

**CHALLENGES UNDERMINING SPORTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA:
FOCUS ON FOOTBALL TRANSFORMATION**

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ABSTRACT

Sports remains useful drivers of national development. The different sports are drivers of societal peace and development. However, it should be noted that sports are currently part of the drivers of global relations amongst citizenry. This study traces the place of sports in the Nigerian national development culture. It used secondary materials to identify the challenges that undermined football in Nigeria, which include but are not limited to corruption, feet drain, poor officiating, nepotism, poor government policies etc and consequently recommends increased government investment in sports, professional training, improved officiating as well as encouraging migrant sportsmen that have travelled outside the country to return home and join in building the sports.

Key words: Sports. Football. Development. Nigerian Football Federation

RESUMO

Desafios que prejudicam o desenvolvimento do desporto na Nigéria: foco na transformação do futebol

Os esportes continuam sendo propulsores úteis do desenvolvimento nacional. Os diferentes esportes são propulsores da paz e do desenvolvimento social. No entanto, deve-se notar que os esportes são atualmente parte dos propulsores das relações globais entre os cidadãos. Este estudo traça o lugar dos esportes na cultura de desenvolvimento nacional nigeriana. Ele usou materiais secundários para identificar os desafios que minaram o futebol na Nigéria, que incluem, mas não estão limitados a corrupção, drenagem de pés, arbitragem ruim, nepotismo, políticas governamentais ruins etc. e, conseqüentemente, recomenda maior investimento governamental em esportes, treinamento profissional, arbitragem aprimorada, bem como encorajar esportistas migrantes que viajaram para fora do país a retornar para casa e se juntar à construção do esporte.

Palavras-chave: Esporte. Futebol. Desenvolvimento. Federação Nigeriana de Futebol.

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INTRODUCTION

Sports especially football is a tool for nation building. In a place like United Kingdom, it is a major source of national economy. But in Nigeria, the degree of motivation has made it a less paying profession. This has turned football as a sport to be less attractive career within the Nigerian state.

Most players from Nigeria that has the economic means and connections prefer to go to Europe, America (North and South), as well as Asia, to develop their sporting career because of the lucrative nature of football in many countries within these continents. Unfortunately, football in Nigeria has been undermined by a lot of factors, which include but are not limited to corruption, lack of funding, sponsorship, professionalism, government policies, etc.

Football as a sports contribute little to nothing to the Nigerian national economy. Ironically, sport generally contribute a mere 0.005% of the nation's GDP (gross domestic product) according to the 2021-2025 Nigerian National Development Plan. Equally, in recent times, the nation has not been consistent in their success rate or performance in some international sporting events especially in the area of football.

For instance, Nigeria failed to qualify to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, losing out to Ghana on FIFA away-goal rule. To make matters worse, the internal insecurity problem and corruption within some of the sports federation, especially football has prevented Nigeria from attracting strong international competition that would motivate more citizens to pursue a career in football and other sports. In short, since 2009, the nation is yet to host any major FIFA events.

In late 2023, the nation failed to win a joint bidding offer to co-host the 36th AFCON tournament alongside Benin Republic. The situation of football in Nigeria is worsened by the fact that the nation's top officials have been enmeshed in too sporting scandals. The former NFF (Nigeria Football Federation) leader, Amaju Pinnick, was charged with embezzling funds gotten from the nation's participation in the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil.

Therefore, sport especially football which is the most popular sport in Nigeria is faced with multiple challenges within the

Nigerian state. The NFF in time past was enmeshed in leadership tussle while the Nigerian Professional League (NPL) has become a glorified competition with a lot of complain over poor officiating.

The Super Eagles which is the men's national team is very inconsistent in its performance while the senior female team, Super Falcon's dominance in Africa has continued to remain strong notwithstanding challenges from South Africa, Morocco, and Cameroon senior female teams. Worthy of note is that the U17 national male team known as Golden Eaglet is finding it difficult to sustain their dominance, especially during the U17 World Cup, having won it for a record of five (5) times.

Football in Nigeria, even though it is the most popular sport, is yet to gain the required state transformation attention. The situation has gotten to a level where the average Nigerian prefer to watch European matches to that of Nigerian league.

