

Effects of Sponsorships on Performance of Para Athletes in Kenya

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Abstract

Sponsorship is used throughout a Para Athlete career beginning from when talent is identified and trained, to when they participate and perform at athletics competitions. The study aimed at investigating how sponsorship approaches affect Para Athletes performance. These aspects include the athletics expertise, competitive style, sportsmanship and rivalry obtained from conceptual Model of Athlete Brand Image. An exploratory case study was done to twenty (20) Para Athletes after theoretical sampling from the total sixty six (66) Para Athletes. In-depth interviews and observation were used to collect data among the Para Athletes. Validity and reliability were tested using pilot study on five (5) Para Athletes. The data analysis was done guided by Grounded Theory research design using the Straussian Approach. The study found that sponsorships were not there for the Para Athletes and hence no effect was experienced on their performance. Two major themes were identified with respect to the sponsorships on performance of Para Athletes. First, the Para Athletes acknowledged extremely limited interaction to sponsorships, with some none at all. Secondly, the Para Sport structure and leadership proved to explain the nature of current sponsorships. Hence, appropriate Para Athletics leadership and structure to drive the availability and use of sponsorships in Para Athletics is vital. The implication of these findings is to reorganize the structure and method of selecting Kenya's Paralympic leadership, which should be included in the federation constitution. Based on the findings of the study, further research should be done to develop appropriate Para Sport structure and leadership to influence sponsorships and Para Athlete performance.

Keywords: Sponsorship, Athletics Expertise, Competitive Style, Sportsmanship, Rivalry, Para Athlete, Grounded Theory

INTRODUCTION

The importance of athletes as brands is paramount in sports marketing and attracts sponsorships, increasing their marketability (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Kerr & Gladden, 2008; Williams, Walsh, & Rhenwick, A., 2015). Key to a successful marketing strategy is the impact of athlete performance on both the athlete and sponsorships. The sports marketing industry operates on two levels: promoting sports products and leveraging sporting events to promote consumer goods and services (Kaser & Oelkers, 2005; Shilbury, Westerbeek, Quick, Funk, & Karg, 1998; van Heerden, 2001). Athlete managers must consider the implications of sponsorships on performance when selecting participants in sponsored events which is important for all stakeholders (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006).

Although extensive research exists on athlete brand equity and brand image (Williams *et al.*, 2015; Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014; Kerr & Gladden, 2008), few have focused on the athlete as a product. This research utilizes existing studies on athlete performance and brand image proposing a framework that analyzes the influence of strategic sports marketing management on athletes' performance (Arai *et al.*, 2014; Williams *et al.*, 2015). The study demonstrates the importance of sponsorships on athletes, how different sponsorships impact athletes in different ways resulting in differences in performance. With the right strategy, this can benefit all stakeholders (Gladden & Milne, 1999; Kerr & Gladden, 2008).

Sports events are unique in how fans and participants engage with each other and have a social facilitation element

(Mullin *et al.*, 2007). As such, sports marketing experts need to recognize that each athlete is unique, with different personalities and approaches on and off the field (Kaser & Oelkers, 2005; Shilbury *et al.*, 1998). Marketers should consider their impact on performance when decide on participants in sponsored events (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006).

The study contributes to an under-researched but crucial area: athlete performance. Such research involves the identification of athlete characteristics that enhance performance, enabling the development of effective strategies. The analysis builds on the Athlete Brand Image (MABI) Model, expanding on this to include additional elements like success and competence (Arai *et al.*, 2014). Athletic performance is defined by elements, such as sportsmanship, expertise, competitive style, and rivalry. Furthermore, athletic star power incorporating the factors of expertise, social appeal, likability, signature style, and professional trustworthiness also contributes to the overall performance of a Para athlete (Arai *et al.*, 2014; Arai, Ko, & Paplanidou, 2013).

The influence of an athlete's performance on sponsorships and the athlete themselves is critical to the success of any marketing plan. Promoting sporting goods and using sporting events to advertise consumer goods and services are the two facets on which the sports marketing industry operates (Kaser & Oelkers, 2005; Shilbury *et al.*, 1998; van Heerden, 2001). Selecting athletes for sponsored events requires athlete managers to take into account the effects of sponsorships on performance, which is crucial for all parties involved (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006).

