

MAKERERE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

9TH MAWAZO SEMINAR

CONSTRAINTS AFFECTING THE PARTICIPATION OF GIRLS
AND WOMEN IN SPORTS IN UGANDA

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Despite the fact that the population of Uganda consists of nearly 60% females, there are more males involved in sports in Uganda than women. More men are penetrating sports at the international and national levels than women in Uganda.

Why and what is wrong with women participation in sports in Uganda? Why is it ^{that} although the qualifying standards of women for African Games are less demanding than those of men we get less women qualifying for medals at African Championships than men? Why is it that Uganda athletics and other sports have had nearly the same women athletes in the national teams for the last two decades? Why is it that it is increasingly difficult to replace such old athletes with young talents?

The answers to most of these questions lie in the nature of our society. Most of the factors affecting female participation in sports in Uganda are of a sociological origin. The factors include :-

- The social roles of women in our society;
- The general low status of women in our traditional societies;
- Polygamy;
- bride price;
- lack of access of women to school education;
- teenage pregnancies;
- marriage;
- lack of opportunity in sports by women at community level;
- reduced sports opportunity for girls in schools;
- low social expectancy of women in our societies;
- prejudices against sports and games related to women;
- male chauvinism;

lack of international openings and contacts for promising female athletes;

low level of education among ugandan sportswomen, and

6 traditional taboos against female participation in sport.

The factors above are closely interrelated and sometimes overlap.

This paper is an attempt to analyse the causes of low female participation in sports in uganda today.

2.1 Social roles, norms:

Social roles, norms and values of most of our traditional societies in uganda preclude sport for an adult woman.

Sport and play-like physical activity is an affair for ungrown children and girls. As a girl grows into adult hood she has to abandon all play-like physical activity and involve herself fully into work-like physical activity such as cultivation, threshing fetching firewood and water, grinding, milking cows etc which are in no way considered to be sports.

2.2 Status of women:

Another factor however is the status of women in uganda society. Both in traditional societies and in the recent modern society of uganda the woman is considered to have a lower status than men. It is only the emancipated woman of tomorrow perhaps who can hope to have the same status as men. But as of now ugandan women enjoy a lesser status as men, i.e. they have fewer rights, lower economic power and ownership. Even if the women of uganda may be more productive economically than men, they often do not own the means of production and do not have much say about what they produce, does not belong to them but to the men folks. Consequently the women do not also own their own time. The way they use their time to produce is mainly dictated by men. They hardly have no spare time left for them to participate in sports or do things of their own on their own.

Compounded by this is further that the existing predominant social attitude and practices and low expectations about women give them an automatically lower status than men. Under this inferior status its normally unwomanly for a woman to excels in sports. Sport excellence is more of a male attribute than a female one.

Most Ugandan societies are rural societies. These societies expect girls to grow into women to be first and foremost home-makers and not anything else such as engineers, doctors, bureaucrats, technocrats lawyers or politicians. The normal decent professions which a girl can take up outside school are still those related to home making ; teaching , nursing or copy typing. Otherwise most girls in our society grow into the role of home makers at a very early age. There is nothing more prominent in the initiative role play of our children even before the nursery school than the role of a home maker. The girl is equiped more with dolls, napkins, cooking utensils etc as play toys than with planes, engines, cars etc. When she improvise toys she improvises those toys which are similar to what she sees her mother using. At the instruction of their mother our girls learn more about child care, cooking, cleaning washing, digging, peeling etc as exclusive responsibilities of the women. Boys do not learn these roles but instead their roles allow more time for play and involvement in the more vigorous sports activities. In the rural areas these day to day chores of women are accomplished without running tap water, electricity but with unrenueable sources of energy. The women normally have sufficient physical fitness to accomplish the tasks of fetching water, collecting fire wood, carrying children on their backs, digging, collecting food from the gardens, milking etc,

But this kind of fitness is not necessarily sport specific. However at the end of the day, which starts after sunrise and ends well after its dark the ugandan rural woman has hardly any time left for sports and recreation.

Women in the rural areas in uganda also play a key role in subsistence agriculture. They cultivate the land and most of their time is spent in gardens, In some tribes women may look after the smaller domestic animals such as sheep and goat, pigs and chicken, but the more exercise demanding task of looking after cows is left to men. Girls may look after calves and the milking but only in the absence of boys in the home. Most of our girls except those in urban areas grow up with this kind of role stereotype in mind. This role stereotype excludes sports. Meanwhile the boys are raised to be more physically active and to play the more competitive and aggressive but rather humble and as gentle as lambs. They are not expected to lead but to follow without question in the steps and paths laid down for them by the men folk.

