



**FIFA**  
**Research Scholarship**

**“Changing the Game:  
The dynamics of the commercialisation of  
football in Uganda and Kenya”**

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## **Abbreviations**

KES – Kenyan Shilling; TZS – Tanzanian Shilling; UGX – Ugandan Shilling; \$ - US Dollar  
b – billion; k – thousands; m – million; p.a. – per annum

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## **Summary**

Over the last three decades, football has evolved into a global business. The commercialisation of elite level professional football affects all levels and tiers of the game - from club ownership and sponsorship to ticket and merchandise sales, fandom, players' careers and salaries, as well as TV broadcasting and licensing. Importantly, the commercialisation of football affects all world regions, including Africa. Commercialisation of football in Africa - though currently still at low level compared to other world regions - is arguably at the forefront of the significant commercialisation of sports on the continent generally. Further, the domestic commercial football scene is rapidly developing and thereby transforming the sector in several African countries. Various leagues, competitions, clubs, teams and projects exemplify this phenomenon.

Against this background, this study contributes to the scholarly analysis of the various dimensions of the ongoing and intensifying commercialisation of football in Africa, especially its domestic drivers, agencies, formats and repercussions. It analyses the major dynamics and characteristics of this process in Uganda and Kenya, two exemplary countries in this regard in East Africa. The inquiry was informed by the following questions: How is commercialisation being advanced and embedded in domestic football? Who are the relevant actors? What are relevant motivations, factors, sites, forms, and practices? What changes are triggered by the commercialisation? How are conflicts and challenges addressed by different actors? What is the impact of commercialisation on sports performance and development, including professionalisation? In short: Who is commercialising football, why, how, and to what effect?

The two-country study approach allows for documentation and comparison of the developments in two neighbouring countries that have similarities but also considerable differences regarding their respective commercialisation context and trajectory. It thus enables the researcher to identify a large spectrum (and a number of different) on-ground commercialisation activities and trends that are shaped by the history, politics, economy, society and culture of both countries. The analysis is based on interviews with over 90 respondents; participant observation at live football matches, competitions and events (professional and amateur football, men and women football); and the following of media news and reporting (national newspapers, TV stations, sports news websites, social media) in the period late-2021 to early-2024. The respondents who participated in the research include various actors that are active in the football sector in the two countries: players, coaches (football, fitness/physiotherapy), club administrators, managers and professionals (finance/accounting, marketing, PR/social media), sports/football officials, fans, sponsors, journalists, and other relevant professionals from the area of football/sports, media, agent, event and marketing business.

The report gives a data-based account of the growth and character of commercialisation, and respective innovations, advancements, collaborations, difficulties, setbacks, and revivals over the last decade. It also explores some of the relevant aspects of the politics and political economy underpinning the sport. It thus contributes to the analysis of and discussion about the multi-faceted commercialisation-in-practice at domestic level in a key football region of the world. The broader trends in politics, society and economy in the two countries – and at regional, continental and global level – suggest that the commercialisation trends outlined in this analysis will continue and gather pace and depth in the coming years. Many actors in Uganda and Kenya want to (see their own) excel in sports - and football in particular - on a broader based, and more competitive and financially rewarding level in future. Research that analyses the changes to come remains vital.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last three decades, football has evolved into a global business. The commercialisation of elite level professional football affects all levels and tiers of the game - from club ownership, sponsorship, and ticket and merchandise sales to fandom, players' careers and salaries, and TV broadcasting and licensing. This reality has come to the fore with the rise of new business models which are changing how we think about this global game. Within six years of being founded by the multinational drinks company Red Bull, for example, German club Rasenballsport (RB) Leipzig was performing consistently well at both national and international levels. It attained six promotions in six years to reach Germany's top league. In neighbouring Austria, FC Red Bull Salzburg is doing very well at national level and international level. Another instructive example is the City Football Group (CFG) – with majority-ownership links to the state United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Abu Dhabi Royal Family (Abu Dhabi United Group) - which despite being only a few years old already owns, or co-owns, six clubs on four continents and is rapidly becoming one of the most powerful forces in the world's favourite sport. These developments concerning Multi-Club-Ownership (MCO) business models in football are one of various intriguing examples of the contemporary dynamics of high-end sports commercialisation backed by very potent commercial and political actors. They have raised questions and triggered debates about the operations and impact of corporate (and state-related) forces, actors and approaches on football, both globally and locally.

Importantly, the commercialisation of football is not limited to the most resourceful, powerful and competitive leagues in Western Europe but affects all regions of the world, including Africa. However, in business terms such as local TV revenues, club budgets and incomes (sponsorship, tickets, merchandise, sale of players, and players' salaries), domestic football in Africa is currently a peripheral player in global football business, with low levels of commercialisation. It is still largely reduced to supplying footballers to the system (mainly football clubs in the metropole, namely countries in the Global North), with very limited financial returns that are yet to substantially boost local football development on the continent (Akindes 2023). The commercial football scene is however rapidly developing and transforming the sport in many countries on the continent. Further, Africa has produced various superstars of global football repute that play in the top leagues of European football, win team and individual trophies, and reap significant commercial benefits from their achievements: Footballers such as Egypt's Mohammed Salah (Liverpool FC) and Senegal's Sadio Mané (Al Nassr FC) are recent examples of African football achievers who have become global household names, and, importantly in the context of this report, commercial success stories. They are thus illustrative examples – alongside athletes such as Tunisian tennis player Ons Jabeur, Kenyan

runner Eliud Kipchoge or Greek-Nigerian basketball player and 2021 NBA Finals MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo (Milwaukee Bucks) - for understanding key actors, features and trends of the burgeoning African Sports Economy (ASE) (Wiegratz and Rofe 2023; see also Fletcher and Bisschoff 2014). As noted elsewhere, the ‘development of distinctly African sports economies can be unpacked through an inquiry into capitalism, foreign and domestic capitalists, ... sports commercialisation..., sports diplomacy... as well as broader trends in politics and international relations’ (Wiegratz and Rofe 2023). This study takes into focus the ASE through an inquiry into commercialisation of football in East Africa and aspects of the history, politics and political economy underpinning the sport.

Commercialisation of football in Africa has taken a unique trajectory, due to a particular interplay of historical and contemporary factors (Alegi 2010; Goldblatt 2019; Akindes 2023). It is arguably at the forefront of the contemporary commercialisation of sports on the continent (that is, a major driver of the ASE) and much debated in public spaces, board room offices, media newsrooms, and private conversations at home. The African Cup of Nations (AfCON) 2024 was expected to attract a TV audience of over 650million (m) people worldwide (Mohammed 2015). Yet, there has been limited research into the contemporary activities, dynamics, and outcomes (including achievements) of the commercialisation of domestic football sectors in Africa (however, see, for example, Chiweshe 2017a, 2019; Mosola 2017; Akindes 2020 on aspects of the phenomenon). A deficits-focused analysis (i.e. a focus on crises, challenges and the like) is a significant part of the scholarly landscape, and also of opinion articles and journalistic reporting in national press outlets in Kenya (e.g. AfriGOG 2010) and - though, recently, arguably to a lesser extent - Uganda.