While peak performance is undeniably the ultimate goal for any athlete, achieving and sustaining it requires significant resources. Training, equipment, and travel all contribute to an athlete's ability to excel. Here's where sponsorships enter the equation. By partnering with brands that align with their values, athletes gain access to financial support and brand exposure, creating a symbiotic relationship that can fuel further performance gains. Strategic sponsorship management can influence and enhance athlete performance, specifically focusing on the Para athletes. Sponsorships are a useful tool for athletes striving to achieve peak performance, with multiple studies linking sponsorship benefits to increased performance levels (Bader & Bergfeld, 2015, Mäkelä, Hult, & Tarkiainen, 2017). Through sponsorship deals, Para athletes can access valuable resources such as cutting-edge equipment, enhanced medical care, and travel, allowing them to focus on their craft (Accorsi, Paltrinieri, & Solberg, 2016). Sponsorship partnerships also provide athletes with brand exposure, introducing them to new fans and broader media coverage, strengthening their image as an athlete (Phua & Jin, 2017).

Effective sponsorship management can serve as a performance catalyst for Para athletes. Sponsorship that is properly managed and coordinated positively influences Para athlete performance, resulting in improved performances (Ko & Pastore, 2005). Sponsorship can also empower Para athletes to realize and maximize their potential by significantly increasing their chances of qualifying for international competition (Kunkel & Funk, 2017). Sponsorship management approaches can include an effective strategy for athlete product development, targeted sponsor-consumer communication, and leveraging of sponsorships during sports events to maximize the athlete's reach (Cunningham, Cornwell, & Coote, 2009; Grohs, Reisinger, & Fuchs, 2014).

Effective sponsorship management can help Para athletes perform better. One that is properly managed and coordinated has a positive impact on Para athlete performance, leading to improved results (Ko & Pastore, 2005). It can also help Para athletes reach their full potential by increasing their chances of qualifying for international competition (Kunkel & Funk, 2017). Sponsorship management approaches can include an effective strategy for athlete product development, targeted sponsor-consumer communication, and leveraging sponsorships during sporting events to maximize the athlete's reach (Cunningham, Cornwell, & Coote, 2009; Grohs *et al.*, & Fuchs, 2014).

The concept of sponsorship has been explored extensively in literature. Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy (2005) define

sponsorship as a strategic partnership between a sponsor and a sponsee, in which the sponsor provides resources, usually money, in return for access to the sponsee's rights, associations, or audiences. Chen and Pharr's (2020) definition of sponsorship refer to it as a commercial agreement between two parties, typically an organization willing to provide financial support, and another party, such as an event or athlete. Kuzma and Shanklin (2016) describe sponsorship as the transfer of resources, typically money, from a sponsoring organization to a sponsored entity, such as an athlete, team, event, or organization in exchange for some form of return such as increased brand recognition, improved image, or other business objectives. Lim, Ting, and Hoo (2018) define sponsorship as the provision of long-term financial or material support by a company to a sporting event, organization, or individual under the condition that the sponsor will receive specific benefits in return, such as brand recognition, customer loyalty, and goodwill.

In recent years, there has been an increasing trend towards using sports sponsorships as a marketing tool due to its advantages over traditional advertising. Shank (2009) argues that sponsorships create a powerful communication channel allowing for direct connection with the target audience, hence making companies stand out from the competition. The author also notes that sponsorships allow companies to maintain a positive image and improve brand identity, leading to increased visibility, which is especially important in a crowded marketing landscape. Jobber (2007) contends that there are five main principles of sponsorships targeted at creating promotional opportunities, improving community relationships, promoting favorable brand and business associations, creating entertainment opportunities, and gaining advertising.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2011) observe that team sponsorship can be particularly successful in creating emotional benefits, leading to powerful marketing tools that positively impact future sales and earnings. Organizers of major events such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup have been able to secure significant sponsorship deals in the past decades (Skinner & Rukavina, 2002). Sponsorships provide a strategic platform to achieve effective promotion through clear communication of a company's products, identity, and message. As Amis, Slack, and Berret (1999) assert, sports event organizers anticipate receiving sponsorship funds and look forward to offering something in return, indicating the mutual benefits to sponsors and sports organizations.