Most if not all viewing centers in Nigeria do not show NPL matches because they do not get patronage from the citizenry in relations to NPL matches. The situation is worsened as most stadiums within the country are often empty during NPL's matches.

Europe, China, America (North and South), and even some Asian countries like Saudi Arabia, has invested and are still investing tremendously in the area of sports. Sports have become a major backbone of these continents economy.

Due to the priority given to sport especially football in these continents, most Nigerians and African players who gets to play in these leagues ends up nationalising in those continents. The implications are that it has resulted in 'feet drain' (Ani, Anyanwu, 2023a) and 'sport drain' (John, Reuben, 2023:252), thereby robbing the nation of the talents of such an individual. In recent years, so many sports personalities especially footballers from Nigeria has switched allegiance to the country where they ply their sports trade. Among those who have done such in the past are: Angelo Obinze Ogonna, David Alaba, Dele Alli, Tammy Abraham, Fikayo Timori, etc.

The contribution of sport to the economy of Europe and some countries in Asia cannot be over-emphasized. According to Daily Mail (Walker, 2021), in the 2019-2020 season,

despite one quarter of all games being played behind closed doors, the English Premier League contributed 7.6B pounds to the UK economy. Meanwhile, players were stung for 1.4 billion pounds in tax, almost 100,000 people kept their jobs. Sport and physical activity contribute 39bn pounds to the UK's economy. The English Premier League is the most watched football league in the world, with matches broadcast to one billion homes in 188 countries (Walker, 2021).

As a result of Saudi Arabia's recent foray and unprecedented investment in sports, between 2016 and 2019, sports' contribution to the Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product almost tripled (Berman, 2023).

However, in Nigeria and Africa, the case is the opposite. Sport in general and football in particular is nothing to write home about. It has suffered from a lot of factors such as: poor funding and sponsorship, sport and feet drain, corruption, insecurity, government policies, inadequate professionals, poor sporting facilities, stereotyped opinion concerning sports and football, corruption, poor youth participation, etc.

The implication becomes that the contribution of sport to the economy is less than 1% (see Nigeria's 2021-2025 National Development Plan). This poor revenue level has brought hardship to football professionals representing the country while killing sports and football passion locally.

Therefore, this article presents the current state of football in Nigeria. It equally documents the challenges hindering the success of football in Nigeria and possibly recommend solutions on how to solve such anomaly.

The work will as well interrogate the development of sport and football in Nigeria during the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras. This work is qualitative research that made extensive use of secondary materials from newspapers, book chapter(s) in developing its content. This article begins by contextual clarifications of some the key words used.

This was followed by examining the history of football and sport development in Nigeria during the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras. This was followed by interrogating the current situation of sports and football.

Going forward, factors mitigating against the success of sports and football in Nigeria was assessed. In rounding off the article, strategies and recommendation were offered.

Contextual Clarifications of Terms

Sports: There is no general acceptable definition of sport. Sport is 'any activity that uses physical exertion or skills competitively under a set of rules and regulations that is not based on aesthetics'. It is germane to note that, sport has evolved over time.

Some sports have been modified to fit into contemporary settings. However, sports have been part of every culture past and present.

That is to say, each culture has its own definition of what sport is, how it is played, who plays it, and when it should be played. There are about 8000 indigenous sports and sport games. Among the type is sports are acrobatic, air, board, catching games, climbing, cycling, combat, flying disc, gymnastics etc.

There is no general acceptable definition of football. Football is a 'game played by two teams of 11 players each, using ball round leather ball, which players kick up and down the playing field. It is the game where players kick the ball to each other and try to score goals by kicking the ball into a large net. In North America, Ireland, and Australia, football is known as 'soccer'. Football as a sport, falls under the ball games. Some play football for fun while others play it as professionals. Some have carved a niche for themselves as football journalists, agents, coaches, medics, players, commentators, etc.

Super Eagles and Falcons: This is the senior men national team (Super Eagles) and senior women national (Super Falcons) teams in the country.

Both represent the nation in senior FIFA events such as World Cup and continental competition such as AFCON. Super Eagles has represented the nation in six FIFA World Cup tournaments (USA 1994, France 1998, Korea/Japan 2002, South Africa 2010, Brazil 2014, and Russia 2018) while Super Falcons has represented the nation and continent (Africa) at every FIFA Women World Cup since it was inaugurated in 1991. We equally have the Golden Eaglet (U17) and Super Falconet (U20)

that represent the nation in other categories of FIFA events such as U17 and U20 World Cups and continental tournaments such as AFCON.