Against this background, this report focuses on the commercialisation of football in the east African countries of Uganda and Kenya - countries where I have worked as a researcher for 19 years and 5 years respectively and follow their news closely. It explores some of the major drivers, characteristics and repercussions of the football phenomenon in the two countries. The findings in this report will enable a better understanding of commercialisation-in-practice at domestic level in a key football region in the Global South. Investigating this phenomenon allows us to draw analytical attention to these processes, which are relevant locally, nationally and globally and of interest to the wider football community. The overall animating and guiding questions are:

- *How is commercialisation being advanced and embedded in domestic football?*
- *Who are the relevant actors? What are relevant factors, sites, forms and processes?*
- *What changes are triggered by the commercialisation of the sector? What is the impact of these processes on sports performance and development, including professionalisation?*
- *In short: Who is commercialising soccer, why, how, and to what effect?*

## 2. Research questions

The commercialisation of football is brought about by and has in turn contributed to a number of significant economic, socio-cultural and political changes at the domestic/local level. It has altered the character of the economic, cultural and political embeddedness of the sport. Yet how and why this alteration has occurred is yet to be fully studied. The question then is: What are the characteristics of the commercialisation of local football and what changes are triggered by the commercialisation? This leads to a set of specific sub-questions that have informed to varying degrees the project and the on-ground research over a period of about 20 weeks, during the last 2.5 years:

- What are the reasons for the commercialisation of football in a given country?
- What are the key drivers and components of commercialisation?
- How has the process been advanced and managed by the promoters of commercialization?
- What have been milestones and challenges in the process?
- How have local histories in each country affected the commercialisation?
- How have different local actors – football players, coaches, managers, fans, other clubs, national football associations, industry specialists, companies, politicians, technocrats – related to commercialisation, namely engaged, embraced, challenged or rejected it?
- What changes has the commercialisation triggered, especially at the economic and socio-cultural level (relationships, practices, norms, values, attitudes, ideas, and discourses)?
- How has commercialisation interacted with the political embeddedness of football?
- How has commercialisation affected the development of football in each country: led to increasing levels of professionalism, improved the quality of performance and overall spectator experience?
- How has this affected the popularity of domestic football in comparison to the significant interest in European football?

## 3. State of the literature

The study engages with and contributes to three strands of literatures: football in Africa, neoliberalism in Africa, and commercialisation in Africa. *The football-in-Africa literature* has focused on the following: (a) the history of and changes in football on the continent, from the colonial era through to post-independence and now the neoliberal/globalisation era: Africa in a globalising football sector – and related aspects of nationhood, state building, Pan-Africanism, (political) economy, culture, urbanisation and neighbourhood (Fair 1997; Alegi 2010; Baller 2014; Tounsel 2018; Goldblatt 2019; Cleveland, Kaur, and Akindes 2020; Akindes 2023); (b) football, aid and development, namely the activities of donors and NGOs, and the role of football in the context of

these agencies' programmes that work with disadvantaged groups (provide life skills training, address poverty, education, and other variables) (see for example, Kaur 2017, 2023); and (c) football migration, notably players' hopes, dreams and aspirations, efforts and trajectories to get into professional positions in leagues abroad and related dynamics of social (im-)mobility, identity, gender/masculinity, religion, self-discipline, uncertainty and race (see Darby, Esson and Ungruhe 2022; as well as Kovač 2020, 2021, 2022 for the case of Cameroon; Engh et al. 2017 for South Africa; Ungruhe and Esson 2017 for Ghana; Esson 2015a, 2015b on uncertainty/Ghana and on trafficking/West Africa; Ungruhe and Schmidt 2020 on East Africa).

It has furthermore explored: (d) soccer academies (Darby, Akindes, and Kirwin 2007; Onwumechili and Perry 2019; Kainz 2014; Dubinsky 2022; Dubinsky and Schler 2019, 2016 for the case of Ghana; Kovač 2020 for Cameroon); (e) women football and respective (cultural) challenges and struggles (Onwumechili 2024; for the case of Nigeria: Onwumechili and Goodman 2021; South Africa: Engh 2011, 2014); (f) men/masculinity and football (e.g., Chiweshe and Choto 2024); (g) fandom/spectatorship culture [including concerning national teams as well as European football, particularly the English Premier League (EPL)] (Onwumechili and Akindes 2014; Chiweshe 2024; for the case of Ghana: Akpabli 2023; Nigeria: Omobowale 2009; Olaoluwa and Adejayan 2011; Ethiopia: Semon 2022; Uganda: Vokes 2010; Kenya: Waliaula 2012, 2018, 2021, 2022; Waliaula and Mbogo 2021; Waliaula and Okong'o 2014, 2020, 2021; Waliaula and Mbogo 2021; Odhiambo Ogone 2024; Zimbabwe: Chiweshe 2017; studies are analysing e.g. pay-to-watch football kiosks, fans' identity, cultural appropriation, prestige, symbolism, everyday life/life world, and media).

There is also a strand of literature that analyses (h) the World Cup in South Africa (Alegi and Bolsmann 2013; Fletcher 2014; for a documentary see Martiniello and Ascione 2010); (i) betting (Schmidt 2019), (j) post-retirement trajectories of African players (notably in Europe) (Ungruhe and Agergaard 2021); (k) club dynamics (management, pan-/ethnicity) (Ncube 2014; Johns 2019; Akindes 2020; Waliaula and Okong'o 2020); and (l) politics/power (and crisis) in national football (Onwumechili 2014; Rommel 2014). Onwumechili (2020) gives an overview of strands of the scholarship (see also Akindes 2023).

More specifically, the literature on commercialisation is growing but still rather sparse and fragmented (for early interventions see e.g. Hamil et al. 2000, 2001; for a recent study in the Kenyan context for example see Origi and Deya 2019; Mboya, Mwisukha, and Gitonga 2022). The accounts on soccer academies and players issues (notably migration and citizenship) are probably the most comprehensive and up-to-date ones. That said, Alegi traces the different phases in the



commercialisation of football in Africa. He notes how the commercial interests of (global and local) mass media and corporate sponsors have integrated Africa more fully into the networks of global sport business (2010: 110), but in a skewed manner. He finds that the involvement of domestic and foreign companies has challenged existing local sports structures and hierarchies and encouraged the professionalisation of sports management. Alegi highlights the local political embeddedness of football on the continent, including its reliance on government funds and political support (idem: 57). In other words, football - and the surrounding commercial operations – is shaped by the state and wider national and global politics and is part of the national and local political economy (ibid, Krippner 2001). Furthermore, studies of ‘glocalisation’ highlight how global products and services are adapted to better fit local or national conditions (Robertson 1992). Specifically, in their discussion of neoliberalism and football, Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) suggest studying the way contemporary capitalism is ‘glocalised’ to fit particular contexts – as opposed to ‘one size fits all’ - emphasising the complex ways nations implement pro-market policies and programmes (ibid: 65). This requires a study of the way in which the commercialisation of football is ‘glocalised’ in Africa, and into the relationships between capitalism, business, sports, culture (leisure, lifestyle), politics and the related issues of class, gender, and age/generation.