Traditionally competitive sport in most tribes has been more exclusively a men's enterprise. Women have always been relegated to more passive spectator roles such as sitting on the side to watch, cheer and clap or ululate when the climax is reached, e.g. in wrestling. Only in dancing have women in most traditional societies been accorded the excesses vigorous body experiences, but where joint dances with men are allowed the men are supposed to dance more vigorously than women. Even in the traditional sexual act women are normally expected to play a more docile and less vigorous role during the coitus than men.

The role requires the woman to give in to the man at the end of it all. In no way is she considered to play a complementary role, to the man in this act but rather the man is regarded as the conquerer and she always the subdued. This belief has important psycho sexual consequences for women with regard to the point of attitudes on maintaining their fitness through sport. There is a general belief that women who are more physically fit through sport are sexually less desirable to men.

2.3. Bride Price System:

The bride price system or dowry payment, still exists in most of our societies. Under this system the woman is treated more as an economic object by men. The qualities of girls beauty, good manners and training in home chores, ability to work are still being battered for cows, goats, cloth, gold, salt and money other items of bride wealth which are exchanged by the family of the husband in order to acquire a wife. Thus on marriage a wife comes into the man's home not as a life partner but as an item of wealth. So that even when women are married and have children they are still regarded and used by men not as equal human beings but as tools of production to pay back old wealth spent in the dowry as well as produce profits through labour. It is not unusual to hear a man saying he did not get any profit out of his wife! As such women in their homes, in most tribes, must work and produce wealth as well as children. They should not have a rest until the bride wealth paid by their husbands has been paid back and born profits.

This compounds further their low status and there is no time and no chance given to most women to participate in sports and leisure recreation under such circumstances.

2.4. Polygamy:

Men in most of our tribes too have a tendency to acquire more wives. Women too do accept having a co-wife as normal despite the christian teachings of "one man-one wife" which have gone on in this land for over a century. A man can acquire more wives so that he has more access to free time for himself and more essential services from the many wives he has. The more women a man has the more time for himself and the more his women must work for him, ^{or} the children and in order to maintain themselves with food, clothing, education medical care. The husband only provides the shelter of the house and land to be tilled. Until very recently not many women own land and not many tribes allow women to put up their own houses. Where as polygamy is accepted on the side of men polyandry on the side of women is regarded as prostitution and treated as anti - social in most tribes of Uganda. Under polygamy therefore a woman is compelled to work harder and more. As such very little time is left for them to participate in sport. And as most women under the yoke of polygamy are poor, exploited and overworked there is hardly ever a chance or time to think of participation in sports.

2.5. Access to school:

It is generally believed that better education could help women to achieve a higher social status but in Uganda girls do not have the same access to school as boys. Thus the chance of girls to learn about sports while in schools is less than boys.

Girls register by percentage more drop-outs of school than boys. At primary levels the number of girls enrolled may be comparable to boys but the higher one goes up in the educational system the less the number of girls to boys, the birth might not be due to teenage pregnancy. Sports girls in secondary and primary girls in Uganda are often victims of pre-marital sex-exploitation by unscrupulous sports administrators, coaches, gamesteachers and male athletes as there is no set code of ethics or standards of conduct regarding sports behaviour.

2.6. Marriage:

Girls who stop school get married more or less immediately. Their potential for higher education and sports are therefore not fully realised. Their career in competitive sports comes to an end as they have now acquired a new role as married women. Married women especially in rural areas are not expected to involve themselves in sport. They are a man's wife and therefore his property. To participate in sport would require them to first seek permission from their husbands. Not many husbands would be willing to allow their wives into sports unless such men are highly educated.

2.7. Shortage of funds for tuition:

Education in Uganda is not free. School fees have to be paid right from the nursery school and this is expensive. Educating a child by paying school fees is looked at as a form of investment. Education costs money and most families do not have the money in adequate supplies. Most parents prefer to invest in the education of boys than girls. Girls have their value even without education, they can go and marry, earn bride price for the family but boys cannot.

Consequently the access of girls to school and sports opportunities there are reduced. In case there are not enough funds to send both the girl and boy to school, the girl is first withdrawn. By University, despite the higher female proportion in the population, women form less than a third of the students. At primary levels girls are generally keen about competitive sports and are often given a chance to participate in netball and athletics. This trend may be continued with secondary education where girls add basketball, tennis, hockey, table tennis, volley ball and handball to their list of competitive sports. By higher school however many stereotyped prejudices of girls against sport begin to take over and at the University, the marked disappearance of girls from the sporting fields becomes a norm.