Several studies have found that sports sponsorships are becoming more popular and important, as evidenced by their larger share of marketing budgets (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019). Sponsors are recognizing that promotion is more than just advertising; it encompasses the entire process of reaching consumers (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). Sports sponsorships are an effective way for organizations to connect emotionally with current and potential customers. Many successful sponsorships focus on generating promotional opportunities, strengthening community ties, establishing favorable brand associations, creating engaging entertainment experiences, and raising brand awareness (Kunkel & Funk, 2017).

One of the primary benefits of sponsorships is the ability to establish emotional connections with customers, which is critical for businesses seeking enhance brand equity and foster positive relationships with customers and the community (Groza & Ahmed, 2016). Aligning with a team's dedication and passion can be especially effective at increasing customer emotional engagement, resulting in higher sales and profits (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Kunkel & Funk, 2017). Successful sponsorship can result in significant returns through media coverage, brand recognition, a positive image, and increased profits, ultimately justifying the initial investment (Kolyperas & Anagnostopoulos, 2019).

Sports sponsorships have evolved from a form of corporate philanthropy to a strategic promotional activity (Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019). The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics exemplified this shift, with organizers raising more than \$400 million in sponsorships (Skinner & Rukavina, 2002). This historic achievement paved the way for increased support of significant sporting competitions like the FIFA World Cup, demonstrating the evolution of sponsorships from a



philanthropic activity to an essential marketing tool (Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019).

The 1996 Olympics in Atlanta marked a watershed moment in the evolution of commercialized sporting events. Corporate sponsorships became a major revenue source, accounting for a staggering 32% of total income. This financial windfall established sponsorships as a key marketing strategy for many businesses (Meenaghan, 1998). Sponsorship-linked marketing, in which brands align with complementary sporting events, has emerged as an effective tool for improving brand image and market position. However, the effectiveness of sponsorships varies. Some financially successful transactions fail to provide a competitive advantage for the company (Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019).

Sports sponsorship spending has been steadily increasing, with projections ranging from \$29 billion in 2009 to \$35 billion by 2013 (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Groza & Ahmed, 2016). Sponsorships, when effectively integrated into the marketing mix, can contribute to superior market performance and even become a company's core competency, giving it a significant competitive advantage (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005; Groza & Ahmed, 2016). Sponsorship has grown so rapidly that it is now not only more common but also more deeply integrated within sponsoring organizations (IBIS World, 2021).

While sports sponsorships have tremendous potential, they are not a surefire way to success. The complex process of converting resources into a competitive advantage, combined with the diverse outcomes of sponsorships, can make success uncertain (IBIS World, 2021). However, the growing importance of sponsorships cannot be denied, as evidenced by senior management's involvement in sponsorship decisions (Meenaghan, 1998).

Sponsorship contracts provide a unique advantage: exclusivity. Sponsorships, unlike many other forms of communication, have the potential to provide exclusive rights and benefits. However, these agreements necessitate long-term commitment and strategic planning from both parties (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). Sponsorships are particularly valuable to global marketers. They can cross cultural boundaries and effectively promote a company's image on a global scale (Miyazaki & Morgan, 2001). Companies that associate themselves with major sporting events can become globally recognized icons that resonate with a global audience (Kunkel & Funk, 2017).

The increasing complexity of sponsorships has made clear strategic thinking a top priority for marketers. Choosing the right partner is essential, but disagreements can still arise. Consider Nike, for instance. They sponsored two popular soccer teams in the 1998 World Cup but declined to sponsor the Atlanta Olympics despite the potential for significant brand exposure. This emphasizes the significance of a clearly defined sponsorship strategy. Another challenge is "ambush marketing," in which competitors try to piggyback on the sponsorship of another brand. In the face of such tactics, businesses require a structured approach to maximize investment returns (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005).

Beyond financial muscle, a company's existing resources play an important role in sponsorship success (Kunkel & Funk, 2017). This includes tangible assets like facilities or equipment, intangible assets like brand reputation, and critical skills like marketing expertise. Companies with a strong internal resource base and well-organized execution are better positioned to capitalize on sponsorships and achieve their business objectives.