There are recent studies that explore related matters such as football academies in Ghana and dynamics of hopes, dreams and aspirations (visualised futures) of various actors in that setting (Dubinsky and Schler 2016, 2019; Dubinsky 2022). Dubinsky (2022) explores the entanglement of soccer academies with personal and community development and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). He sheds light on: (i) respective individual and communal benefits and setbacks (failures, disillusionment), (ii) strategies to overcome challenges and adversaries (such as the revenue challenge) and (iii) the interplay of football with the wider economic crisis in the country that shapes the options, choices and achievements of academies and players. Further, Chiweshe in his overview of experiences of commercialisation of African football observes that the sport has so far failed

to capitalise on the popularity and commercial base of football because of factors such as corruption, lack of professional structures, lack of corporate endorsements, and lack of government support (...) Most of the people employed in football in Africa are clients who are placed there typically without any proper qualifications or skills to perform their job. (Chiweshe 2019)

However, as this report will show below, this lack & deficits-account is in important ways at odds with empirical realities by 2022-24 in countries such as Uganda and Tanzania (and to lesser extent

Kenya) that are undergoing a vibrant commercialisation of football. Similarly, Mosola (2017) in his study explores the militating factors against commercial viability of football clubs in South Africa. The analytical starting point is the observation that ‘South African and most African professional football clubs are not financially viable and thus do not yield healthy returns on investment for their owners’. The dominant account of an almost all-round crisis is in ways out of synch with the on-ground situation by 2022-24. As this overview indicates, the commercialisation of football, the running of football as a business, has been studied directly and indirectly, through an exploration of media and culture, broadcasting, fandom, players, and business projects. Yet, studies rarely explore the commercialisation of an entire football sector in a country, especially at club level. This study further contributes to the emerging global scholarship on global political/geopolitical economy, diplomacy, sports, business and politics (Rofe 2018, 2019; Chadwick, Widdop, and Goldman 2023; Wiegratz and Rofe 2023).

Next, this study contributes to the relatively nascent (and to-date fragmented) literature on *commercialisation processes in Africa*. Commercialisation entails preparing and introducing something - a new product/service, production method, space, natural resource, activity, or actor - into the profit-making realm. This entails drawing what was hitherto uncommercialised or informally commercialised into fully capitalist exchange relations. Various entities are commercialised, from data to religion and natural resources (Dolan and Wiegratz forthcoming). This literature has covered the commercialisation of sectors such as: agriculture, public services (healthcare, education; see e.g. McIntyre et al. 2006; Rwantabagu 2011; Mamdani 2010), wildlife, natural resources (land: Baross 1983), and urban space (supermarkets/shopping malls, consumer culture; Dolan and Humphrey 2000; Murillo 2017). Studies on the agricultural sector and the rural poor dominate much of the field (e.g., Poulton and Chinsinga 2018).

Analyses often study the effect of commercialisation on development outcomes; on livelihoods, income, and food (in-)security of particular social groups/classes: urban poor, urban workers, market traders, informal street vendors/shop owners, smallholder rural farmers (see for example Aina 1990; Devereux 2002; Tapela 2008; Miller 2006; Ligthelm 2008; Oya 2011; Crush and Frayne 2011; Liedeman et al. 2013; Peyton et al. 2015; Strydom 2015; Meagher 2016; Poulton and Chinsinga 2018). Studies of external drivers of commercialisation (for example the role of foreign actors such as the World Bank) are relatively common. Investigations regarding internal drivers for commercialisation (and the exact local agencies and change processes of heightened commercialisation) are less so. Detailed studies are typically one country case analyses (see Murillo 2012). Cross-country comparative analyses are rare (Otiso and Owusu 2008). Commercialisation of

domestic sports sectors - especially in the context of the dynamics of global/local capitalism, economic development, professionalisation, social identity, everyday life, social media and leisure - is underrepresented in this strand of scholarship.

Finally, this study also explores the dynamics of *neoliberal capitalism in Africa* in general and of the neoliberalisation of a society and a culture in particular. The embedding or locking-in of the pillars of a neoliberal 'market society' - of which heightened commercialisation is a part - entails a transformation of people and society: not only changes regarding economy and polity but also culture (Harrison 2005, 2010, 2019; Wiegratz 2016). Despite significant theoretical literature on the topic (see Harrison 2010), there is a shortage of research looking at the socio-cultural aspects of the phenomenon, particularly at the intersection of business, sports, recreation and consumption (and politics). For these reasons, this study explores how commercialisation is embedded, expanded and intensified in a society at everyday level. This allows us to study the actual existing commercialisation, or what can be called commercialisation-in-practice. This includes the analysis of the legitimization and popularity of commercialisation (economic growth and dynamism, modernisation, catch up with global models, individual self-fulfilment, social mobility) and respective processes of the production of pro-commercialisation orientations, beliefs, discourses, norms, values, and practices, especially at everyday level. The football sector gives us an analytically useful avenue into exploring such larger societal changes, namely major characteristics of the embedding of an ever more advanced spirit of commerce into previously less commercialised societies and social realms therein. This is of broader significance given also that it has been suggested that Africa is at the forefront of global societal changes concerning the marketisation of societies (Harrison 2019).

#### **4. Methodology**

Data was collected to gain insight into how the actors themselves relate to, identify, conceptualise, think about and evaluate the processes related to commercialisation, and how they act in this commercialising sports sector. The methodology used was a combination of structured interviews with various football actors, and participant observation at football matches in both Uganda and Kenya. In Uganda, research for this data set was undertaken in the period April to May 2022. There was official endorsement for the project from the national football governing body, FUFA. The data is based on over forty interviews and over ten observations of (a) men and women top league matches (including matches of teams whose coach/manager/player(s) I had interviewed), (ii) corporate-sponsored amateur football events and (iii) a games day at an artificial turf amateur-league.

Participant observation entailed attendance of football matches, including pre- and post-matches periods to understand what commercialisation looks like on the ground, in particular localities. I followed the country's football dynamics via online media (of national newspapers, TV stations and sports news websites) for over two years as well. Interviews were conducted with actors from the following categories:

- players (current and former top-league players, men and women),
- coach (male team, top league),
- club administration and management (top league clubs, from the areas of finance, accounting, marketing, PR/social media as well as board/CEO level),
- national sports/football officials [from the Federation of Uganda Football Associations (FUFA), the Uganda Premiere League (UPL), the National Council of Sports],
- media (journalists, photographer, TV broadcasters),
- professionals who are/were involved in aspects of commercialisation of football (lawyer, agent, organisers of amateur football events/competitions, etc.),
- and fans (including fans representatives of UPL clubs).

The interviews lasted between forty-five minutes two hours. Interviews were one-on-one (and included key informant interviews). Research was mainly conducted in the Greater Kampala metropolitan region, Uganda's traditional football centre, and home to many of the eighteen UPL clubs. Research also took place in two other major cities that have consolidated their position as top football hubs in the last few years: in the eastern town of Jinja that was home to three UPL clubs during the research period and in the northwestern town of Arua, the capital of West Nile region and home to two UPL clubs then. Research in Jinja and Arua helped to explore club-level commercialisation dynamics in upcoming football regions outside of the Kampala area.