2.8. Teenage Pregnancies

These make an abrupt end or interruption of both the education and sports life of most girls. Girls once pregnant in our schools, most of which are missionary founded, rarely ever go back to school. They are often castigated and sent away into exile or early marriage by parents from their homes. Once a girl becomes pregnant when she is at school, she is regarded as a disgrace. And more to it when she produces she becomes a mother and a woman and starts to be regarded and considers herself as such. She therefore ceases to go to school and automatically stops taking part in "girlish activities" such as sports. She is expected to show decent behaviour, wear appropriately and adequately like a woman; be decent and dignified in her walks and manners; be respected and show respect to herself as an adult female by not exposing certain parts of her feminine body. Sport is automatically not a way of enhancing her newly acquired status as a mother.

2.9. Lack of community opportunities for women sport:

Until recently opportunities to women to participate in sports at the community level have been missing even in the major towns of Uganda. Such opportunities are absent in the villages too. This is mainly because of nearly three decades of political instability and lack of community planning. It is only recently, with the introduction of the Resistance Councils system that women in Uganda have started to be mobilised for sports at the grass root level. Netball as the traditional sport from England is being developed as the only sport for women in Uganda. Other parts are yet to be thought of for women communities. Involvement and even with the netball organisation is still wanting.

In soccer Ugandan women are more of spectators and cheerleaders. Sport development among women at the grassroots in Uganda is yet one project to be addressed by the numerous women clubs. It could be a good tool for mobilising women, improving and encouraging good health habits and enhancing the productivity and competitive nature of women. Since 60% of our population are female; and it is they who contribute over 65% of our foreign exchange export earning through production of coffee, cotton and other cash crops sports participation among them at grass root levels should be encouraged to make them more productive and healthy. Women also are potential models for sport role socialisation of children, however they can only perform this role well only if they are well socialised into sports themselves.

2.10. Reduced opportunity for girls' sports in schools:

In most schools especially mixed schools the game teachers are more concerned with soccer and other boys' sports rather than sports activities for girls. The boys activities often overshadow the activities of girls both in the programmes and financing. The range of sports activities performed by girls in the schools is narrow. After netball girls rarely have a chance to know other sports such as hockey, volleyball, basketball, tennis in great detail. Similarly as well other institutions outside sports such as the national resistance army, prisons, police, bank of uganda which have women teams play less attention to women teams than men. Most voluntary sports clubs in uganda have only men's departments or trade exclusively in soccer.

The opportunities for girls and women to enjoy sports in these clubs are closed off.

2.11. Lack of female career openings into sports:

In addition girls at school who would take up sports careers are discouraged by low female expectation which prevents them from pursuing courses which are more science-oriented and lead to more prestigious job opportunities. On the general there are fewer Hsc girls taking science subject combinations than arts oriented subjects. But science subject combinations such as Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Maths are vital to students intending to offer sports at university or tertiary colleges. Sports at this higher level is for academic and career purposes offered as a science. Girls interested in building careers as a sports teachers, coaches and sports administrators therefore are initially eliminated by their subject combinations on entry to tertiary institutions. Most of these institutions record less than 10% of the total percent of girls for sports courses.

The consequence is that there are only a handful of trained female sports teachers and gamesmistresses to promote female sports in the primary schools, secondary schools and teachers colleges. At the moment Makerere university, the leading university has not even a single qualified sports teacher on her staff. The interests of women sports are therefore not adequately catered for. Other university and tertiary institutions are in no better position. Girls who wish to make a career in sports and remain within the academic pipeline have inevitably to try their chances outside Uganda.

2.12 Prejudices against female sport:

The prejudices that sports does not require or reflect intelligence is rampant. In addition it is a general belief that sport spoils the beauty of a woman by making her muscular. Girl athletes are not adequately educated against these prejudices. Except teachers and parents encourage them to accept that this is actually true. Many girls feel molested by this type of attitude even where they would have liked to participate in sports. They are always being accused of having "foot intelligence" and little grey matter upstairs. Classic examples of star athletes who have suffered that type of ridicule and humiliation in our school are Evelyn Adiru, Sichola Mujawamaria, Oliver Achii, Edith Nakiyingi but given different conditions outside our school system they have not only proved sports stars but also turned out as high academic achievers and are leading the way as Uganda's first graduate sports careerists. Female teachers, especially the disappointed lot of life banished spinsters referred to as "Abakyala banakadiwadda" - "Safuna musajja" play the key role of spreading such prejudices about sports girls' schools.

