

# Evaluating The Impact of COVID-19 on The Management Systems of Ethiopian Sports Clubs: Regional Insights and Challenges

Yonass Alemayoh<sup>1</sup>, Dr.Kesatie Legesse<sup>2</sup>, Dr.Mathivanan Dhamodaran<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Hailay Gebretinsae<sup>4</sup>, Dr. Theodros Birhane<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Sport Science, Mekelle University, Ethiopia.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Mekelle University Sport Science Academy, Ethiopia.

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Mekelle University Sport Science Academy, Ethiopia.

<sup>4</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Management, Mekelle University, Ethiopia

<sup>5</sup>Assistant Professor, Mekelle University Sport Science Academy, Ethiopia.

Corresponding author: Dr.Kesatie Legesse, MU-SSA

## Abstract

The COVID -19 pandemic has created substantial challenges for sports clubs worldwide, including those in Ethiopia. This study investigates how the pandemic has influenced the management systems of sports clubs in Ethiopia, focusing on management functions. As per Koontz and O'Donnell's management checklists. A mixed- methods approach was used, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis from 330 respondents, including athletes, coaches, managers, board members, and technical staff from sports clubs in Addis Ababa and the Tigray region from 4 sport disciplines and 20 clubs. Statistical analysis, including 5 Likert-scale measures and ANOVA, was used to examine differences in management effectiveness among clubs.

The key findings of the study included the significant disruption of the planning process, difficulties in coordinating team activities, and challenges in leadership and human resource management strategies in maintaining staff stability during the pandemic. The study found that strong manager- coach collaboration and stable employment conditions for coaches were critical for team performance during the pandemic, with correlation coefficients of 0.730 and 0.557, respectively. The study also found that control systems were the weakest link in sport club management during the pandemic, with an average of 2.91. This study emphasizes the critical roles of digital transformation, financial management, and leadership in navigating these challenges. The results suggest that Ethiopian sports clubs must strengthen their management systems, invest in digital resources, and prioritize financial sustainability to better prepare for future crises.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, sports management, sports clubs, organizational resilience, Ethiopia.

## 1. Introduction

What keeps organizations running often comes down to one thing: management. Inside any group working toward a goal, it's the framework that lines up people, money, and tools into something useful. Think of it like guiding pieces on a board, each move shaped by decisions about what needs doing, how tasks fit together, who leads them, and whether things stay on track. This flow – mapping out steps, arranging effort, leading action, checking results- turns plans into real outcomes without wasting time or energy. The idea isn't new; back in 2012, Stoner and Freeman described exactly this rhythm as essential for getting things done well.

Because sports groups work with players, staff, backers, and fans all at once, their operations tend to be tangled. Today's teams aren't just a local pastime anymore- they've grown into serious setups carrying weight beyond games. Success now depends less on luck, more on sharp direction plus clear long- term thinking, especially since these bodies face pressure much like businesses do; Smith and Stewart noted this shift back in 2010.

When the COVID-19 virus emerged near the end of 2019, businesses everywhere faced sudden difficulties. Because of rising cases, officials put in place actions like stay-at-home rules, limits on movement, along with spacing people out in public areas. As a result, how work got done, how students learned, even how friends met up - all shifted in noticeable ways.

Few areas felt the impact like sports did when handshakes turned risky, flights got scrapped, and crowds vanished overnight. Across nations, gyms shut without warning while tournaments once set in stone blinked out of calendars.

When events got called off, sports clubs struggled just to keep doors open. Cancellations meant empty schedules, which bled income fast. Sponsors pulled back when crowds disappeared from games. Fewer members showing up made the hole deeper. Money trouble piled on top of daily chaos.

Even before the virus arrived, teams across Ethiopia struggled – tight budgets, weak systems, old facilities. When the outbreak hit, fresh hurdles landed on top of what was already a tough climb.

