

THE PROBLEM WITH AFRICAN FOOTBALL: CORRUPTION AND THE (UNDER)DEVELOPMENT OF THE GAME ON THE CONTINENT

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SUMMARY: 1. Introduction – 2. Corrupt nature of African football administration – 3. FIFA's non-interference policy – 4. Football (under)development in Africa and corruption – 5. What does the future hold for African football? – 6. Conclusion

1. Introduction

Rampant corruption, maladministration and lack of accountability have negatively impacted on the development of football in Africa.¹ Football has turned into a billionaire dollar industry across the world but Africa remains at the periphery of this lucrative system. It is believed that many factors such as the predatory and globalised nature of major European leagues, Africa's problem stem from systematic and institutionalised problems with its football administration structures. This paper highlights examples from across Africa to show that corruption is an endemic part of football administration on the continent. The continued under performance of African teams over the years will be used as a yardstick to measure the stagnant nature of the game in Africa. Local leagues and clubs on the continent are largely run unprofessionally except in a very few countries such as South Africa and accusations of match fixing are abound. Coupled to this, political interference provides a context in which football becomes a complex social construct in which space, culture, politics and economics intersect to produce very little development of the game as a vibrant commercial entity. Yet FIFA's standing statutes of non-interference have often meant corrupt leaders continuing in their positions for decades. The question is what then for African football given the deep rooted and structured nature of corruption.

Corruption is synonymous with African football.² The tale of the game on the continent is full of controversy and complex problems involving missing funds, election rigging, presidents who serve for decades, under paid players and poor infrastructure. This paper provide examples from across Africa that highlight how the under development of the game is intrinsically linked to the lack of transparency in how the game is being managed. The nature and level of corruption might be different from country to country but what is clear from literature is that most, if not, all African countries have serious administrative problems. The major obstacles facing all countries from combating corruption in football are FIFA's statutes of non-interference³. With protection ensured from the global football mother body, most national association leaders run roughshod and this leads to the detriment of the game. There is corruption in sport all over the world yet somehow when it comes to football in Africa the practice has devastating effects especially on the players earning a livelihood from the sport.

Whilst there are many definitions of corruption, this paper views it as the abuse of public office for private gain. Within football this is when any official or person or persons use their position of trust in order to gain an undue advantage.⁴ Across the world football corruption is evident in many activities including vote buying, match fixing, bribing officials, player transfers, sponsorship deals and even team selections. Across Africa issues of nepotism, tribalism, regionalism and religion also play an important part in corrupt activities. Corruption determines access to space, resources and fair chance. It hurts all people who depend

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¹ Rukuni, C. & E. Groenink (eds.) 2010. *Killing Soccer in Africa*. FAIR Transnational Investigation, pp. 2, www.fairreporters.org (accessed 7 June 2012).

² Ibid, pp. 2.

³ FIFA Statutes Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes Standing Orders of the Congress July 2012 General Provisions Section 68.2 state that. 'Recourse to ordinary courts of law is prohibited unless specifically provided for in the FIFA regulations. Recourse to ordinary courts of law for all types of provisional measures is also prohibited.' Also Section 13.1(g) states each association is to manage their affairs independently and ensure that their own affairs are not influenced by any third parties.

⁴See: <http://www.seco.admin.ch/themen/00645/00657/00659/01387/index.html?lang=en> (accessed 6 February 2014).

on the integrity of people in power.⁵ In football this includes local clubs, young players and football fans in general. Corruption suffocates development and makes processes expensive especially where there is need for infrastructural development like in Africa. Corruption is not an African problem but endemic to world sport.⁶ The nature, scale and impact of corruption in Africa is however different. In Africa corruption is usually related to how officials use money from sponsors, government and FIFA earmarked for the development of the game for personal use. In such a scenario grassroots football is effectively compromised.