In Kenya, research was undertaken in Nairobi from early December 2021 to early February 2022, as well as for several weeks in the period July-September 2023. In the latter research time, I also spent time in the country's second-largest city, Mombasa, to explore commercialisation there, with a focus on the KPL (Kenyan Premier League) club based there, and the major amateur leagues in the city as well. I did interviews and attended live matches of both women and men football in the respective top leagues. This included watching some of the teams whose coach/manager/player(s) I had interviewed. I also attended a match of the Harambee Starlets senior team. I conducted interviews with the following categories of actors:

- top league players (men and women, active and retired),

- clubs: management/administration/technical team (top leagues, including CEOs, team, coach, physiotherapists/fitness coaches, media staff, etc.),
- fans,
- national football administrators (linked to the Football Kenya Federation, FKF),
- media staff (journalists, broadcaster),
- other professionals who are/were involved in commercialisation of football (sports analysts, marketing/event experts, brand manager of a football sponsor, academy owner, etc.).

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours. They took place in coffee/restaurant places, offices (including on training ground offices), and online (2 cases). Altogether I did over 50 interviews. Other than seven group interviews (that were with 2-5 respondents) all interviews were one-on-one interviews (including key informant interviews). I followed football dynamics in the Kenyan online media (newspapers, TV stations, sports specific news websites) for over two years.

Altogether, the report is thus based on over 90 interviews from both countries. Importantly, the respondents were assured of anonymity regarding the content of the interview discussion. This was important to facilitate an in-depth discussion on the commercialisation (and thus professionalisation, business, achievements and problems) of football in the respective countries, a subject that can be (very) sensitive personally, professionally, economically, politically, socially, and culturally. Anonymity was thus important to achieve data depth, quality and authenticity, while comforting and protecting the respondent who was willing to give time and provide crucial insight for this research project and thus support the production of this analytical account for wider public use and benefit. The analysis was concluded by the end of January 2024. Please note that word count limitations do not allow to deepen the analysis of various points, even crucial ones. The analysis below is meant to give an overview of some of the major features of the subject under examination, as encountered during the research; provide some short comparative analysis where apposite; and offer in particular an account of recent trends and shifts. A wider and in-depth account of several aspects that are mentioned briefly, is planned for in future publications (that can also integrate feedback and further insights provided from readers of this text). Future research could explore in more detail the multifaceted implications regarding football commercialisation of points raised – concerning trends, changes, improvements, challenges, political economy etc. - in this overview report (see also Wiegratz and Rofe 2023 for suggested research areas concerning the African sports economy).

## 5. The Case of Uganda

### 5.1. Overview

The opening analytical account below is based on the submissions of various respondents, including several key/senior informants: A decade ago, in the early 2010s, the state of Ugandan football looked highly discouraging. After years of internal wrangles and conflicts between FUFA and some of the country's powerful clubs, as well as problems regarding match manipulation and financial misappropriation, many fans and sponsors turned their backs on the sector. The public image of both FUFA and club football was poor, and public trust and confidence were low. Meanwhile, the popularity of the EPL among Ugandan football enthusiasts was on a steady rise.

By 2022, however, Ugandan football had seen a remarkable revival and is now thriving (Wiegratz 2022), as part of a larger sports boom in the country (driven also by cricket, netball where the national team has attained global acclaim, rugby and basketball), and the strengthening of Uganda as a sports nation, both in terms of (semi-) professional and amateur sports. The country's football is increasingly successful at regional and continental level, and there are many positive dynamics in domestic competitions as well. The federation is in full swing, has expanded and consolidated its operations and boosted its image, is overseeing important advancements in the sector, and is, compared to a decade ago, in much better terms with the government. The Uganda Premier League (UPL) is broadcast on live TV by Chinese multinational StarTimes (and named StarTimes UPL), as part of a 10-year contract (Nsimbe 2018). There has also been a revival of football in the various regions of the country outside the traditional football area of greater Kampala. The UPL clubs based in the north-western city of Arua, and Jinja in the east, did well in the 2021/22 season and some of these teams have been competing for top UPL spots (BUL FC, Arua Hills SC). Kitara FC, based in Hoima district in Western Uganda (in the oil region of the country), did very well in the 2023/24 UPL season (4<sup>th</sup> best UPL team, winner of the Stanbic Uganda Cup). The fan base is growing and vibrant in a number of clubs and there are many examples of improved relationships between fans and club management. Many clubs - including those in the lower divisions and outside the UPL - have managed to sign deals with sponsors. Currently, more than 40 sponsors are engaged in the UPL (New Vision 2019; BUL 2021; Katungulu 2022).

The Kampala Capital City Authority Football Club (KCCA) FC, which plays in the capital, has played some floodlit night games - termed Night Football – since the 2022/23 UPL season. There is a range of popular amateur competitions, especially in Kampala, usually played over the weekend.

Kids Soccer clubs are growing in popularity in residential neighbourhoods, catering for different income groups. Old Boys associations of prominent schools, working and resident in Greater Kampala, have also started their own leagues, with teams formed according to generations/class years. Football competitions at secondary school and university levels are also popular with students and fans and attract significant media attention. FUFA started its own TV channel in 2022 and is broadcasting live games from various competitions at national and international level (including women's, men's, senior and school level games), as well as press conferences (pre-match, pre-game day etc.), and various other activities of the sector. FUFA TV is also cooperating with StarTimes in the broadcasting of live games (Magogo 2022; Bbosa 2022). Football has significant media coverage, not only in the print media or on TV for example but also on the various sports-dedicated news websites that operate (Pulse Sports, Kawowo, Swiftsportsug, Sportsnation, etc.).

The social media presence of FUFA, clubs, players, fans, journalists, and pundits are extensive, innovative, and captivating. Artificial turf grounds have been constructed, and this supports the football of amateur teams, competition organizers, schools, academies, and communities (New Vision 2020). By the time of research Arua Hill SC was building a stadium that is integrated into a larger shopping mall complex, which also has plenty of office spaces and hotel facilities (though this project has stalled by end of 2023, the time of finalising this analysis, below). The club was selling fans and other members of the public a real estate product - a plot and house in Kongolo Sports City (Real Muloodi 2022; Matooke Republic 2022). Clubs such as the Vipers SC and KCCA FC have made some good money from the sale of players in recent years, which has helped cover the club running costs and development initiatives, such as improvements to stadium infrastructure (Nsimbe 2020; Daily Monitor 2021; Senono 2022; Transfermarket 2024a). Though not without challenges, the current situation and recent trajectory of Ugandan football is positive, in sports and commercial terms. Based on the research data, the following section sheds light on Ugandan football: factors, conditions and dynamics behind the regained popularity, the positive trends in the sector and how this significant turn-around was achieved.