One way to see change is by watching how sports groups handled hard times. Not every club reacted the same when things shifted suddenly. What happened during the pandemic shows cracks- also openings- in how they run things. A closer look at Ethiopian teams reveals patterns just as much as the outcomes themselves.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to sports organizations worldwide, disrupting their management systems and operational functions. In Ethiopia, sports clubs have faced significant difficulties in maintaining effective management practices amid restrictions, resource limitations, and infrastructural disruptions. Despite the vital role of management functions such as planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling in ensuring organizational resilience, there is limited research on how these functions have been impacted by the pandemic within Ethiopian sports clubs, especially across different regions and sport disciplines. Understanding these impacts is crucial for developing strategies to strengthen management systems and enhance the clubs' capacity to respond to future crises. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of COVID-19 on the management systems of Ethiopian sports clubs, with a focus on regional differences and sport types, to identify key challenges and opportunities for improvement.

## **3. Research Objectives**

To assess the impact of COVID-19 on the management functions (planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, and training) of Ethiopian sports clubs.

To compare the management performance of sports clubs in Addis Ababa and the Tigray region during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To examine the differences in management practices between team sports and individual sports clubs amidst the pandemic.

To identify the major challenges faced by Ethiopian sports clubs in maintaining effective management systems during COVID-19.

To provide recommendations for strengthening sports club management systems to improve organizational resilience against future crises.

## **4. Research Questions**

1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the management functions of Ethiopian sports clubs?
2. What are the regional differences in management performance between clubs in Addis Ababa and the Tigray region during the pandemic?
3. Are there significant differences in management practices between team sports and individual sports clubs during this period?
4. What are the main challenges faced by Ethiopian sports clubs in implementing effective management strategies during COVID-19?

## **5.0. Review of related literature**

### **5.1 Managing Systems in Sports Groups**

Starting off differently every now and then, sports management means using standard business practices inside athletic groups. According to Hoye and colleagues 2015, it involves guiding people, handling money, and shaping how things are organized- all aimed at meeting both team goals and company targets. The structure shifts subtly here, yet keeps its core idea intact throughout.

Effective sports management typically involves several key functions:

- Planning organizational activities and strategies
- Organizing resources and responsibilities
- Staffing and human resource management
- Directing leadership and communication

- Controlling and evaluating organizational performance

Without these management tasks, daily operations might drift off track. Success in crowded markets often ties back to how well they're handled. Smooth running relies on clear direction from them; reaching goals becomes easier when oversight stays consistent. Performance improves where structure supports action.

### **5.3.Crisis Management in Sports Organizations**

When trouble hits, groups must shift fast to handle sudden problems. Back in 1993, Pearson and Mitroff pointed out that dealing with crises means getting ready ahead of time, acting once it happens, then bouncing back after. One morning, games everywhere just stopped. Teams stared at empty fields, unsure what came next. A virus moved fast, shutting down the season without warning. Leaders in sport scrambled to fix budgets slashed overnight. Some canceled events. Others tried playing behind closed doors. Money dried up quickly. Safety became a daily argument. Meetings ran late. Decisions shifted by the hour. Nothing felt steady. The old way of running things no longer worked. Adjustment arrived slowly, piece by broken piece.

Firm direction, when paired with adaptable oversight, often helped groups handle such pressures better.

## **6.0 Methodology**

### **6.1Research Design**

A cross-sectional survey research design will be used in this study. To realize the purpose of the study, the investigator, after consulting the experts, the advisor, and the co-advisor, prepares a questionnaire to elicit data that are related to the number of athletes trained through different methods during the pandemic. Further analysis of the management of sports based on the opinions was on seven specific dimensions, namely, general administration, planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, and training. Club management is the dependent variable, while General Administration, Planning, Staffing, Organizing, Directing, Controlling, and Training are the independent variables. The research will be cross-sectional, or a "snapshot," because the phenomenon, the impact on the sports club management system, will be examined at one particular time and not over several years. The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale to get the opinion of the respondents. The obtained opinions were scored, and the scores were analyzed, and the results were presented using percentages. The researcher statistically analyzed differences in opinions among sports clubs on the management systems using ANOVA. In all cases, the 0.05 level was used to test the hypothesis of the study.