2. *Corrupt nature of African football administration*

Khumalo⁷ argues that bad governance within football is a universal problem which begins at the very top at FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association). The scandals, greed and corruption cases across the world over the past years point to a world football system crippled by controversy. Football governance in Africa is based on national associations which in turn report to the Confederation of African Football (CAF) which is the continental footballing body. National associations are independent bodies whose leaders are chosen by a few members involved in football administration. In most countries such as Zimbabwe and Nigeria the majority of football fans are not involved in this process and in most countries only those who have been involved in football administration for a number of years are allowed to run for office. As such the fans have no way of holding administrators accountable. Administrators only answer to FIFA or CAF which are not involved in everyday happenings of footballing nations. There is upward accountability which leaves African fans alienated from the footballing fraternity. This has serious implications in the commercialisation of the game since it is the same fans that are required to part with their money to finance football on the continent.

Corruption is institutionalised within African systems and football structures are not different. Pannenburg⁸ shows that corruption in Africa has many names: ‘a ‘little something’, a ‘gift’, a ‘motivation’, an ‘envelop’ or a ‘dash’. Most of them refer to eating – indeed, ‘to eat’ means people using public money for private purposes. Nigerians call it ‘sharing the national cake’ which tells you that the practice is to some extent ‘legitimized.’ African football, as with its politics, has developed a system of patronage in which rich and powerful individuals use their positions within football to amass wealth, power and continued political influence. This is what Price terms the ‘Big Man Small Boy Syndrome’ in which The Big Man controls and gives orders; the Small Boy obeys and does not dare to speak his mind.⁹ Most of the people employed in football in Africa are clients who are placed there in most cases without any proper qualifications or skills to perform the task.

A report by the Forum of African Investigative Reporters¹⁰ (FAIR) labels football administrators as corrupt, greedy and inefficient administrators. Khumalo concludes that while players (such as George Weah, Salif Keita, Didier Drogba and Kalusha Balwa) have sacrificed their personal fortunes to develop not just soccer but their own communities, and have in some cases bailed out their national teams, the administration tasked with developing the game focus on personal gain.¹¹ Football can be a lucrative livelihood for senior administrators with access to funds from FIFA, taxes from affiliates including premier soccer leagues and from national team games. Very little is ploughed back into structures that promote junior football or coaching structures. The FAIR report outlines instances of vote buying and corruption in elections for footballing positions. One example is in Zimbabwe where two football councilors admitted receiving US\$2000 each for their votes in electing football president.¹² It also implicates journalists in Zimbabwe who

⁵ See: <http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo?gclid=CLDV8pzLvr0CFekBwwodsw0AeQ> (accessed 3 May 2013)

⁶ For example In Europe there is a growing epidemic of match fixing and illegal betting. An infographic at Sports Betting Online highlights the impact of the £306 billion illegal betting industry across. <http://www.sportsbettingonline.net/blog/match-fixing-football-european-epidemic/> (accessed 3 March 2014)

⁷ Khumalo, T. 2013. *Football's rotten core must be excised*, <http://www.citypress.co.za/you-say/footballs-rotten-core-must-be-excised/> (accessed 4 February 2013)

⁸ Pannenburg, A. 2010. Football in Africa: Observations about political, financial, cultural and religious influences, *NCDO Publication Series Sport & Development*, p14.

⁹ Price, R. 1974. ‘Politics and Culture in Contemporary Ghana: The Big-Man Small-Boy Syndrome.’ *Journal of African Studies*, 1:2.

¹⁰ Rukuni, C. & E. Groenink (eds.) 2010. *Killing Soccer in Africa*. FAIR Transnational Investigation. Download the report at www.fairreporters.org (accessed 7 June 2012)

¹¹ Khumalo, T. 2013. *Football's rotten core must be excised*, <http://www.citypress.co.za/you-say/footballs-rotten-core-must-be-excised/> (accessed 4 February 2013)

¹² Ibid, pp. 6.

allegedly took and demanded payments from football officials to write favorable stories. Football agents are also often accused of paying off coaches bribes so players they represent are called up to the national team, increasing their market value. This leads to many internal problems between players when they report for national duty. The best players do not always get selected and this impacts on the performance of African teams at international competitions.