## **5.2. FUFA's revival & growth - basis of football's revitalisation & commercialisation**

Ugandan football had its golden years in the 1970s (reaching the AFCON finals in 1978), but in the subsequent decades faced problems for various reasons, mostly the political turmoil in the country in the early 1980s. There were also cycles of crises and renewal efforts throughout the 2000s. During this period, there was the effect of the country's economic liberalisation (Wiegratz 2016, Wiegratz, Martiniello and Greco 2018) on the football club scene. Liberalisation and privatisation of state

parastatals affected the finances of both company and institutional clubs. Hitherto prominent clubs such as Coffee FC (by the Coffee Marketing Board), were affected. Budgets of companies and institutions came under pressure in the name of efficiency and cost-cutting, and some private owners of clubs struggled with their businesses too. Also, there were significant internal wrangles and malfeasance in both FUFA and the sector generally. There were conflicts between FUFA and some major clubs over matters of power, money, sector organisation and governance (who is in charge of football). There was a subsequent split of the top league into two leagues; significant misuse of funds; and extensive match fixing. Consequently, the public image of both FUFA and club football was poor: it was regarded as a scene of low to no misappropriation and the swindling of money, disorganised and dysfunctional. Public trust and confidence were low. Sponsors and broadcasters shunned the sector and so did a significant number of fans who were appalled by the crisis and lost interest.

Around the same time the popularity of the EPL intensified in the country, due to the technological availability of TV dishes and the for-pay football broadcaster DSTV in public and private spaces, such as homes and bars. Being a fan of a foreign club, especially one from the EPL, was (and still is) regarded as highly cool, and prestigious: it was status and identity boosting (Vokes 2010). Fanaticism and extremism of post-match brawls between fans and suicides have been reported. Sports betting another variable in the equation that may as well be a subject of a separate study. The EPL remains popular by the 2020s and has the lead over other major European leagues by far, largely due to historical reasons: Uganda is an anglophone country, thus with strong ties to Britain.

Ugandan football however showed some signs of recovery in the early 2010s and was by the early 2020s – after a decade long journey of rebuilding the sector - in a strong, more stable post-recovery state. This achievement is due to various constructive changes in core areas, including: administration (with the new FUFA administration under the helm of President, Moses Hassim Magogo, in office from 2013 onwards), clubs (more professional and regionally more spread), sponsors, competitions, commercial formats and activities, media, technology (mainly the effect of mobile phones), fandom, culture, image, professionalism, networks, and sector politics. Football is regarded as the lead sports sector in the country and FUFA in various ways is a role model for other sports associations. The latter shares its experience and know-how with associations of other sports. FUFA markets itself (via reports, videos and texts) as an organisation that is a growth and success story of over a decade by now (FUFA 2023a).<sup>1</sup> The rise of football betting and its continued popularity and economic

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<sup>1</sup> See for further background also the book by FUFA's current CEO, Edgar Watson ('Football. My Life', Watson 2000).



significance (also in terms of revenues for the state) also triggered key changes. These trends and factors together are mutually reinforcing and have produced a growing ecology of commercial football that is on expansion and consolidation trajectory. This process is driven by a variety of dynamic actors who are making (or aiming to make) a livelihoods, profits and professional careers - and more generally are engaged in a Making Lives (Lockwood 2024) - linked to football.

According to various respondents, the leadership of the current FUFA president Magogo - who is now in his third term (2021-25) - marked the beginning of the revival of both FUFA and the sector (see also FUFA 2021). This was a very gradual change process that had shortcomings and setbacks. However, judging by the situation in late 2023, it was remarkably successful. More specifically, the FUFA administration under Magogo has made significant improvements in the realms of governance, planning, programmes, capacity building, financing, organisational culture, and communications. These changes have taken time to be embedded and produce the desired results, for example a reduction in wrangles. FUFA, supported by the government, decided in its favour disputes with some clubs and took over the ownership of the UPL. FUFA thus reasserted and consolidated its power.

Some respondents pointed to limitations related to some of these changes, had views that were different from FUFA's, or that made criticism with regard to specific FUFA matters (such as decisions taken on matters of club penalty for fan violence during a match, and similar cases.) or the organisation and leadership generally (see below). But, according to many respondents, the range of significant positive changes were evident, especially against the context of a deep crisis a decade ago. These improvements have boosted the sector's growth, vitality, and performance and laid the foundation for its ongoing commercialisation including the attraction and retainment of corporate sponsors and good-will and cooperation from the government. In short, shortcomings and problems aside, the common view was that FUFA's management and staff had (i) ended the sector's crisis, decline and dysfunctionality and the retreat of various key actors from the sector and (ii) made the sector more functional, professional, dynamic and attractive. That laid the foundation for the sector to expand and flourish, also in commercial terms, with remarkable results, particularly in recent years. UPL, under FUFA ownership, has gained credibility and status again, and fans and sponsors returned to the league. A recent success of FUFA that symbolises its organisational determination, capacity and effectiveness is the three states of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania winning the bid to host AFCON 2027 tournament. FUFA - and in particular President Magogo and his close FUFA collaborators - were instrumental (and in many ways leading) in preparing and seeing through the East African bid (Independent 2023c; East African 2023b).

The key ingredients of FUFA turning around the sector included: FUFA being more open and responsive to external criticism, a strengthened media team, a focus on professionalisation of the sector via significant capacity-building (running various training programs on a regular basis for clubs, coaches, sponsors, media and other professional groups that operate in the sector), a more inclusive sharing of the benefits of these programs across regions, an increasing number of well-organized competitions (including beach soccer), encouraging women's football, promoting commercialization efforts, successes in setting up/running various leagues and competitions, attracting sponsorship, and an improvement in its relationship with the government. FUFA boosted competitive women football via: new women's leagues and competitions, support for the national senior team (Crested Cranes) and junior teams, capacity building (courses etc.) and the promotion of more gender balance and equality in the sector generally, also in terms of gender representation in the FUFA media team or in refereeing (see e.g. FUFA 2022b, 2022e).<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, FUFA has worked on capacity building in the sector, through for example, club professionalisation. This has included extensive training of various professionals such as: coaches, public relations and marketing officers, club owners, managers, and referees. Thanks to FUFA's efforts, more coaches got licences and, in late 2022 FUFA announced that it would offer licensing courses in local languages rather than English to allow wider participation in the profession (FUFA 2022a, Eagle 2022).

FUFA's club licensing process is linked to improvements regarding this professionalisation agenda that has put emphasis on injecting corporate governance principles into club management, and generally enhanced clubs' focus on commercialisation. Professionalisation and commercialisation have been supported and reinforced by the club licensing process which ensures that minimum requirements are met over time (for reported problems with club licensing see e.g. Muganga 2022b). As one sports official observed: 'The club licensing process shaped and gave our football destiny'. This was corroborated by an official linked to the UPL, who asserted that:

The challenge was the mindset change. People who run clubs were often driven by passion, not business motives. Often it was a one-man show. We tried to change that: owners had to look at a club, at football as an investment: hire professionals and tell them 'give me results', give the CEO a contract, have an office, a secretariat, a finance officer and codes of conduct. We tried to

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<sup>2</sup> See also <https://x.com/fufawomen>.

improve matters of club personnel and infrastructure such as the quality of pitches and attractiveness of stadia. We guided clubs in their fans' development strategy.