Nigeria Football Federation (NFF): NFF is an agency of the Nigerian Federal Government under the supervision of the ministry of youth and sports. NFF was formed in 1945 and became FIFA and CAF member in 1960 and 1959 respectively. This is a body charged with the responsibility of overseeing footballing activities in Nigeria - both local and international games. It has its headquarter in Abuja, the nation's capital.

However, corruption has become the order of the day in the association. For instance, in 2013, a former Nigerian Senate president, described the agency as one of the most corrupt agencies in the country. Poor leadership and leadership tussle is another factor hindering the efficiency of the agency. As a result of this, NFF, has in time past, incurred the wrath of FIFA. NFF oversees the activities of Nigeria professional league (The Nigeria Premier League), Women League, and other leagues in the country.

The Nigerian Leagues are under the supervision of NFF and consist of the Nigeria Professional League (NPL), Amateur League, Nigeria National League, Women League, etc. Twenty (20) teams makes up the NPL while the Nigeria Women League has 14 teams. The Nigeria National League also known as Division 1 consist of 46 teams. The most successful club in the Nigeria professional league is Enyimba football club. The latter remains the only football (professional) club in Nigeria to have won continental titles (both the CAF confederation cup and CAF champion league). The Nigeria League is managed by a body known as League Management Company (LMC) since 2012.

CAF - Confederation of African Football or Confederation Africaine de Football This is a continental (African) football organization that oversees and regulate football in Africa.

This organization was formed in 1956 and has 54 member associations while it is headquarters is in Giza, Egypt. CAF organizes a biennial event known as AFCON (African Cup of Nation) and equally awards both male and female best African players annually. The 2025 AFCON will be hosted in Morocco (North Africa) and will be the 35th edition while the 36th edition in

2027 will be hosted by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda (all three countries in East Africa).

History and Development of Sports, Especially Football in Nigeria

The history and development of football in Nigeria is traced to colonial era. However, sports of different kinds were already in existence in Nigeria before colonial era. During the precolonial era, there were a number of sports in the country.

Among the prominent sports identified by John and Reuben (2023:245), during the pre-colonial era were wrestling, dancing and hunting. It has been argued that wrestling was used to settle vendetta among warring communities (John and Reuben, 2023: 246).

However, most wrestlers in many communities are seen as heroes because of their communal services to the community like being drafted as ad-hoc members of the community warriors in times of war.

Most of them, especially the outstanding ones are honored with the king's daughters or some of the most beautiful maidens of the community. Dancing competitions were organized especially during major festivals such as New Yam festivals in Igboland (John and Reuben, 2023: 246). Equally, it is pertinent to note that dance is equally used for entertainment during 'moonlight' games (John and Reuben, 2023: 246) and during this period, most men scout for wives.

Meanwhile, hunting is regarded as a sport for the bravest in pre-colonial Nigerian societies This is because only those who are brave and courageous undertake the task of endangering their lives in forest in search of bush meats as well as community enemies engage in such sports. Most of them use their 'catch' to woo women.

They equally earn a living through the sales of their 'spoils' in major markets within their own environment and other neighboring communities. However, during this period, football was not yet developed. However, the absence of football did not equal the absence of sport. The pre-colonial period was followed by the colonial period. That was a period of formal territorial domination of Nigeria by the British and that period witnessed the introduction of British culture into Nigeria. With the consolidation of her (Britain) rule in Nigeria, the

colonial administrators introduced some sporting activities which were hitherto not known in Nigeria (John and Reuben, 2023: 246). Prominent among these sports was football (Ani, Anyanwu, 2023b).

The first football match played in Nigeria was in 1904 while the first international recognized football match was played on 8th October, 1946, between Nigeria and Sierra Leone in Freetown, Sierra Leone (John and Reuben, 2023:246).

During this period, the colonial administrators made no tangible effort to develop sport and integrate Nigeria into mainstream football. However, the colonial master laid the foundation for sport and football development in Nigeria (John, and Reuben, 2023:247).

