

## **AWF Annual Event – 2013 Report**

### **Sport: can it really change women's lives?**

*The third annual AWF event posed the question 'Sport: can it really change women's lives?' and an audience of two hundred people heard contributions from an Olympic Gold medal-winning athlete, a youth sport community coach from Ghana, and the European regional development manager for one of the biggest sports in the world. The event was preceded by the official launch of the Women's Sport Leadership Academy (WSLA); part of a partnership between the AWF and Females Achieving Brilliance (FAB).*

Dr Sarah Gilroy (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), University of Chichester) opened the evening by recognising the heritage of sporting excellence that has emanated from the University of Chichester. Sarah also reflected on how sport has influenced her career, including how it aided her in becoming Deputy Vice-Chancellor despite the relative absence of women in senior roles in UK higher education.

Dr Elizabeth Pike (Chair of the AWF) gave an overview of the AWF and its achievements to date before officially starting the evening's proceedings by introducing Dr Anita White OBE who would be facilitating conversations with the guests; the first being Dr Katherine Grainger CBE.

#### ***Dr Katherine Grainger CBE – Journey to Success***

A video of Katherine's journey to success at London 2012 (with Anna Watkins in the women's double sculls rowing) was played as she walked to the stage. The emotions, both positive and negative, provided a fitting starting point for the conversation Anita was to have with Katherine. Katherine admitted that although she has watched the video many times before, each viewing provided a different perspective of her success.

Unsurprisingly, Katherine stated that winning her London 2012 Olympic Gold medal was the proudest moment of her sporting career and reflected how winning in front of a home crowd was "the moment" she had worked so hard to achieve. This was in contrast to the "unbelievably crushing moment" four years earlier in Beijing, 2008, where after leading 1800m of the 2000m race, the team was beaten to Gold by China. Upon her return to the UK, she stated she struggled with meeting friends, family and the media who were so positive towards her Silver medal success: "I was so raw and emotional but people were so nice...it was just a killer...I wanted to be in a hole and hide for months because no one could make it OK". It was not until a media event that she was asked "how does it feel to have wasted four years of your life?" that Katherine realised she had not only won an Olympic Silver medal but had been a three-time World Champion in the years leading up to Beijing. It was the catalyst for London 2012 and her "moment of redemption".

Yet she was the only one from her boat who was fortunate enough to experience another chance – a theme Katherine expanded upon when Anita asked how women's rowing has developed during her career. Katherine admitted she is in the right place at the right time because of "trailblazers" who, before National Lottery funding in 1997, were engaging in rowing without the finances and assistance offered today. Due to greater investment in women's rowing, and through her own interest and enjoyment, Katherine claimed sport has "empowered" her. After switching from martial arts to rowing at university, she highlighted the values which grew her self-confidence and the ability to accept losing as well as winning.

These values have influenced her decision to give something back to sport through her involvement in the sport-based charity International Inspiration which aims to inspire, empower and transform people's lives through sport, in particular women and girls:

*“We may be exhausted after a day in the boat but you then realise people in some areas of the world are walking as far as we have rowed to get clean water. You can see how sport can be used as a vehicle for change and transform people's lives because it helps at so many levels where hope and opportunities have previously been denied”.*

In the questions from the audience that followed talking with Anita, Katherine reflected on the patriarchy she encountered in martial arts whilst at university and how rowing offered a more sociable environment full of people and characters that helped her grow as a person. In response to a question from Dave Messenger (Christ's Hospital) regarding whether Talent ID projects were worthwhile, Katherine stated how more research was needed on the mental-side to becoming an elite performer rather than focusing on physical attributes: “You may be incredibly gifted, but the real challenge is repeating those skills day-in, day-out. People want it easy, but it is dealing with the repetition that is as important as your size, height, and strength”.



*(L-R: Nick Pink, Francisca Korantemaa Darfour, Dr Katherine Grainger CBE, Dr Sarah Gilroy, Professor Clive Behagg, Dr Anita White OBE, Dr Elizabeth Pike)*

### **International Development**

Following Katherine, Anita introduced the second half the discussion in order to understand whether sport can really change the lives of women who come from poorer countries where women have not had the kinds of opportunities to develop and excel in sport that Katherine has had. This was supplemented by an International Inspiration video of a women's empowerment project in Kenya.

Nick Pink (International Cricket Council (ICC) Regional Development Manager for Europe) had had a varied career working in the international development field in different sports organisations, and Anita asked him where he thought sport had had the biggest impact on the lives of girls and women. Nick highlighted how investing in individuals has led to significant outcomes, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and how fortunate the UK was that investment in sport is seen as so important. This includes UK Sport's partnership with the International Netball Federation which has resulted in the

appointment of a woman to become the African Regional Manager for Netball Development in Southern Africa.