In South Africa, the lead up to the World Cup in 2010 is alleged to have been tainted by match fixing involving senior soccer administrators. The matches in question included friendly matches Thailand, Bulgaria, Columbia and Guatemala.¹³ An initial report by FIFA Chris Eaton showed that there was enough evidence to initiate a probe. The report highlighted that South African Football Association (SAFA) officials had been involved in match fixing through convicted Singaporean Wilson Perumal Raj. There are 'allegations of death threats and violence, offers of cash payments to officials, six-figure cash sums being banked on the way to matches, referees and linesmen being flown from around Africa and Europe specifically to corrupt games, and dramatic attempts to remove officials suspected of corruption minutes before matches began.'¹⁴ All these cases highlight a systematic and deep rooted problem which involves powerful individuals across the continent. The masses that follow football can only sit and watch as their game is hijacked by greedy and corrupt officials without any development at the grassroots or improvement in infrastructure.

Sugden and Tomlinson¹⁵ argue that the problem which is most worrying in Africa is the scale of corruption. Admos Adamu who was the head of Nigeria's football association allegedly misappropriated US\$800 000 grant from FIFA meant for infrastructural programmes. Former Cameroonian goalkeeper Joseph-Antoine Bell once claimed that 90 out of 100 dollars in football disappears in private pockets¹⁶ Corruption is bad because it, among other things, demoralizes the players.¹⁷ FAIR report cites the following cases of corruption from across Africa to highlight the wanton and brazen acts of corruption affecting African football:

- In Cameroon mobile phone company MTN pumped in \$600,000 of an \$800,000 project to renovate a number of stadiums. The other \$200,000 was to come from Fecafoot, the Cameroonian FA, but instead, \$146,000 ended up in the pockets of the then sports minister, Thierry Augustin Edzoa, so that he could "breathe easier", he said after the payment. The work never happened. The \$600,000 is unaccounted for.
- Under Adamu, Nigerian football has reached a position whereby only 10% of the \$7m received from the sponsor Globalcom reaches the clubs. Television rights for the Nigerian league are worth around \$5m, but since this deal was signed no Premier League club has received a share of the money.
- In Ivory Coast, FIF received \$1.6m a year from the Ivorian Petrol Refinery Company, SIR, but local clubs never got any of the money. The fund's existence only became public when SIR stopped the donations in 2007 on discovering the money was not being distributed.¹⁸

There is a lot of money flowing into the African game from 'companies whose core businesses are mining, agriculture, oil and gas, beverages and otherwise, but also by international sports companies such as Adidas and Puma and by television networks on the continent. There is also money coming in from other types of sponsorships and FIFA development projects. Much of the funds are earmarked for grassroots development but one only has to see the poor football facilities in Africa to notice that the money may be spend elsewhere.'¹⁹

¹³ Oliver, B. 2010. *Free-for-all and corruption in African football shames FIFA*, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/oct/24/corruption-african-football-fifa> (accessed on 5 January 2014)

¹⁴ Kelso, P. 2012. *Match fixing corruption shakes South Africa to the core*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/teams/south-africa/9754415/Match-fixing-corruption-shakes-South-Africa-to-the-core.html> (accessed on 6 September 2013)

¹⁵ Sugden, J. & A. Tomlinson. 2003. *Badfellas: FIFA Family at War*. Edinburgh/ London: Mainstream Publishing.

¹⁶ Oliver, B. 2010. *Making a killing out of African football*, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/oct/24/football-corruption-cameroon-nigeria-ivory-coast> (accessed 5 March 2014)

¹⁷ Pannenberg, A. 2010. *Football in Africa: Observations about political, financial, cultural and religious influences*, *NCDO Publication Series Sport & Development*

¹⁸ Oliver, B. 2010. *Making a killing out of African football*, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/oct/24/football-corruption-cameroon-nigeria-ivory-coast> (accessed 5 March 2014)

¹⁹ Pannenberg, A. 2010. *Football in Africa: Observations about political, financial, cultural and religious influences*, *NCDO Publication Series Sport & Development*, p14.