Resources Required for Sponsorship

Effectively utilizing available resources is paramount in maximizing sponsorship investments (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). The effective use of resources can lead to vastly different results for companies participating in the same event (Quester & Thompson, 2001). The available resources can be broadly categorized into three groups: tangible assets, intangible assets, and internal capabilities.

a. Tangible Assets

Tangible assets like financial resources are vital in sponsorship. Sponsorship requires increased marketing investments like advertising, public relations, and promotions to achieve the desired brand linkages (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). However, companies can misjudge the marketing spend required to activate a sponsorship program. This action can lead to unanticipated high costs and difficulty in ascertaining the results and, in turn, sponsorship termination (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). The high costs of sponsorship programs can also create entry barriers for smaller companies, favoring organizations that have significant financial muscle like large corporations (Meenaghan, 1998).

b. Intangible Assets

Brand image and brand-building skills serve as intangible assets in sponsorship investments (Kunkel & Funk, 2017). Sponsors must understand the intrinsic value of the association that they are forming (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). This value is shaped by the properties' brand personality, athlete/artists skills, marketing efforts, and how audiences perceive them (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). Sports properties like teams and athletes incorporate diverse values and symbols that resonate with their fans' emotions and psyche (Amis & Pant, 1997). Harnessing these emotive responses can lead to successful sponsorship efforts (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). Companies rely on such properties and the innate associations they on that the audience brings along to expand their marketing efforts (Kunkel & Funk, 2017).

c. Capabilities

Effective sponsorship management requires an array of administrative skills, including expertise in sponsorship itself, market awareness, and operational procedures (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). The role of the sponsorship manager, the experience, and seniority is crucial in setting expectations and ensuring effective team collaboration within the sponsorship activation team (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). Such skills also help sponsors navigate opaque and complex value-in-kind deals, managing reputational risks, and working with regular communications protocols (Farrelly, 1999). Companies need a robust resource base that comprises a blend of financial, brand, marketing, and sponsorship team expertise to leverage the full potency of sponsorships, achieving measurable returns on sponsorship investment (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005).

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The field of sports marketing research has focused on sponsorships (Quester & Thompson, 2001; Kunkel & Funk, 2017) but has neglected to explore the impact of sponsorship approaches on Para athlete performance. Most studies concentrate on the bearing of sponsorships in promoting products and services through sporting events, ignoring the athlete's perspective (Meenaghan, 2001). This gap is a crucial problem limiting the complete understanding of how sponsorships influence Para athletes' performance. This research aimed to bridge this gap by investigating the relationship between Para athlete performance and sponsorship approaches used by companies.

The current disparity between the performance of Kenyan able-bodied athletes and their Para athlete counterparts in similar circumstances highlights the need for further investigation (IAAF, 2019; IPC, 2019). Even though both athletes train and compete in Kenya, able-bodied athletes have consistently achieved higher rankings globally. Thus, the urgent need to better understand sponsorship approaches and their impact on Para athlete performance. Researching the sponsorship strategies used by Para athletes produced information on the possible reasoning behind this discrepancy in ranking.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed an exploratory case study approach for its primary data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Kenyan Para athletes. Using a combination of structured and unstructured questions, the researchers harnessed the participant's experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. To generate emergent themes, the Straussian grounded theory methodology guided the data analysis process (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1998, 2008). Moreover, to develop a more complete understanding of the topic, theoretical sensitivity was established through an extensive literature review and the researcher's personal and professional experiences (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researchers prioritized recruiting participants who have the experience to provide rich data that can address research questions in the most comprehensive way. The theory sampling process ensured that the interview process continued until a saturation point is reached, leading to comprehensive data exploration (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

FINDINGS

Regarding how often the respondents heard about sponsorship in Para Athletics 50% said that they had never heard of it, 11% said sometimes while 39% said rarely as shown in figure 1 below. For instance, Respondent 2 noted, "*Hakuna. Bado*" "*Nothing. Not yet*" (Excerpt Range: 4096-4109). In the same way, Respondent 1 revealed doing business for support apart from sports, "*Apart from sports I do business. Sports are profession. It is just I don't have support for funds. Asubuhi niko kasini, then Jioni niko mazoezi*" "*Apart from sports I do business. Sports is a profession. It is just I don't have support for funds. In the morning, I am working, then in the evening I am training*" (Excerpt Range: 1400-1545). Respondent 11 also said, "*Sijawai. Rarely*" "*I have not. Rarely*" (Excerpt Range: 12159-12176). Similarly, respondent 11, Excerpt Range: 20501-20787, declared not hear it in para-athletics and even cautioned of looking for opportunity to represent other countries.