During this period, the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) formerly known as Nigeria Football Association (NFA) and the Nigerian national football team were formed in 1945 and 1949 respectively.

The major international sports event won during the colonial period in Nigeria was in 1954 when Emmanuel Arinze Ifeajuna became the first Nigerian and African to win Gold Medal at an international event - British Empire and Commonwealth Games (John, and Reuben, 2023:246).

It should be noted that the colonial period gave way for the post-colonial period. This period can be sub-divided into military and post-military era.

Both periods witnessed the transformation of sports especially in Nigeria. The military era is often regarded as the golden age of sport especially football in Nigeria.

During these periods, the nation cemented herself as one of the pillars of football in Africa and the world. The nation recorded unprecedented successes in sport with particular and special reference to football. Both regional, continental and global trophies were won.

Major football events were hosted in the nation. Among the trophies won were: 1980, 1994, and 2013 AFCON cups won by Nigeria, the 1996 Olympics trophy, 1985, 1993, 2007, 2013, and 2015 (U17) World Cups, eleven women AFCONs, etc. The period also witnessed Nigeria hosting major events like the 1980 and 2000 AFCON, as well as the 2009 U17 World Cup. In 1994, the Super Eagles was

ranked 5th (FIFA ranking) in the world of football, a feat no nation in Africa is yet to break or attain.

Equally important to note, is that during the post military period, football in the nation, entered a state of ebb. Corruption became the order of the day. This affected her performance in most global events. Example of this was the inability of the Super Eagles to qualify for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. While in 2023, the Super Falcons threatened to boycott World Cup group stage matches in Australia due to poor funding. The situation is worsened by the fact that the local leagues are gradually and fast becoming a shadow of its former self.

Discussion on Current Challenges of Sports and Football in Nigeria

Football is in a 'sorry' state in Nigeria. Coming home, the stadiums used by most league teams are not up to standard. Up to early 2000, Nigeria has about seven FIFA standard stadia across the country (The Guardian, 2023).

These seven stadia were the National Stadium, Lagos; U.J. Esuene Stadium, Calabar; Liberation Stadium, Port Harcourt; Ahmadu Bello Stadium, Kaduna; Liberty Stadium, Ibadan and the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa Stadium, Bauchi (The Guardian, 2023).

Taking a clue from this, only seven states out of thirty-six states of the federation has a reputable stadium as at early 2000 which is fit for an international event. Now do the mathematics, if all these states, which is not true, are to have at least a team in the NPL, which comprises of twenty teams, the remaining thirteen teams are either playing in a substandard stadium, risking the lives of their players, or are sharing a stadium with a neighbouring state. Even though some states recently have built new stadium, however, without any fear of contradiction and as at the time of writing this article (The Guardian, 2023), stadia that are of international standards in Nigeria are not up to four. This lack of quality infrastructure impacts negatively on Nigeria's ability to raise talented stars (The Guardian, 2023).

The stadia that are available are a risk to football players. Some have fractured their legs, hands, and has sustained other varying degrees of injuries due to the bad conditions of the stadia. Most of these players are

abandoned to themselves with little or no help to treat themselves. This has resulted in some of them abruptly 'hanging their boots' (retiring from active professional football). These players are equally endangered to insecurity as a result of their teams using road transport for matches. Some have been attacked, robbed, maimed as a result.

Some teams have boycotted international matches (like CAF competitions) due to lack of funds for flights. Players and staff have protested unpaid salaries and wages thereby threatening to boycott league matches. Some matches have been halted as a result of clashes between supporters of different teams who took to the pitch and throwing stones and other harmful missiles from the stand. Most Nigerian matches have suffered due to poor officiating from match officials. This has most Nigerian referees not to be regarded or being called up to officiate FIFA and AFCON matches. These referees are not adequately trained and most of them are not FIFA trained and licensed referees.

The glory days of the Nigeria League is fast fading away. The 1980 AFCON squad were 100 percent home based players, that of the 1994 AFCON team had 99 percent players that learnt their trade in the local league while the 2013 winning team had 30 percent of players that were home based (The Guardian, 2023). In fact, the goal scorer of the lone goal in the 2013 AFCON final win against Zambia was a home based player (Sunday Mba).