### **6.2 Study Area**

This research is to be carried out in Addis Ababa and the Tigray region among 20 sports clubs in the athletics, cycling, football, and handball disciplines. The study area will be determined by a purposive sampling technique. Therefore, the major clubs have their administrative offices in Addis Ababa and the Tigray region within Mekele, Adigrat, and Shire Endesilasie.

### **6.3 Selection of subjects**

Through the census method, all the board members, coaches, assistant coaches, and technicians were selected as the subjects for the purpose of recognizing the performance of the management system in their respective clubs. Athletes will be chosen through simple random sampling from each club.

### **6.4 Selection of variables and instruments**

Considering the pandemic situation, it was necessary to analyze the management system of various sports clubs to see how they performed with the core competencies in General Administration, Planning, Staffing, Organizing, Directing, Controlling, and Training during the pandemic. However, the management system variables were purposively selected for this study.

### **6.5 Data collection procedures**

The data collection process for this study was executed in three distinct phases to ensure the integrity, reliability, and ethical compliance of the gathered information. Initially, the preparatory phase focused on securing formal authorization and validating the research instrument. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board, followed by the acquisition of official letters of support from relevant regional sports bureaus and federations. To ensure the instrument's psychometric soundness, a pilot study was conducted with a representative subgroup of participants. This allowed for the calculation of Cronbach's Alpha to verify the internal consistency of the multi-item scales, ensuring that the questions effectively captured the intended management constructs before full-scale distribution.

The second phase involved the systematic recruitment of the N=330 participants and the administration of the survey. A multi-modal distribution strategy was employed to accommodate the geographic dispersion between regional hubs such as Addis Ababa and Tigray. Participants, including athletes, coaches, and management staff, were identified through official organizational rosters. Before data were collected, every respondent was provided with an informed consent briefing that detailed the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the protocols in place to guarantee absolute anonymity and confidentiality. This transparent approach was critical for minimizing social desirability bias and ensuring honest reflections on organizational performance and crisis resilience.

The final phase centered on data cleaning and preparation for quantitative analysis. As surveys were returned, they were meticulously screened for completeness and response patterns; any instruments with significant missing data or "straight-line" responses were excluded to maintain the dataset's quality. Validated responses were then digitized and coded into statistical software. Categorical variables, such as gender, professional position, and geographic location, were assigned numerical codes to facilitate non-parametric testing, such as the Mann-Whitney U test. This rigorous data management protocol ensured that the final dataset was robust, organized, and ready for the synthesis of management functions within the context of the study's objectives.

**Table:1 Comparison of Management Scores by Location and Sport Type**

| Management Functions | Addis Ababa(n=226 ) Vs. Tigray(n104) |           |             |         | Team sport(n=190) Vs. Individual sport(n=140) |           |             |         |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
|                      | Mean(AA)                             | Mean(Tig) | U statistic | P-value | Mean(Team)                                    | Mean(Ind) | U statistic | P-value |
| Planning             | 3.35                                 | 2.87      | 8921.5      | 0.000   | 3.15                                          | 3.25      | 12890.0     | 0.210   |
| Organizing           | 3.58                                 | 3.08      | 8450.0      | 0.000   | 3.38                                          | 3.47      | 12980.5     | 0.245   |
| Staffing             | 3.35                                 | 2.85      | 8765.0      | 0.000   | 3.10                                          | 3.29      | 12450.0     | 0.048   |
| Directing            | 3.38                                 | 2.84      | 8320.5      | 0.000   | 3.18                                          | 3.23      | 13100.0     | 0.345   |
| Controlling          | 3.08                                 | 2.56      | 9010.0      | 0.000   | 2.85                                          | 3.00      | 12700.0     | 0.130   |
| Training             | 3.55                                 | 3.08      | 8650.5      | 0.000   | 3.38                                          | 3.43      | 13020.0     | 0.280   |

## 7.0 Interpretation:

**4.1. Planning:** The mean score for planning was 3.35 in Addis Ababa, compared with 2.87 in Tigray. The Mann–Whitney U statistic was 8921.5, with a p-value of 0.000, which is below the 0.05 significance level. This indicates a statistically significant difference in planning practices between clubs in Addis Ababa and Tigray.