By contrast, some of those who said to have heard of Sponsorship, identified Kenya Government as supporting the Para Athletics. Respondent 4 said, "*Rarely. Maybe government only. Government sponsorship only. Only one. Juu sasa una jua serikali inajivunia kila mmoja kuwa mkenya*" "*Rarely. Maybe government only. Government sponsorship only. Only one. Because you know the government is proud of everyone being Kenyan*" (Excerpt Range: 24468-24601).

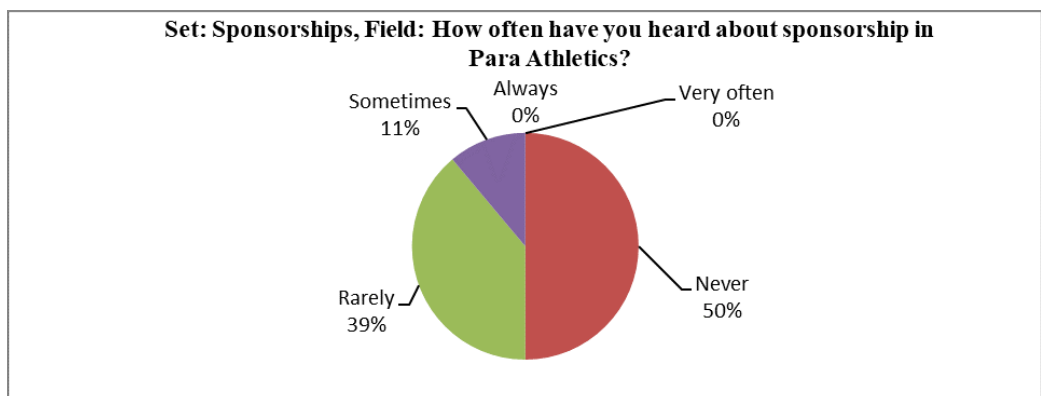


Figure 1: How Respondents have Heard of Sponsorship in Para Athletics

As regards to the sponsors in the last event the respondents participated, the majority said no sponsors where there. To give an example, Respondent 8 said “No one” (Excerpt Range: 13466-13472). In like manner, insisted no sponsors were there and had to sell own sheep to cover the expenses by saying “*Nauza ata kondoo yangu*” “*I even sell my sheep*” (Excerpt Range: 4738-4761). Respondent 6 also argued that “*Hata sikuona hawa sponsors kama walikuwa sikuona*” “*Even I didn't see these sponsors if they were there I didn't*” (Excerpt Range: 3413-3461). In the same way, Respondent 11 emphasised, “*Hakuna hata moja*” “*Not even one*” (Excerpt Range: 12267-12284).

Some respondents mentioned Safaricom and Kenya Government as sponsors in the last event they participated; all these were related to competitions to represent Kenya in international competitions. For example, Respondent 10 said, “*Lakini sikuwa mmoja wao. Kuna hii side ya Olympic last year. Unasikia Safaricom walikuja. Siku qualify kuenda Olympics. Nilisikia tu Safaricom na sijui na wapi*” “*But I was not one of them. There's this Olympic side last year. You hear Safaricom came. I didn't qualify for the Olympics. I just heard Safaricom, and I don't know and which one*” (Excerpt Range: 6711-6871). Likewise Respondent 4, (Excerpt Range: 24697-24796), explained that the Government of Kenya supported the Kenya team in terms of food and accommodation. The respondent further recounted:

Because I remember in 2012, I broke a record in the side of Paralympic I arrived in Kenya though I will say that the only thing that I come and see it promoted me is the company of Safaricom. Safaricom sasa waliweza ingilia kati wakatutuzia sasa. Walikuwa wametuhidi watu wenye watakuwa wamequalify waletu world record watapata kitu fulani zawadi zawadi namna hii. Wakatutuzia sasa mambo ya pesa. Ni hiyo tu 2012. Lakini apart from other things ya mambo kama makampuni kama Isuzu, kama hii ya YouTube, hawaingizi. Walitupromisi tu ikaishia hapo. Walitupromisi na walikuwa watushike mkono wakati tukienda. Walikuwa sponsors wa AK na Paralympics. Sasa watu wa Safaricom ndio wameelewa watu wa Paralympics. Sponsor wa National team ni Safaricom na wako sawa. Lakini wale masponsors wengine hatujewahi ona. Lakini mambo ya Safaricom wako kila mchezo yenye tunatoka inje. Safaricom wako. Wanaingilia lakini makampuni zingine hawajawai ingilia, labda wakiingilia ni zile support ndogo ndogo, lakini sasa kuweka YouTube nini, hakuna.

Because I remember in 2012, I broke a record on the Paralympic side I arrived in Kenya although I will say that the only thing that I came and see it promoted me is the Safaricom company. Safaricom could now intervene and reward us now. They had promised us people who would qualify, and break world record would get something like a gift. They have rewarded us money. It was in 2012. But apart from other things of things companies like Isuzu, like this one of YouTube, they don't. They just rewarded us only and ended there. They promised us and they were to assist as we went. They were sponsors of the AK and Paralympics. Now its Safaricom that have come to understand the Paralympics. National team Sponsor is Safaricom, and they are ok. But those other sponsors we have never seen them. But it is Safaricom who are with us in every competition event we go out. Safaricom is always there. They are involved but other companies have not, maybe they chip in with those small assistance, but now like putting on YouTube, there is none (Excerpt Range: 5187-6210).

Majority of the respondents reported to receive support in their sports activities from parents (11) while 7 said that they did not receive support from parent but by themselves in all the Para Athletics activities. To give an instance, respondent 6 pointed out, “*Ni wazazi tu. Wananisaidia kunipatia fare. Saile na train tuna train na watoto*” “*Parents only. They help me get the fare. When training I train with children*” (Excerpt Range: 3535-3615).

Similarly respondent 5 said “*wanasisuppon tu. Nakaa nyumbani. Najisupport pia. sponsorship sijawai patana nayo*” “*They support me. I stay at home. I also support myself. I have never encountered sponsorship*” (Excerpt Range: 8054-8136). Respondent 10 also said, “*Tuseme tu wananiambia tu, you work hard. Wananisaidia ata transport ata mabrother wangu. Tuseme naenda Nairobi, wananisaidia. Kwa training hakuna*” “*Suppose they just tell me, you work hard.*



They help me with fare. Suppose I go to Nairobi, they help me. In training there is none” (Excerpt Range: 7005-7151). Respondent 4 revealed how the parents provides favorable conditions for training:

Eeh, wazazi wananisupport. Kama mimi wananisaidia juu nikiwa nimeenda mazoezi siwezi nikaja nikaenda kuchuna majani chai siwezi nikaja nikaenda kulima. Sasa wananisupport kwa ata kuninunulia facilities ya kutrain nayo wananisupport wakati tunatoka ng'ambo sasa. Huwa wanainunulia viatu, facilities “Yep, parents are supporting me. Like they help me up when I go to train, I can't come and pick tea leaves I can't come, and I go to plow. Now they support me by buying for me training facilities and support as we return from abroad. They usually buy me shoes, facilities” (Excerpt Range: 24873-25173).

Turning now to examples of those who did not receive parents support in Para Athletics activities, Respondent 2, Excerpt Range: 4280-4288, said not receiving support from parents. Same to Respondent 9, Excerpt Range: 3781-3796, who did not receive any support. Insisting to fund self, Respondent 11 said, “No” (Excerpt Range: 12355-12360). While Respondent 13 said, “Parents ni poor bwana. Ata nikisema...Ni poor, totally poor. Ni mimi mwenyewe” “Parents are poor. If I say... they are poor, totally poor. It's me alone” (Excerpt Range: 21023-21102).