Nick then explained what the ICC were doing to promote women in cricket, noting that “the future of sport has to be more inclusive”. He highlighted how some national organisations are doing tremendous work already, how the ICC have a women’s strategy and have recently signed the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport, and how women’s cricket is the fastest growing area of their development programme. However, he did warn that there are positive and negative implications to a separate women’s strategy: “because it is separate, it is not embedded in central strategy, but if it becomes embedded too soon it will get lost”.

The AWF’s engagement with a leadership programme in Tanzania was on Nick’s guidance and he praised the AWF for developing its involvement from building trustworthy relationships with those involved, to engaging in communications through the student action group on Facebook. The overall project initially had a 78:22 ratio of men/boys to women/girls but has shifted over time. Furthermore, rather than create competing programmes nearby, organisations such as the AWF and International Inspiration are “bolting on” to enhance these programmes because “the British Pound goes a long way when managed properly”. Nick was keen to note how the knowledge and context are crucial for the programmes because some often do not take into account cultural issues that create further barriers for women to engage in sport.

The final guest for the AWF Event has had first-hand engagement in the leadership programmes and the cultural issues highlighted above. Francisca Korantemaa Darfour was one of the first Ghanaian leaders on the programme, and stated how “it was amazing because people were sitting down and listening to us – if you understand the cultural programme, it helps!” Franka explained that her engagement in sport empowered her as a person, and as a woman, because of the skills and values she learned. She has enhanced these skills further after being awarded the prestigious Mo Ibrahim Foundation scholarship to undertake a Masters degree in Governance and Statebuilding at the University of Birmingham, and attributed her success in being awarded the scholarship to her experiences with the leadership development programme. Franka revealed she hopes to apply the understanding from her studies through teaching and lecturing about conflict and reconstruction in countries such as Liberia. Crucially, she again acknowledged how bringing the views of young people into development was necessary, and how sporting values had allowed her to develop as a person.



*(Dr Anita White OBE spoke to Francisca Korantemaa Darfour, Nick Pink, and Dr Katherine Grainger CBE)*

### **Questions from the audience**

The questions from the audience following the discussion were wide-ranging and encompassed many issues women encounter in sport, including the lack of leadership opportunities. When asked when a woman will become the President of the IOC, Katherine and Nick both responded that networks of “men in suits” still dominate. Nick acknowledged sadness that we may have to wait another generation before it happens because currently “women’s roles are in women’s areas and committees, and we need to find ways of getting women into wider sectors”. Franka added an example of how women are gradually advancing through sectors such as education and health and are using transferrable skills to gain access into sporting institutions in Ghana.

A subsequent question asked whether another way of achieving change is through generating leadership from an early age. Nick outlined how in the UK, Future Leaders programmes are engaged in differently depending on what the sport is. In addition, Dr Sarah Gilroy asked about the direction of school sport currently. Nick responded that the UK may have gone backwards in the previous few years because of funding cuts to community sports partnerships. These networks facilitated the greater inclusion of sport into the curriculum. Franka reflected upon slowly changing societal perceptions of sport in Ghana, which were gradually allowing more people to realise the positive values sport can bring. Growing acceptance of women in sport in the UK is occurring, but many questions from the audience focussed on how more needs to be done in the media. Anita responded that media coverage of women’s sport remained an issue despite more than twenty years of lobbying, but presenters such as Gabby Logan and Clare Balding were gaining exposure and recognition. Furthermore, women are reaching leadership positions in sport coverage (such as Barbara Slater as Director of BBC Sport) and women’s sport programmes (such as Sportswomen on Sky Sports) are growing.

### **Closing remarks**

Anita highlighted the plethora of examples raised throughout the night for how sport has the ability to change women’s lives and develop them as women. Whether it be at an elite level with Katherine or at development levels such as Nick what facilitates and Franka epitomises, the range of skills and values ensconced under the umbrella of sport have the capacity to change not only sport itself, but those women who are engaged in sport. In summing up,

Franka said: “I believe totally that sport can change lives. Investment in sport is an investment in women! Only through sport did I get to learn about myself and have the opportunities to progress like I have”.

Nick said: “We need to get away from the point of view that investing in women and sport is a risk. It’s not, it’s worthwhile. We are not seeing enough women in sport leadership. It will initiate change”.

And Katherine said: “We should be proud of where we are. It was not too long since women ‘didn’t do sport’, but we are now in more events than ever before and in greater numbers”.

Professor Clive Behagg (Vice-Chancellor, University of Chichester) closed the evening by expressing his pride that the University of Chichester hosts the AWF. The AWF fits into the history, ethos, and mission of the University to inspire individuals to exceed expectations and Professor Behagg remarked that the University “had got that right tonight”.