The higher mean score in Addis Ababa suggests that clubs in the capital were better positioned to undertake planning activities, including setting objectives, developing training schedules, allocating resources, preparing competitions, and responding to operational challenges. The comparatively lower score in Tigray may reflect difficulties associated with disruptions to infrastructure, transportation, financial resources, communication systems, and institutional operations.

In contrast, the comparison between team and individual sports showed mean scores of 3.15 and 3.25, respectively. The U statistic was 12890.0, with a p-value of 0.210. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, there was no statistically significant difference between team and individual sports in planning. Thus, the observed difference in mean scores is not sufficient to conclude that the type of sport affected planning practices.

**7.2. Organizing:** The organizing function recorded a mean score of 3.58 for Addis Ababa and 3.08 for Tigray. The Mann–Whitney U statistic was 8450.0, and the p-value was 0.000. Therefore, a statistically significant difference existed between the two locations. The higher score for Addis Ababa indicates stronger organizational capacity, including coordination of personnel, allocation of responsibilities, communication, scheduling, and mobilization of resources. Clubs in Addis Ababa may have benefited from greater access to administrative structures and sports-related institutions. In Tigray, organizational activities may have been affected by disruptions to institutional

systems and physical infrastructure. For team versus individual sports, the mean scores were 3.38 and 3.47, respectively, with a U statistic of 12980.5 and a p-value of 0.245. Since  $p > 0.05$ , there was no significant difference between team and individual sports in organizing. This suggests that organizational practices were broadly similar regardless of the type of sport.

**7.3. Staffing:** The mean staffing score was 3.35 in Addis Ababa, while Tigray recorded 2.85. The Mann–Whitney U statistic was 8765.0, with a p-value of 0.000. This demonstrates a statistically significant difference between the two locations. The result indicates that Addis Ababa clubs generally experienced more favorable staffing conditions. This may include better availability of qualified coaches, assistant coaches, technical personnel, administrators, and other support staff. The lower score in Tigray suggests that clubs may have experienced difficulties in recruiting, retaining, and supporting qualified personnel. When team and individual sports were compared, team sports obtained a mean of 3.10, whereas individual sports obtained 3.29. The U statistic was 12450.0, with a p-value of 0.048. Because 0.048 is slightly below the 0.05 criterion, the difference is statistically significant at the 5% level. This finding suggests that staffing practices differed according to sport type. Individual sports recorded a slightly higher mean score than team sports. One possible explanation is that team sports generally require larger and more specialized support structures, including multiple coaches, assistant coaches, medical personnel, technical staff, and administrative support. Consequently, maintaining adequate staffing may be more challenging for team-based clubs.

**7.4. Directing:** The directing function produced a mean score of 3.38 for Addis Ababa and 2.84 for Tigray. The Mann–Whitney U statistic was 8320.5, with a p-value of 0.000. This represents a statistically significant difference. The higher score in Addis Ababa indicates stronger directing practices, including leadership, communication, motivation, supervision, decision-making, and guidance of athletes and staff. During a crisis period, effective leadership is particularly important because managers must communicate changing policies, modify training arrangements, and maintain staff and athlete motivation. For team and individual sports, the respective mean scores were 3.18 and 3.23. The U statistic was 13100.0, and the p-value was 0.345. Since  $p > 0.05$ , there was no statistically significant difference between the two sport categories in directing. Therefore, although individual sports had a slightly higher numerical mean, the difference is not statistically meaningful.