All the respondents indicated that sponsorships are important for the Para Athletics. Respondent 11 emphasized, “Kabisa. Mimi naona ikiwa very important. very important” “Absolutely. I consider it very important. Very important” (Excerpt Range: 12452-12510). In the same way, Respondent 6 said, “Ummh, kama tungepata sponsorship naona ingekua fair. Lakini hautakaa mwaka moja ndio uende ng'ambo. Na hii yetu ya paralympics ni once per year” “Ummh, if we were to get sponsorship, I see it would be a good one. You won't have to stay one year to go overseas. And in paralympics it is once a year” (Excerpt Range: 3710-3850). Similarly, Respondent 5, (Excerpt Range: 8202-8517), explained that it would help in covering the Para Athletics related expenses. Closely to that, Respondent 4 said that sponsorship helps make Para Athlete focused:

Unajua saa zile umesponziwa sasa you are now relaxing. You are focusing only in one thing. Your mind is not divided. Sio kama saa zile uko nyumbani. Sasa saa zingine unaweza ukasaidiwa, saa ingine hauwezi ukasaidiwa. You are fighting for it as an individual.

You know when you get sponsorship you are now relaxing. You are focusing only in one thing. Your mind is not divided. It's not like when at home. Now sometimes you can be helped, other times you can't be helped. You are fighting for it as an individual. (Excerpt Range: 29315-29571).

The respondents gave some recommendations to the Para Athletics stakeholders in regard to sponsorship in Para Athletics. For example, Respondent 4, (Excerpt Range: 12822-13155), suggested popularizing Para Athletics to widely to the population to attract more participants. The respondent further urged the government to consider employment opportunities to the Para Athletes just as the able-bodied athletes by saying, “Athletics Kenya. Mtu kama Hezekiel Kemboi awin anakuja ajiriwa awe askari. Maybe mtu wa paralympics sasa ata akikosa miguu ama nini akuje aajiriwe ata kwa maofisi ama nini. Hata kosa kuandika. Si lazima akua police” “Athletics Kenya. Someone like Hezekiel Kemboi if he wins, he comes and gets hired as a soldier. Maybe the Paralympian is missing his feet or something, should get hired at offices somewhere else. He cannot fail to write. He doesn't have to be a police officer” (Excerpt Range: 30753-30970). Respondent 9, (Excerpt Range: 4007-4158), also gave emphasis to recognition that when a Para Athlete win, it is a win for the country, so they should be sponsored. Respondent 6 gave proposals to county governments and companies:

Kama kwanza County, waprovide ile mahitaji tunataka, naona ingekuwa mzuri. Watununulie ile vitu kama shot put, discuss, hii vitu ya kuchezea na zingine. Wasponsor watu, may be wasponsor watu every one-month wakue kwa

kambi kabla. County Government naona ingekua mzuri. Alafu ningeomba tu hawa watu wa makampuni wasaidie Paralympics. Maybe tukienda sasa kampuni fulani watusaidie, naona ingekua fair. Maybe waseme kama hii mwezi tutasaidia nyinyi fare ya kuenda kucheza Nairobi au tuwapee fare ya kukuja kambi mtrain Nairobi. Nasema tu watusaidie, kama iko kampuni yenye inaweza kutusaidia watusaidie. Kwanza County Government watusaidie kabisa.

As a County, to provide the needs we want, it would be great. Buy them things like shot put, discus, sports equipment and more. To sponsor people, may be to sponsor people every one month to be in camp beforehand. County Government I think would be great. Then I would just ask these corporate people to help the Paralympics. Maybe if we go now some company to help us, I reckon it would be fair. Maybe they say this month we will help you travel to play in Nairobi or give you a fare to come to Nairobi to train. I just say help us. If there is a company that can help us, help us. First, the County Government to help us completely. (Excerpt Range: 3936-4576).