3. *FIFA's Non-Interference clause*

FIFA have a standing policy of non-interference by government or other external parties into football matters. The FIFA statutes state that 'each member shall manage its affairs independently and with no influence from third parties.'²⁰ This rule was put in place to combat political and government interference in football matters especially in authoritarian regimes. Stories of imprisonment and torture of players and officials highlight the necessity of this rule necessary.²¹ In Africa, where football is followed passionately, political interference is part of the game but covertly as the FIFA statutes forces government not to take over control of football matters. FIFA Director of National Membership and Development notes that, 'political interference is when a government tries to take direct control. The most common case of political interference is when a government perceives that the Executive Committee of the national association is not performing well enough and decides to take action. Often, because the national team is losing too many games, they decide that changes must be made and want to put someone else in charge. Other than that, it can be a lot of different things. For example, a government organizing its own competition, outside of the association, or a government which decides to change the result of a league, because they favor one team more than the other.'²² However, this same rule has been criticized for protecting corrupt officials.

This rule has often been cited as a bullying tactic by FIFA to circumvent global democratic processes. Any talk of good governance in football is often viewed as an intrusion by FIFA 'into its established prerogatives of power, privilege, purse and space.'²³ To ensure that there is no interference there is a strict policy which leads to suspension of countries whose governments interfere in football matters. Football authorities are thus untouchable as Bob Munro, vice-chairman of the Kenyan Professional League argues that: 'In many cases, 'government interference' is because of gross mismanagement and/or corruption in the national football association. But who suffers most when FIFA impose a ban? Sadly, it is the innocent clubs, coaches, players and referees. What judicial or other regulatory process in the world punishes the innocent victims?'²⁴ Kenya was in 2004 banned by FIFA because the government had interfered with footballing matters after the high court tried to remove football leaders for various cases of corruption and maladministration including failure to produce annual audited accounts for four years and allegations of misappropriation of funds. Football clubs in the country had tried without success to lobby FIFA to intervene as the corruption worsened yet when the judiciary intervened they were quick to act. Government of Kenya was forced by FIFA to ignore its high court and reinstate the officials which is curious given the wide ranging debates on national sovereignty. FIFA has proven to be sovereign to itself with little regard for what national governments think or do.

In 2009, the National Sports Council in Zambia suspended Bwalya from all sporting activities after he was implicated in a corrupt scandal involving the transfer of a youth player to Israeli club, Maccabi Tel-Aviv, in 2008. Bwalya had refused to stand before a parliamentary committee to answer questions on the transfer. The ban was rescinded after FIFA intervened with a letter signed by general secretary Jerome Valcke stating that 'This current controversy circles around issues falling under the direct competence of FIFA, (a) the defence of the fundamental principle of the autonomy of the FIFA member associations from external influence, (b) the disputes around international transfers of players.'²⁵ Zimbabwean President Mugabe in 2006 attempted to investigate the misuse of a fund meant for the national team participation at the African Nations Cup. He had ordered the Sports Commission to evaluate the use of the fund other allegations of corruption within the national association but when FIFA threatened to ban Zimbabwe the investigation was stopped.²⁶

²⁰Farell, C. 2013. *FIFA's non-interference rule is holding back serious investigations*, <http://hereisthecity.com/en-gb/2013/05/24/fifas-non-interference-rule-is-holding-back-serious-investigatio/> (accessed 23 January 2014)

²¹For instance in countries such as Iraq (under Saddam Hussein) where the president's son was once the football association president athletes were tortured and beaten for poor performance like the Olympic team in 2000

²²See: <http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/news/newsid=1528544/> (accessed 20 March 2014)

²³Khumalo, T. 2013. *Football's rotten core must be excised*, <http://www.citypress.co.za/you-say/footballs-rotten-core-must-be-excised/> (accessed 4 February 2013).

²⁴Oliver, B. 2010. *Free-for-all and corruption in African football shames FIFA*, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/oct/24/corruption-african-football-fifa> (accessed on 5 January 2014)

²⁵Rukuni, C. & E. Groenink (eds.) 2010. *Killing Soccer in Africa*. FAIR Transnational Investigation, pp. 26, www.fairreporters.org (accessed 7 June 2012).

²⁶Ibid, pp. 24.