Most stadia lightening are poor and cannot host night football, thus, forcing all games both local league games and other football qualifiers such as AFCON and FIFA to be played during the day. The only successful club in the Nigeria League is Enyimba football club which has a total of four international trophies. The rest of the NPL teams outing in most continental leagues have ended up abysmally. Corruption and favoritism is a major factor hindering the success of football in Nigeria. This has resulted in the poor performance of both the senior male and female teams. As at the latest FIFA ranking of 2023, the Super Eagles were ranked 40th in the world as against the 5th position she was ranked in 1994 (The Guardian, 2023). Without any fear of contradiction, sport is now the new 'oil money's (John, and Reuben, 2023:248). In the last five years, NFF has received about \$11m from both

FIFA and CAF while the federal government has allocated close to 12b Naira to her (NFF) in the past eight years (The Guardian, 2023). This is apart from the monies paid by FIFA Goal Project to FIFA member states (John, and Reuben, 2023:248). However, these funds have failed to translate into real time success.

It would be recalled that in 2010, during the FIFA World Cup in South Africa, the Super Eagles, threatened to boycott group stage matches as a result of unpaid match bonuses by NFF (Nigeria Football Federation).

In 2016, John Obi Mikel, a former professional footballer, paid the hotel bills of some NFF officials at the 2016 Olympics held in Brazil (Daily Post, 2016).

In 2022, the Super Falconets of Nigeria (the female U20 team) were pictured sleeping on chairs and floor at a Turkish airport in Istanbul (Turkey's state capital), after they were eliminated from the FIFA U20 World Cup (Punch, 2022).

During the 2020 Olympics held in Tokyo (but was held in 2021 as of the Covid-19 pandemic), a Nigerian athlete was seen washing his jersey that was used in a game earlier (The Cable, 2021). In 2016, the former NFF president, Amaju Pinnick, and four other officials of the former (NFF), were accused of misappropriating over 8,400 Dollars (Punch, 2019). This was the money paid to NFF by FIFA as Nigeria's appearance fees in the group stage of the 2014 FIFA World Cup held in Brazil (Punch, 2019). Meanwhile, in 2016, a former NFF President, Sani Lulu and some of his executives were charged by the Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for allegedly misappropriating over 1.5 billion Naira that was released by the federal government to NFF in preparation to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa (Premium Times, 2016).

In 2023, the Super Falcons protested against poor wages and inadequate funds for preparations to the Women FIFA World Cup held in Australia. As a result of NFF having a track record of embezzlement, FIFA in 2023, took a decision to pay Women FIFA World Cup prize money directly to Super Falcons to avoid embezzlement by corrupt NFF officials (Tekedia, 2023).

Football stadiums in Nigeria are in shambles. The grasses are poor and most stadiums apart from the Godswill Akpabio International Stadium and the National Stadium,

cannot host any major FIFA events. Nigeria last hosted a FIFA event in 2009 and a continental event in 2000 (a joint AFCON hosting right with Ghana).

The poor nature of Nigeria stadiums has caused unwanted and preventable injuries to local players plying their trade in Nigeria. These players (injured) are left with little or no proper medical attention.

Some professional footballers who have broken their bones while in action were sometimes taken to homes of local bone setters. Surgeries are poorly performed by some untrained medical professionals. Without any fear of contradiction, one of the reason for the rejection of Nigeria's bid to co-host the 2027 AFCON was as a result of the poor sporting and footballing facilities in the country (The Cable, 2023), though, CAF (Confederation of African Football) cannot be absolved of some corruptible practices and inner politics. However, the former (poor footballing and sporting facilities), remain a critical factor coupled with insecurity challenges bedeviling every regions of the country.

A lot of factors were responsible for the under-performance of sports particularly football in Nigeria. Some of these factors include lack of funds, poor investment in football; lack of sponsorship for Nigerian football league; widespread insecurity that has undermined the sports in almost all the regions of Nigeria; weak government policies; inadequate professional experience and weak implementation of transformative football policies as well as bad leadership/management of football in Nigeria.

Others include inadequate sporting and footballing facilities and the negligence of existing ones; widespread corruption; stereotyped opinion concerning sports and football by some Nigerian parents; poor youth participation in sports due to the get-rich-quick syndrome in the country; feet drain; and popular culture of favouritism in selecting sportsmen An attempt will be made below to explain some of these ideas further.