The other lot of teachers involved are elitist teachers who think girls should take up only elite courses such as law, technology and medicine, which they themselves failed to attain before falling back to education.

2-13. Male chauvinism in sport and lack of women sports leadership:

The world of sport is normally a men's world. Men believe sports belongs to them and that they are always better than women and therefore should provide the leadership even where capable women exists. The men in Uganda have dominated most sports associations. Even netball which should be a women's domain is still invaded in by men coaches and umpires. Women in Uganda are not being left run their own sports without interference from men. On the National Council of sports women are poorly represented so is it in most joint associations if they do often hold the non-influential positions. In the prominent clubs the women are relegated to the role of escorts and cheerleaders or spectators. Their role and participation in sports is therefore secondary to men.

The blame for this situation cannot be put entirely on men for being chauvinists but also on the women for being feminine and to expect to have a secondary role. Women in Uganda as such have also lacked sports leadership ability to lead themselves in sports issues without referring to men. They expect men to lead them e.g. it has not made much difference in terms of women sports, to have a deputy minister in charge of sports in the last two or three years. Even in the absence of a minister of youth culture and sports, she has not dared to promote women sports interests any further than men would have done. We would have expected her a defacto minister in the portfolio of sports to further double womens sports participation. Why not ?

2.14. Lack of international openings and contacts for women athletes.

Sports women in Uganda often do not have easy direct access to international sports associations, seminars and competitions. They often lack means to make their own sports contacts and lobby for favours amongst those countries and organisations which promote women's sport. Men officials often treat men sports such as soccer, boxing as the absolute and only priorities in sports development forgetting the problems of women sports. There are fewer women coaches and sports administrators and their contacts to the outside international sports world are minimal. In this way the international participation of Uganda sports women is curtailed.

2.15. Low level of Education of women sports administrators:

The low level of education attained by some of our would-be women sports administrators and sports women is also another set back. Sports women in Uganda, to be able to attend international conferences, represent us on international sports organisations affectively and to articulate their cause and bargain for their interests loudly need to be well educated. At the moment Uganda boasts of only less than ten graduate sports women as careerists in sports. It is luck to find a woman sports official on council who has completed a higher school successfully and who can articulate herself eloquently. It would definitely make a big difference if our sports women leaders were sharp and well- educated.

Well educated and capable sports women leaders such as the chair person for the uganda Handball federation are definitely making a difference in sport even among men.

2.16. Taboos:

There are many traditional taboos hindering girls and women to take part in sports. These exist in all our tribes. We all know too well. To sum up it seems that the above are some of the problems which constrain the full participation of women in sports in Uganda. Some of these are problems which could overcome through education and schools. Others require a sociological re-orientation of our society. And while others require the women themselves to change their attitude towards sports and their role and place in society. My concern about this issue as a sports administrator, and that of sports teachers, or scholars in this area is to identify the problem; show which factors and how these factors specifically affect sports and our work in schools in the district, clubs and the communities and how to finally overcome them. The following are suggestions/proposals on how the problems could be overcome:

3.0. Proposals for improving the participation of girls and women in sports in Uganda:

It is suggested that the following steps should be taken to improve female sports;

- (i) Encourage girls to overcome self prejudice or the feeling that they are the weaker (fair) sex.
- (ii) Give to girls an early start in P.E. and sports activities to ensure they are adequately socialised into sports and given continued support by teachers and parents throughout the education system.
- (iii) Put more emphasis on sports and games in the exclusively female institutions.

(iv) Encourage the exposure of girls to successful female athletes as models through films, meetings, visits and talks, demonstrations in sports by female national athletes, magazines, articles on sports and women.

(v) Regular exchange of sports trips between girls schools.

(vi) More women involvement in sports as officials, administrators, leaders, managers, sports teachers, coaches etc.

(vii) Co-educational sports activities should be encouraged in school

(viii) Men to be encouraged/persuaded to allow their spouses a chance to take part in sports.

(ix) Step up woman - to-woman encouragement into sports. Women should encourage fellow women to venture into sports.

(x) Discourage early marriages among girl athletes.

(xi) Improve family life education and family planning education to female athletes.

(xii) Educate and discourage parents from offering their daughters in polygamous family relationship.

(xiii) Encourage the struggle for female emancipation and equality in sport and other aspects of life in Uganda.

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