A club CEO from the eastern region also noted:

FUFA brought FIFA to us. FUFA made access to various training programmes more even. It operates more long term oriented, and allows more people to benefit from football, different from the past when only a few members in the industry benefitted. We participated in a training retreat on how to make a club more professional - you don't remain the same as a club afterwards. The licensing process was about club improvements; there were checklists and milestone talks, also with our sponsor.

FUFA was generally made more accessible, open, and inclusive. This facilitated the spread of the benefits of its programmes - and those of partners such as FIFA - and support beyond the central region, the core football area of the country, being the first nucleus of urbanisation, historically. Instead, all regions, clubs and individuals have reportedly had access to training. Over time this training has built crucial capacities (skills, competencies and attitudes) across the country in the key professions that make up the sector and contribute to its growth and dynamism. It has catalysed the growth of professional careers in football related professions including administration and management to start and/or flourish, notably in the core roles of CEO, marketing, media and public relations. It has helped to spread and deepen the understanding of the sports and share knowledge to others - 'people now understand the game', various respondents noted.

Several respondents had benefitted from FUFA training and capacity building workshops, which enhanced their career development, and cultivated a sense of professionalism, belonging and sector development as a collective endeavour. 'The course identified us'; the CEO noted. These programmes have enhanced the pool, skills and agency of people who are linked to, understand, contribute to and, importantly, benefit from the sector. FUFA has also trained sponsors about how to support a club effectively and sustainably, the roles of a sponsor and the power of football to enhance a commercial brand. According to the cited CEO, 'FUFA is the authoritative body. If the sponsor meets FUFA officials in such a setting, the sponsor gets confidence and regards football as the right thing to invest in'. The training component was thus remarkably comprehensive and fundamental to Ugandan football's enhancement and development. It buttressed the sector with enhanced professionalism and effectiveness and raised the image of FUFA. Various shortcomings and challenges remained however, and criticisms were aired (see below). In short then, FUFA was neither 'perfect' or

uncontroversial, nor got everything right - but it was strategic, effective, convincing, and transformative enough to significantly revive the sector (also seen against the case of the federation in neighbouring Kenya, the FKF, see below).

Supported by FIFA, there was also investment into football infrastructure. In Njeru for example, a FUFA technical centre that has a stadium was constructed. In Kampala, the FUFA headquarters, the FUFA house, was built as part of FIFA's GOAL development and assistance programme. FUFA has secured many such partnerships with high-profile international actors that benefitted the revival (notwithstanding the debated shortcomings in the execution of some of the programmes). FUFA also invested in its own staff base: more staff, teams and trainings, and a professionalisation of roles and the hiring of professionals. There was previously a much stronger reliance on volunteers, for example regarding media related work.

Given the crisis in the early 2010s, the current FUFA administration further invested into mending and rejuvenating relationships, with various actors who had broken away during the crisis years and had become bitter, disinterested, distant, and/or very critical of FUFA. Some critical former players for example took on key roles in FUFA in the integrative process. There was thus a repositioning and rebranding of FUFA. 'We had to convince the public that FUFA is legal and compliant and doing things the right way', a FUFA marketing staff remarked. Regaining the public confidence, interest and passion for football was seen as crucial. FUFA also reached out to cultural and religious leaders and invited them to live football events and included them in the kick-off ceremonies. A FUFA media staff explained: 'We spoke to the various kingdoms in the country and let them know that they play a huge role when it comes to communicating football to the public. They can help change the public perception of football. We invited religious leaders to national matches and let them do the ceremonial handshakes and inspections before the match'.

FUFA furthermore improved its relationship with the government through more communication, dialogue and consultation. This provided the basis for FUFA's successful lobbying for some of the sector's interests in later years, notably more funding support from the government. This reach-out, fence-mending and repair period took years. Change was gradual and there were limits to the change - some critics remained unconvinced.

A changed communication and media strategy was central to this revival process. The communication was geared towards being more welcoming, regular, and extensive, more open and responsive to debate and criticism, and more professionally managed (so that there was a reduction

of people working for or being associated with FUFA claiming to speak in the name of FUFA on crucial matters, for example). The federation regarded it as important to allow for and facilitate a more broad-based and candid public discussion and consultation process about the sector, and to communicate more and get buy-in for its vision of the sector. Relatedly, FUFA aimed to educate the public about football and provide it with football knowledge, information and entertainment. As mentioned, it also needed to achieve and retain a much better image in the eye of the public.

Over time, more people became ‘ambassadors of FUFA, explaining and defending the federation’ (FUFA media staff); complaints and hearing procedures were put in place and/or improved over time, for matters of clubs-players welfare disputes for example. The communications department was enlarged and professionalised. It now has a mix of permanent staff and a support team of stringers and freelancers. Communication platforms were revived, extended or opened up anew, especially social media handles. The federation also started a FUFA radio station and TV station, both united under one FUFA media company. One motive for this expansion was to expand the broadcasting of various competitions, beyond the UPL and beyond what state and private media broadcasters provided. This FUFA media provision was part of the organisation taking the game closer to the fans across the country- ‘people love local games’ (FUFA media staff). The more accommodative approach to communication affairs – crucial for a sustained revival - was outlined by a FUFA media staff as follows:

Let the discussion unfold, don’t look so defensive, don’t gang up, respond publicly to some criticism, for instance through statements on our website. Bring in critics, keep it open, and show good will. We listen to grievances. We explain our position and try to get invited to different media platforms to have an opportunity to do that. We also criticise ourselves in internal criticism, and we tried to speak more with one voice as FUFA, instead of having many different unauthorised voices out there speaking for FUFA.

With time FUFA, and thus Ugandan football, regained to a considerable degree ‘the hearts of the people’. Goodwill, confidence and engagement from a range of key actors improved, including players, fans, sponsors, the media and the government. This process of getting more buy-in from key stakeholders is illustrated by statements such as that of FUFA media staff: ‘When we first went to sponsors to sell our vision, twenty percent of them showed support; now, nine years later, we get a positive response of eighty per cent’; and a club CEO: ‘UPL is now an organised, worthy league. The federation helped bring back the fans’.

FUFA thus arguably showed a ‘Will To Improve’ (Li 2007), a will to work its way out of crisis, and to correct a considerable number –of crucial shortcomings and mistakes (both past and present) in its operations and sector revival approach more generally, despite shortcomings. After public criticism about payment delays and inconsistencies in the context of international competitions, for example, FUFA published information about the funds it transferred to players for participating in these competitions. FUFA also provided basic health insurance cover for several male and female players at club level. In October 2022, FUFA also provided financial support to key sections and actors of the sector. For the first time clubs of the two women leagues got a cash injection to cover some of their costs (since season 2022/23; Muziransa 2022). This comes after FUFA had been criticised for not supporting the women clubs financially (a point that was also raised by some respondents). FUFA has tried to work on some of the pressing problems and shortcomings in the sector that stakeholders have raised with the organisation for a long time in the above case FUFA eventually addressed some of the concerns regarding funding, another example is a recent measure taken to address concerns about match fixing (Mwambu 2022; Katongole 2022; Independent 2023a, 2023b). This does not mean however that every severe shortcoming in the sector that, in some ways, falls under the responsibility of FUFA gets addressed as expected by all stakeholders. For example, FUFA recently had to withdraw national teams from international competitions, citing financial constraints (Saaka 2022; Mabuka 2022).