Lack of Sponsorship: One of the major challenge facing Nigeria's sports and football is due to lack of sponsorship. Although, several organisations such as Air Peace, Coca-Cola, Bet9ja, Zenith bank, MTN, Cadbury (John & Reuben, 2023:248) etc have signed contracts with NFF worth billions of naira, they have not

been able to lift football in the country from the valley of poor sponsorship. The current level of sponsorships is yet to translate to football success and transformation. Due to lack of sponsorship, sporting facilities have decayed in many parts of the Nigerian state. Most of the sponsors are yet to adequately invest the needed fund that will make sport and football to grow and thrive in Nigeria. Therefore, this is a clarion for both NFF and the Ministry of Youth and Sports to attract foreign investors who are ready to invest into the untapped potentials of the nation's sporting and football wealth.

Lack of funding and investment: As captured aptly by John and Reuben (2023:248) 'lack of funding has prevented most clubs not to compete favourably on a global stage and has made some athletes not to get to the global stage'. Even part of the available funds for sports development in Nigeria are progressively siphoned. In Punch (2019) reported that the then NFF president Amaju Pinnick with four of his executives were charged with misappropriating 8,400 United States dollars and 4 billion naira. While in 2016, Premium Times reported that a former NFF president was charged with embezzling 1.5 billion dollars. Players have protested as a result of unpaid match bonuses and allowances. Some have threatened to boycott official matches (John, Reuben, 2023) because they were not paid their due entitlements. Investment in sport and football remained very low and poor.

Most clubs in Nigeria are owned by state governments (John, Reuben, 2023), hence their success and failure depends on the fluctuating interest of the state governor at any given time. The situation is worsened by the fact that even a messianic governor that may desire to transform sports in his or her state has only a maximum duration of eight years to do so before he or she will hand over to another governor, whose interest will likely be reduced. There is a need for individuals to invest in sports and football which will create employment and engage the youths.

Government Policies: Poor governmental policies have contributed to the misfortune of sports and football in Nigeria. Different stakeholders from both public and private sectors have in time past agreed that government interference is hindering the development of sports industry in Nigeria (Business Day, 2017).

During the military era, due to government interferences, Nigeria missed the 1996 AFCON slated to hold in South Africa. Thus, missing the chance to defend the title as the then reigning champion, which she won in 1994. Stakeholders, scholars have called for a comprehensive sport policy that will allow the sport sector to be privately driven (Daily Trust, 2022; Business Day, 2017).

Lack of a coherent sport policy and government continuous interferences, backed by little or weak attention in some places have undermined football and sports development in Nigeria. Due to poor government policies, in 2015 and 2018, Nigeria was ranked 169 out of 189 and 146 out of 190 countries respectively by World Bank's Ease of Doing Business, which made it difficult for foreign investors that would have invested in football and other sports to land in the country (This Day, 2015; Premium Times, 2018).

Inadequate Management and Lack of Professionals: These have negatively affected sports and football in Nigeria. March officials in Nigerian football are inadequately trained, which explains their low involvement in officiating FIFA and AFCON matches. As a result of this, league matches have been affected due to poor officiating by referees. Most of the latter do not possess credentials such as FIFA licensed badges. This has affected them from being called up to officiate national matches in Africa and even FIFA matches. In the area of management and leadership, some NFF officials lobby their ways into too managerial positions and has allowed impunity to become the order of the day. In other countries (like Cameroon), most ex-players or sport legends are serving in one sport system or the other. While in Nigeria, almost all the sports are politicized.

Corruption: This dysfunctional social behavior has eaten deep into the football culture of the country and even beyond. Corruption in football and sports manifests in many ways, which include the side of management and players. Football players have the culture of paying top officials to have their names included in most provisional squad list (The Guardian, 2023).

This sporting culture has negatively impacted on the power of the coach on who it is his responsibility to invite (football) players to the national team. Thus, NFF have been

accused of turning players, who ordinarily should be fighting for the opportunity to wear the country's jersey into cash cows (The Guardian, 2023).

The corrupt practices of NFF officials is nothing to write home about in relations to football development. The situation is worsened by the fact that NFF officials, who should be ethical umpires have been enmeshed in corruption scandals (Punch, 2019, and Premium Times, 2016).