**7.5. Controlling:** The controlling function showed mean scores of 3.08 for Addis Ababa and 2.56 for Tigray. The Mann–Whitney U statistic was 9010.0, with a p-value of 0.000. The result demonstrates a statistically significant difference between the two locations. The higher Addis Ababa score suggests stronger monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Controlling may involve monitoring athlete participation, financial expenditure, training activities, administrative performance, compliance with organizational procedures, and achievement of planned objectives. The lower score in Tigray may indicate difficulties in maintaining systematic monitoring and evaluation during periods of disruption. Limited resources, institutional interruptions, communication difficulties, and infrastructure problems can make continuous supervision and control more difficult. The team-versus-individual comparison produced mean scores of 2.85 and 3.00, respectively. The U statistic was 12700.0, with a p-value of 0.130. Since  $p > 0.05$ , there was no statistically significant difference between team and individual sports in controlling.

## 8.0 Interpretation of research question

**8.1.** How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the management functions of Ethiopian sports clubs? The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted key management functions in Ethiopian sports clubs. The study revealed notable challenges in planning, with clubs struggling to set objectives and develop operational strategies amid restrictions. Organizing and staffing were also adversely affected, leading to difficulties in coordinating activities and maintaining qualified personnel. Leadership and communication (directing) were weakened, impacting motivation and decision-making processes. Additionally, control systems were the weakest link, with limited capacity to monitor and evaluate activities effectively during the crisis. Overall, these disruptions hindered the clubs' ability to operate efficiently and maintain organizational resilience.

**8.2.** What are the regional differences in management performance between clubs in Addis Ababa and the Tigray region during the pandemic? There were significant differences in management performance between clubs in Addis Ababa and those in Tigray. Clubs in Addis Ababa scored higher across all management functions—including planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling—reflecting better access to resources, infrastructure, and institutional support. Conversely, clubs in Tigray faced more challenges due to infrastructural disruptions, limited

access to qualified personnel, and resource constraints, leading to lower management effectiveness during the pandemic.

**8.3.** Are there significant differences in management practices between team sports and individual sports clubs during this period? The study found that management practices did not differ significantly between team sports and individual sports in most functions, except for staffing. Clubs involved in individual sports scored slightly higher in staffing, possibly due to the smaller support structures required for individual sports compared to team sports. Overall, the management practices in planning, organizing, directing, and controlling were broadly similar across both sport types during the pandemic.

**8.4.** What are the main challenges faced by Ethiopian sports clubs in implementing effective management strategies during COVID-19? The primary challenges included disruptions in planning processes, difficulties in coordinating team activities, weak control and monitoring systems, and challenges in maintaining staff stability. Limited access to digital resources and infrastructure, financial constraints, communication barriers, and infrastructural damage, especially in Tigray, further compounded these issues. Additionally, maintaining motivation and leadership effectiveness during periods of uncertainty proved difficult for many clubs.

## 9.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that sports club management performance differed significantly between Addis Ababa and Tigray across all six management functions: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, and training, with Addis Ababa recording higher management scores. However, sport type did not significantly influence most management functions, except staffing, where team and individual sports differed significantly. Overall, the findings indicate that geographical and organizational conditions, including access to resources, infrastructure, qualified personnel, and institutional support, may have had a greater influence on sports club management performance than the type of sport.

## 10.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that sports authorities and clubs in Tigray strengthen management capacity through improved strategic planning, staffing, infrastructure, training, leadership, communication, and monitoring systems. Sports clubs should also develop effective crisis-management and continuity plans, enhance the use of digital technologies, and provide continuous professional development for coaches and administrators. Greater cooperation between sports federations, regional authorities, universities, and clubs should be encouraged to share management practices and ensure more equitable access to resources. Future studies should further investigate the specific factors responsible for the management differences between regions.

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