Alongside these, other efforts from FUFA’s range of initiatives have played a role in the revitalisation and commercialisation of the sector. FUFA envisages building and developing multiple competitions and leagues - for male and female players, and for various age groups, up from primary school level - and organise these in a more predictable and stable manner. The driving mantra of this expansion is to bring football to every corner, to every homestead of the country, and thereby to increase the number of teams, players, games and fans, and to strengthen the bond between fans and clubs in local areas. The goal is: to advance the love and passion for football, country and region - in line with the FUFA motto: ‘It is Our Game, It is Our Country’. Further, to change lives through football in terms of livelihoods, professional opportunities, jobs, business, incomes, and profits; and thereby unite communities and strengthen national unity and peace, identity and pride, across all regions of the country.<sup>3</sup>

This drive for football expansion and revitalisation of regions ‘showed that top players and clubs can come from all regions not just the central region. There is more ethnic representation and diversity

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Onyango-Obbo (2024) for context on dynamics of nation and pride in contemporary Uganda.

in football now’, a FUFA marketing staff noted. Likewise, a UPL player remarked: ‘Any region can now have a club in the UPL. There is passion and love for the game and for the region. We love to represent our region in football’, referring to the establishment of many new and upcoming clubs from regions other than the central region. Significantly, FUFA has supported the regional revitalisation of football through capacity building, and the creation of a tournament between teams from the different regions - and an emphasis on the deliberate display of the culture and fandom of these regions during the tournament: FUFA Drums. This competition was eventually successfully marketed to a sponsor; the appeal was to give access to people in all regions of the country, over a long period of time (the competition runs for months).

The resulting growing portfolio of domestic leagues and competitions<sup>4</sup> - in addition to the portfolio of national teams - coupled with a wider national reach of the sports (up to the villages, from top to lower leagues) is used by FUFA to market the sector commercially; and to engage and attract a range of sponsors who find these partnerships and the commercial opportunities they come with attractive. In commercial terms, a competition is an asset, a property. FUFA can sell particular rights to a sponsor, for example: as broadcast sponsor, title sponsor, equipment/drinks sponsor, and so on. These properties are then developed together through brand activation, segmentation, targeting and positioning, at different levels and in regions. The activities are carried out by varying alliances, for example: FUFA, sponsors, senior male national team and its players; or FUFA, sponsors, and UPL clubs/players, and so on.

Furthermore, a core focus in the revitalisation strategy was to first enhance the visibility, reputation, popularity and performance of the male national team - The Cranes. This team, according to various respondents, took the lead in the popularity recovery of Ugandan football from the mid-2010s and helped rebuild the local followership for football. Better performance of the team, with for example the historical qualification of the team to AFCON in 2017 (and again in 2019), after nearly four decades of absence from that competition were noted as milestones by respondents. This helped in the initial phase of the recovery. Crucially, it improved the public image of and trust in FUFA - ‘now FUFA is doing the right things’ (FUFA marketing staff) - and to rebuild public confidence in and excitement about Ugandan football. This then also helped to revitalise other sections of the sector including domestic leagues and respective club football, and also various commercial formats for amateur footballers such as the mentioned (weekend) amateur leagues that are now hugely popular.

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<sup>4</sup> See for details <https://www.fufa.co.ug/competitions/>; <https://fufa.co.ug/fufa-competitions/regional-leagues/>.

The Cranes popularity was majorly enhanced by the marketing campaign of the team's core sponsor then, the South African multinational MTN, the leading telecom company in Uganda. Later, MTN's competitor, Airtel, was the main sponsor of the Cranes, before MTN came back as the sponsor in 2023 (with a five-year package valued at UGX 19bn) approximately \$1m/p.a.). Both firms are financially very powerful and can run supreme marketing campaigns nationwide, with MTN being historically the marketing (hype-an-event) giant in the Ugandan context (another marketing giant, Nile Breweries, has also had commercial partnerships with FUFA<sup>5</sup>). The Cranes thus became a brand and a household name, which the telecommunication firms have also reaped significant benefits from. Arguably, MTN and Airtel engaged in a competition for sports sponsorship and sponsor supremacy, trying to secure deals that gave them high sponsorship benefits (brand visibility, prestige, image etc.), also vis-à-vis each other (i.e. who becomes sponsor of the Cranes and reaps the commercial benefits, and can thus lock-out the commercial rival). See also MTN and Airtel sponsoring different Kingdoms' competitions: Airtel's support for Buganda Masaza football cup vs MTN Busoga Masaza Cup (Nile Breweries too is a key sponsor of the latter in the 7<sup>th</sup> edition in 2024).

That said, in later years, the senior women's national team, the Crested Cranes, was also boosted by FUFA and started to make remarkable achievements in continental football, most recently as winner of the Council for East and Central Africa Football Associations (CECAFA) women championship 2022. Nowadays, FUFA regularly promotes the male and female sections of the sector together in social media spaces, for example in tweets related to key players, teams or games on particular weekends. The Crested Cranes had no sponsor by the end of 2022. However, the team is now reportedly benefitting from the latest FUFA-MTN deal (and also gets support from Nile Special, the flagship brand of Nile Breweries). According to the news about the signed partnership, MTN's financial package will be used to support seven FUFA properties/programmes: The Uganda Cranes, The Crested Cranes, The FUFA Drum Regional Cup, The FUFA Juniors League, FUFA Super 8 Tournament, The FUFA Super Cup, and The FUFA Annual Awards.

Key to note is that this new sponsorship deal also includes support to the Crested Cranes, that is the national women's team. 'This was a key focus for us, while negotiating this partnership. It complements the effort of government and society in general in ensuring equal opportunities for all regardless of gender,' the MTN CEO [Ms Mulinge] passionately observed' (Nile Post 2023). The CEO further noted that the company aims at boosting the sectors development and a strong representation of the nation abroad: 'This sponsorship signals our commitment to continue

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<sup>5</sup> See for one of their latest campaigns with FUFA, the highly participatory Cranes Cabbo campaign (FUFA 2023b).



developing football in Uganda and supporting the Cranes' ambition of flying our country's flag high, everywhere they go' (ibid). Notice the link to national sentiments, unity and pride - something that aligns with objectives of FUFA and government.