The quest to loot and grow rich has sustained the heated cold war and desperado in NFF for years. As a result of leadership tussle that engulfed NFF, the latter was banned by FIFA at a time.

Insecurity: It should be noted that due to displacement of individuals as a result of the insecurity challenges that have overtaken all parts of Nigeria, which include banditry, herders-farmers clash, unknown gunmen and Boko Haram terrorism, etc; those with potential sporting and football talents do not have the safe platform to utilize or develop them. Thus, most Internally Displaced Persons' camps which were built due to insecurity does not have the necessary sporting and footballing potentials. In 2014, as a result of Boko Haram insurgency, El-Kanemi Warriors football club based in Maiduguri, Borno state, changed her home games venues from Borno state to Kano state due to the high risk of Boko Haram members coming to bomb the stadium while a football match is ongoing. In BBC (2020) reported that two football players from the NPL were kidnapped. This and other cases of threats to footballers and sportsmen created fear in the mind of players who are traveling especially during inter- football matches.

Feet Drain: This is an idea that simply connotes the massive movement of talented footballers and sportsmen to Europe, Asia and America, in search of greener pasture as they could not make a living from the pea-nuts that they get as reward or motivation in Nigeria. Due to poor state of sport and football in Nigeria, several players from Nigeria have left the country to play in Europe, Asia, American (North and South), etc. Most of them have switched allegiance from their country of birth (Nigeria) to the country where they currently ply their sporting trade. Those who were not given birth to in Nigeria but are of Nigeria descent either through their father or mother (or both) has taken the same part

(playing and representing their country of birth). This has hindered their invaluable contribution to the success and development of sports and football in Nigeria.

Equally, most coaches, especially during qualifiers (either for AFCON or FIFA World Cup) rely heavily on foreign based players (The Guardian, 2023). Due to poor funding of football and sports at large in Nigeria, most Nigerians travel out to eke out a living using their sporting talents.

Poor sporting and football facilities: Gernot Rohr, a former Super Eagles head coach opined that inadequate infrastructure remained a major threat in Nigerian football. This formed the former's disdain for home-based players during his era as the head coach of the senior national team (Punch 2018; Soccernet, 2021; Complete Sport, 2021).

This has forced players to relocate almost at all cost, from Nigeria, in order to have a better and a conducive sporting facility that is injury-free. Most of the sporting and footballing facilities in Nigeria have been in near state of decay since mid and late 1990s (The Guardian, 2023). This lack of quality infrastructure impacts negatively Nigeria's ability to raise and nurture talented stars (The Guardian, 2023).

Stereotyped Opinion About Sports Especially Football held by Some Nigerian Parents:

Most African parents in time past and even in this contemporary period still holds the notion of sport been a 'man' activity while others see it as a profession that is not worth pursuing.

Thus, some African women are being marginalised and hindered from participating in sport not because of their lack of interest in it but due to long history of direct and indirect forms of discrimination and stereotyping that women have to contend with.

One of the commonly held stereotypes is the notion that sport and football requires strength and that women are physically weaker and less competitive than men (Adedokun et al., 2021 in Franca, 2023:267). This has negatively impacted women's participation in sports and football in Nigeria. Although, the women's participation is now gaining global and national currency.

Poor Youth Participation: The Center for the Study of Economies of Africa (CSEA) outlined three factors for the development of sport in any economy. Those factors include investment in sports, the extent of popular youth participation,

and the level of political stability that exist in the state (Samuel, Ihezue, 2022 in John, Reuben, 2023:252).

Recent happenings, such as banditry, herders-farmers clash, flood, etc, have resulted in the displacement of communities indirectly affecting effective youth participation in sports and football activities in the country (John & Reuben, 2023).

An average Nigerian youth is a lover of sport especially football (John, Reuben, 2023). However, the harsh economic realities undermined the quest for the development of youth interest in sports as they pursue careers like 'yahoo' which will pay fast dividends in the shortest possible time. Popular youth participation is needed for sport and football to thrive. Most sporting events are meant to be youth dominated. This will help reduce crime among the youths (John Reuben, 2023). It will serve as a source of income and livelihood to most youths thereby reducing the rate of unemployment.