The majority of the respondent felt that much has not been done in Para Athletics to attract sponsorships whereby 72% indicated never while 25% sometimes and 6% said often as illustrated in figure 2 below. Respondent 6 claimed, *“Unajua Saile kama umepata Sponsorship ata kutrain, una train. Ni serikali hakuna ingine. Hakuna. Shida ni wakubwa yetu. Leadership. Because hawawezi approach hawa watu. Unajua mpaka uaproach. Hawafanyi. Wanangojea tu ya serikali. Maybe safaricom wamekuja ni saile tumeenda”* “You know if you have received Sponsorship even training, you train. It’s government, no other. Nothing. The problem is our bosses. Leadership. Because they can’t approach these people. You know until you aproach. They do not. They just wait for the government. Maybe safaricom have come; is when we are going abroad”. (Excerpt Range: 6180-6454). On the other hand, Respondent 11 pointed out that sometimes there are efforts, but the benefit does not reach the Para Athletes by saying, *“No, sometimes. Like wale wakora si wanafanya lakini si haifikii athletes”* “No, sometimes. Like those crooks do but it does not reach athletes” (Excerpt Range: 12721-12795). Respondent 4 admitted not seeing the efforts from the Para Athletes themselves noting:

Sijawahi ona hiyo efforts kwa athletes. Sasa unajua muda nayo. Sasa mkimbiaji kama umekimbia asubui umeenda saa inne utakuwa umechoka. You need to rest. Sasa hautakuwa na time ya kutafuta sponsor sasa kumwambia nisaide nisaide lakini kungekuwa na mambo ya camp sasa vile umekuwa umesema. Wao sasa wangeingia kuandika mambo ya kama proposal waseme hawa wakimbiaji wanaitaji hii na hii na hii. Ingekuwa sasa ata mambo ya pesa kwa macounty sasa mambo ya pesa ya walemavu ingekuwa inatumika vizuri. Lakini sasa huwezi ukaenda as an individual na ucomplain to be be given aassistance. Itakuwa vingumu.

I’ve never seen that effort from athletes. Now you know the time. Now as a runner when you have run in the morning, you go at 10 o’clock, you will be tired. You need to rest. Now you won’t have time to find a sponsor to tell help me, help but if there would be a camp, like you have said ... they would now go in to write things like a proposal to say these runners need this and this. It would be money for counties, now the money for the disabled would be well spent. But now you cannot go as an individual and be compelled to be a given. It will be difficult (Excerpt Range: 28490-29079).

Set: Sponsorships, Field: Do you think much has been done at Para Athletics to attract more sponsors?

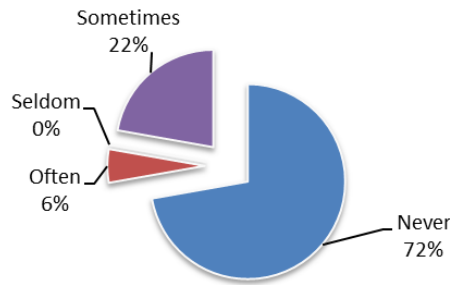


Figure 2: Respondents View on Whether Much has Been Done at Para Athletics to Attract More Sponsors

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings indicate that there is a limited interaction between sponsorships and Para athlete performance. Kenyan Para athletes face a scarcity of sponsorship opportunities, which limits their impact on performance. Paralympic athletes rely heavily on support from family members and able-bodied athletes, depriving them of many sponsorship opportunities. Similarly, event sponsorships exist but appear to have little direct reach with athletes, whereas training sponsorships are uncommon (Meenaghan, 2001).

According to the study, the bottleneck in sponsorship benefits for Para athletes stems from structural issues plaguing the Kenya Paralympic movement (Rial & Carral, 2015). Effective marketing strategies targeting Para athletes throughout their careers, like product life cycles, may provide a solution (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2011; Amis, Slack, & Berrett, 1999). Talent identification and development camps, well-organized competition events for evaluation, ongoing support through sponsorships, and endorsements that recognize athlete accomplishments are all possible approaches.

The study's findings highlight the need to reorganize Kenya's Paralympic movement, including restructuring its leadership and the Para Athletics structure. The study shows how restructuring can benefit athlete performance. Future research can investigate the sponsorship experiences of high-achieving, able-bodied athletes to gain a better understanding of the overall effectiveness of sponsorship approaches. Furthermore, other research studies can look into the best leadership and structural models for Kenyan parasports to address this critical issue (Patton, 2002).

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