, professional capacity building, and adherence to international standards. By addressing these areas, NSFs/NSAs can move from politicized and inefficient bodies toward professional, athlete-centered organizations. Such transformation is essential not only for sport management but also for fostering a sustainable sporting culture that contributes to national development, international competitiveness, and social cohesion.

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