Favoritism and Nepotism: Some Nigeria football players have bought their way into the national team. Through their agents, they have connived with top NFF officials to bring all manner of players to the national team thereby turning players, who, ordinarily, should be fighting for opportunity to wear the country's jersey into cash cows (The Guardian, 2023).

This has been made possible due to the absence of an ethically oriented technical committee whose responsibility is to vet the list of players invited to the various national teams thereby giving for the invitation of every kind of player to the national team (The Guardian, 2023).

In 2018, a former Nigeria coach, Salihu Yusuf, was caught on camera accepting cash from men that posed as football agents to select two players for his Morocco 2018 African Nations Championships (CHAN) squad (The Guardian, 2021). This and other such cases further crippled sports and football development in Nigeria.

Policy Recommendations on Revamping Sports and Football in Nigeria: Changing the current 'sorry' state of Nigerian sport and football requires a lot of strategies and policy formulation and implementation. Among the few strategies and recommendations that will help both present and future policy makers in the sport and football sector include the Cote D'

Ivoire and Morocco strategy of sports transformation, integration of ex-players into the sporting sector, training of professionals in all forms of sports, establishing a government-owned sport university and developing modern sporting and football facilities. An attempt would be made to expatiate some of these ideas below: Integration of ex-players into Nigeria Football and Sport Sector: Countries like Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Netherlands, Argentina, Brazil, etc, have seen her former players especially former footballers manage the senior male teams. Therefore, those with experienced not those with certificates, should be allowed to mount the helm of leadership of NFF and other sporting agencies in the country. Recently, the Cameroon Football Federation also known as FECAFOOT appointed her former player (Samuel Eto'o) as the president of FECAFOOT.

Therefore, it would not be a crime if former players like Kanu Nwankwo (2023), Perpetual Nkwocha, Austine Okocha, Daniel Amokachi, Victor Ikpeba, etc, mount the helm of leadership of NFF or even be appointed as minister of Youth and Sports. Though some of them have gone on to hold some appointments with NFF and the national teams, most of these appointments are short-lived. The present coaches of both the male and female senior teams are foreigners (as at the time of writing this article).

Establishment of a Sport University (Government Owned): The only university of sport in Nigeria is privately owned and currently not affordable by all youths that desire to develop their sporting talents (The Guardian, 2022: John & Reuben, 2023).

John and Reuben (2023: 251) have argued that 'there is a need to establish public owned sport institution(s) that will train different athletes in different sporting activities. Again, the Nigerian Federal Government should enthrone, a scholarship scheme for sport enthusiasts in the country who would undertake different courses in sports. This will help create employment opportunities in the area of coaching, sport journalism, sports agents, fitness coach, sports psychology coach, sport directors, sport commentators, etc.

Training of Professionals: Most sports administrators in Nigeria are suffering from current 'gap in knowledge'. This is because many sports administrators have lobbied their

way to most top positions in sports. Some have little or no knowledge of what sport is.

Therefore, it explains why many of them have failed in office. Equally, the officiating officials are not in any way close to their counterparts in other countries. Therefore, there is a need to train them on sport management and administration. This will go a long way in adding value to sport and football in Nigeria.

Developing Sports and Football Facilities: Currently, Morocco is vying for the hosting right of the 2025 Africa Nations Cup and a joint hosting right with Spain and Portugal for the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

However, the poor state of sports and football facilities contributed in undermining Nigerian hosting chances for the 2027 AFCON, a bid she lost to three East African countries. Therefore, there is a need to develop sport from the grass-root level (The Guardian, 2023,).

However, most grass root sports and football in Nigeria have been hijacked by politicians as an avenue for campaigning and seeking votes from Nigerian youths. As aptly captured by John and Reuben (2023:248-249), 'there is a need to fully and properly fund sport from the grass-root level in other to allow young prospects to fully develop their sporting (and football) potentials'.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the place of sports in the development of the Nigerian state. It shows very clearly that sport is an essential part of human capital development.

The article interrogates the origin of sport and football in Nigeria and equally attempted to define what sport and football entails.

It went further to examine the development of sport and football in Nigeria. It presented the challenges facing sports and football development in Nigeria.

Finally, the study recommends strategies that will serve as catalysts in pushing and propelling the nation's sport industry and football sector to the globe.

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