Government in Africa is the biggest sponsor of national teams. It is also involved in infrastructural development that impacts on the development of the game. In South Africa, the world cup was staged successfully due to the cash outlay by the government yet the same government cannot question football leaders over corruption charges. FIFA cannot expect governments to invest into the game and yet not have control over how the money is utilised. In Nigeria after the 2010 World Cup, President Goodluck Jonathan suspended all national team participation from international tournaments in a bid to clean out corruption within the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF).²⁷ FIFA gave Nigeria three days to reverse the decision or face a ban and the government reversed its decision. On 5 October 2010, FIFA then announced a ban on Nigeria after the government controlled commission on sports forced the acting general secretary of NFF to step down and the national courts took actions against football administrators.²⁸ The corrupt looters are thus protected and immune to prosecution even in countries where there are mechanisms to demand transparency. National laws and courts cannot hold them accountable as noted by a Zimbabwean coach in the FAIR report, 'Nobody dares touch these looters [corrupt football executives] because of the FIFA policy of non-interference. The football community will never get to the bottom of the rot.'²⁹

4. *Football (under)development in Africa and corruption*

Discussing the state of the game on the continent requires a nuanced analysis based on specific contextual factors. Measuring the growth of football can be done using many parameters all of which have weaknesses but put together provide a sense of the dire state of football. Wilson³⁰ has focused on the performance of African teams at the world cup to highlight how the standard of football on the continent seems to be increasingly lagging behind dominant football nations. When Cameroon beat England to reach the quarterfinals in 1990 there was widespread belief that Africa will provide an eventual winner. The preceding tournaments have been marred by failure which according to former Ivory Coast coach Vahid Halilhodzic, is caused by three major reasons: corruption, disorganization and individualism. According to him 'African football suffers from chronic organizational problems...There [Africa], politicians are interfering in absolutely everything, especially football. The reasons are obvious: Football is very popular, particularly on the national level, and some marginal political characters are using football to collect political points...Basically, what we have is organizational chaos, but corruption also plays its part.'³¹

In Africa sport is intrinsically linked to politics as such most people in administrative positions are not there on merit but through patronage. This poses many problems especially given the many administrative challenges facing football associations. A good example is the embarrassment of Togolese players threatening to strike for non-payment of bonuses at the 2006 World Cup in Germany. There are many cases in which national governments have come in to rescue national teams after administrators failed to raise money for travel or bonuses.³² Corruption demoralises players and as was seen in Zimbabwe³³, players also get involved in the corruption. Politicians know the importance of ensuring control over this political resource. National teams are important symbols of nation building, patriotism and pride. This leads to football positions having increasing political significance. Most football administrators are thus chosen through nefarious means which have little to do with competence. This political nature of the game has often been used as an excuse for FIFA's policy of non-interference as noted by one official, 'allegations of false

²⁷ Rukuni, C. & E. Groenink (eds.) 2010. *Killing Soccer in Africa*. FAIR Transnational Investigation, pp. 14, www.fairreporters.org (accessed 7 June 2012)

²⁸ Hoiriis, K. 2010. *Corruption kills soccer development in Africa*, <http://www.playthegame.org/news/detailed/corruption-kills-soccer-development-in-africa-4999.html> (accessed 4 February 2014)

²⁹ Rukuni, C. & E. Groenink (eds.) 2010. *Killing Soccer in Africa*. FAIR Transnational Investigation, pp. 22, www.fairreporters.org (accessed 7 June 2012)

³⁰ Wilson, J. 2010. *Corruption, disorganization blamed for Africa's poor showing at Cup*, http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2010/soccer/world-cup-2010/writers/jonathan_wilson/06/25/africa/index.html (accessed 23 December 2013)

³¹ Ibid.

³² For instance FAIR report on corruption in African football notes how Kenyan government had to rescue the national team trip for a friendly in Uganda whilst football administrators were in America on purported association business

³³ See: <http://www.kickoff.com/news/30834/13-banned-for-life-in-zimbabwe-match-fixing-scandal> (accessed 5 March 2013)

corruption are also often used by governments as an excuse to try to remove football officials from an association. They cannot remove football officials and put their friends at the top.³⁴

Footballing infrastructure across Africa is in a bad state.³⁵ Only a few countries such as South Africa and Morocco boast of world class stadia and facilities. Other countries such as Angola, Burkina Faso, Egypt and Mali have benefitted from hosting the Africa Cup of Nations which has led to building and renovation of some stadia. On the whole however football infrastructure in Africa is in a poor state. This makes attending games across the continent a dangerous endeavour and yearly people lose their lives at stadiums. Stadium deaths are also due to 'contempt for spectator safety on the part of the administrators and non-professional security personnel are the prime causes. Mismanagement worsens the situation (people are allowed in when the venue is already full). Sound management practices and well-trained personnel could do much to alleviate these problems.'³⁶ There is no money going into improving stadium security or increasing the comfort of fans within stadiums. This affects attendance which in turn hurts local clubs most of whom depend on gate takings for survival. Commercialisation and globalisation of football seems to have left Africa behind. Mega deals with television stations and company sponsorship will reduce to nil if corruption is not eradicated. In some countries such as Zimbabwe very few corporate companies want to be associated with the national association. This closes one stream of lucrative financing which is devastating for many poor nations. Corruption creates suspicion and mistrust and examples outlined in this paper highlight how companies have been duped into financing personal aggrandisement in the past.

5. *What does the future hold for African football?*

Football will remain popular and part of the social fabric in Africa. However the development of the game as a viable commercial entity will never be realised if the current organisational malfeasance continues. Africa can forget of crowning a world champion at senior level and infrastructural development will not improve in the foreseeable future because of institutionalised corruption. Local football needs sound management, serious youth development for boys and girls, better coaches' training, and infrastructural improvements at the grassroots.³⁷ This requires money to flow to the grassroots and not into pockets of officials. Without this approach African football will slowly suffocate. It is not proper to continuously ask governments to prop and sponsor the sport yet they have no jurisdiction in monitoring how monies they unveil are used. Local clubs in Africa face serious challenges of sustaining themselves in the long run. With little talent being developed from the grassroots there is a chance most fans will stay away from the games. The few good players coming through are often taken to Europe at young ages in what has been described as new form slavery.³⁸ The global reach of European clubs has seen the rise of transnational fan identities which has meant many African football lovers resorting to televised matches especially in the English Premier League. Local leagues impoverished by years of under development and maladministration are finding it difficult to compete with the increased accessibility of satellite television across the continent. African football is thus at a crossroads and dealing with corruption is a near impossible task without upsetting FIFA's non-interference policy. As long as there is economic and political benefits to running football in Africa, corruption will always be an integral part of the game. The multifaceted and institutionalized nature of corruption is difficult to legislate for and many have given up on ever cleaning the African game.

6. *Conclusion*

African football is in a bad state by all standards. Lack of investment in grassroots structures is putting the future of the game into jeopardy. Football infrastructure remains in dilapidated state yet a lot of money continues to flow into the African game. Corruption is slowly suffocating the game across the continent. Dealing with corrupt individuals is made difficult by standing FIFA rules of non-interference in football

³⁴ Oliver, B. 2010. *Free-for-all and corruption in African football shames FIFA*, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/oct/24/corruption-african-football-fifa> (accessed on 5 January 2014)

³⁵ Pannenberg, A. 2010. *Football in Africa: Observations about political, financial, cultural and religious influences*, *NCDO Publication Series Sport & Development*, pp. 19

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See: <http://www.footballiscominghome.info/the-hosts/bafana-chan2014/> (accessed 3 March 2014)

³⁸ Peltz, R.J. 2010. The sportswriter as development journalist: Covering African football, *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 31:2, 149-173.

matters by governments or state bodies. The threat of bans from football often cower national government into submission and prevents thorough inspection and monitoring of footballing authorities. FIFA are part of the problem in African football corruption and with evidence of so many cases of theft, it is surprising that little action has been taken to tackle the problem. The people who suffer are the fans and the millions of children across the continent denied the chance to fulfil their dreams because of a lack of basic infrastructure and adequate coaching expertise. The performance of African teams at the World Cup continues to deteriorate and this is a microcosm of the effects corruption has over a long period of time.