The mentioned positive trend in male football by the late 2010s was confirmed when the major, historical Kampala-based club, KCCA FC, qualified as the first Ugandan club for the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Champions League group stages in 2018 and did well in that competition; whereas in 2017, the team was knocked out in the first round of the competition by South Africa's Mamelodi Sundowns, in 2018, KCCA finished third in the group with six points (Independent 2018). This excited the crowd in their home games against famous, competitive teams from the continent. A fan and football organiser noted about the significance of this milestone:

Some of the biggest teams in African football played in Kampala, such as Mamelodi Sundowns. We had something to look forward to. And we played well in these games, in an entertaining way, with young players. If we could beat foreign teams, that shows you have a good team. It created a sense of belonging and killed doubts about the quality of local teams after the years of bribery and match fixing. It showed we moved on from that crisis and had integrity back. We wanted to be part of such a wining machine.

The confidence that the revitalisation of Ugandan football was (getting back) on track by the mid to late 2010s was also strengthened by two factors: (i) crucial transfers of Ugandan players to clubs abroad (for example, Farouk Miya from Vipers SC to Belgium club Standard Liège in 2016, for reportedly about 400,000 Euros) and (ii) international level acknowledgments (Transfermarket 2024b). The latter included goalkeeper Denis Onyango (Sundowns, South Africa) winning the African Player of The Year (Africa based) award at the CAF annual football Awards in 2016; and the Ugandan Cranes being voted best team in Africa at that award as well (for the team's AFCON campaign).

Next, FUFA and the government were by 2022 reportedly on significantly better terms than during the crisis in the 2000s to early 2010s. There was now a working relationship in place that has developed over some years. The government increased its financial support to the sector over time, notably for the national football teams. Government and individual office holders/politicians got significant political capital in terms of enhanced legitimacy out of the support for the sector, and this arguably continues to be a motivation for the government's involvement in football. FUFA president Magogo was in 2021 elected as member of Parliament (for Budiope East), representing the ruling

party, National Resistance Movement (NRM). His wife, Anita Among, is speaker of the national Parliament, also representing the NRM there (Kigongo 2021; My Wedding 2022). The close ties of Magogo with the government were crucial in the successful AFCON 2027 campaign and further cemented the relationship between Magogo/FUFA and the government in the country, and the pursuit of joined sports, political, and commercial interests up to 2027 (the next presidential election is scheduled for 2026) and after. Being a high-profile sports administrator was reportedly good for (re-)election prospects in the country, across various sports. This in turn also strengthened the representation of sports interests in parliament (Namanya 2020). Magogo tabled the new (controversial nonetheless) National Sports Act 2023 that according to its advocates strengthens sports federations and advances conditions for heightened sports commercialisation (Lumu and Mulondo 2023; Muziransa 2023; FUFA 2023c).

Government appeared generally to be keener to support Ugandan sports into excelling, especially at international competitions (and indeed Ugandan athletes/teams garnered major successes at international level in 2023). More specifically, the government is focused on matters of youth, sports, infrastructure and jobs. Football was seen to be aligned with the government's five-year planning blueprint, the National Development Plan (NDP), now into its fourth edition, NDP IV. Football comes under the aegis of, among others, human resource and human capital development, as well as peace and harmony in the country.

A national sports official for example noted: 'The football sector is now aligned with the policies and political agenda of government: a focus on youth, education, talent identification, job opportunities, and investment into the future of the country'. Accordingly, with the improvement of frameworks for clubs and better club governance - (thanks to FUFA's professionalisation and club development agenda amongst others) it was now easier to bring partners and sponsors (including government) into the sector. With this came the resources to deal with the various challenges of the sport. The government currently plans to invest further into the sector, for example via the construction of large, state of art stadia in several regions. The official reported that government is in talks with a Turkish construction company that built stadia in other countries, inspired by stadium construction projects in Senegal and Cameroon (Ayuk 2020; Africa News 2022; the Turkish company M/S Summa was eventually selected to build a 20,000-seater stadium in Hoima for AFCON 2027).

Notably, the son of the President, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who was a rising national political figure by 2022 (and is talked about as a potential candidate in the next presidential election), was also visibly linked to the football sector (UBC 2022). Throughout 2022, he repeatedly noted the

relevance of football in Uganda's future development in his various speeches and has prominently presided over key functions in the sector. He mentioned football (particularly building stadia) as a key priority for the government to engage the youth. He opened the CECAFA women championship 2022 that took place in Uganda and was present as a major guest at a function of the popular 'corporate league' in Kampala.

Top government officials are well represented whenever football features prominently on TV and in print/online news: for example, when champions were celebrated at the end of the football season or a tournament (see champions ceremonies at the CECAFA tournament that the Ugandan team won) or when the club champions of the top female and male leagues were crowned (Muyita 2022). Top officials have prominent positions in football administrative structures and associations. Thus, politicians from the ruling party, and political administration, are well represented at the high levels of the football sector, i.e. arguably had political dominance in football (though opposition politicians are also active in the sector, e.g. linked to/represented in some clubs, etc.). This political backing, instead of political disinterest or conflicts, from the NRM helped advance and stabilise the sector's revival. Political engagement stems from a merging and combination of various major public and private interests, such as sports, political, economic, business, and career interests.

As noted, FUFA has also started its own TV station with equipment to broadcast games and competitions, for example from the top women's league, youth and school tournaments, local divisions/lower leagues, and the FUFA Drums games. FUFA TV has found its audience. A recent FUFA Drums quarterfinal game, for example, had 5,400 viewers one day after streaming. This broadcasting capacity of the federation also allows FUFA to promote a range of activities, including: live broadcasts of ceremonies, press conferences - pre- and post-match, and team nomination announcements. One reasoning that was given for this move was that private or public providers would give football not enough coverage. FUFA has a remarkable range of coverage and content on its media channels (including a summary of FUFA's activities in a given month), thanks to a strong communication department. FUFA X (former Twitter) handle has over 202,000 followers, and FUFA TV has over 5,000 subscribers (11.1.2024).<sup>6</sup> This stable, solid provision of content is a key pillar and anchor of the football ecosystem in the country. FUFA TV helps to provide extensive content – and, crucially, live broadcasts - on the key medium of TV. And it helps to innovate, pilot, try out and then scale up (if successful) new competition formats. All this keeps football in public discussion, sheds light on the many facets of and hubs and talents in the sector, motivates and rewards teams and players

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<sup>6</sup> <https://x.com/officialfufa>; <https://www.youtube.com/@fufatelevision/videos>.

and their supporters (institutions, families, fans etc.) and thus boosts the sector's revitalisation and growth and thus also (prospects of) commercialisation and sustainability. The FUFA TV Cup – an annual school tournament with 64 schools participating in its second edition in 2024 (up from 8 schools in 2023) - is a good example in this respect.<sup>7</sup> FUFA also runs commercials in some of the live broadcasts, thus gaining revenues: for example, a high-profile sponsor, Nile Breweries placed adverts for its flagship product Nile Special in the FUFA coverage of the CAF Women's Champions League qualifiers 2023 (e.g., during the CBE FC vs. Vihiga Queens game).

FUFA staff equally interface with club owners/management and encourage them to invest in their clubs' media departments. For example, to ensure that there is a photographer on match-day and a highlights video produced, and that there is public awareness, interest and a positive image about the activities at the club. This, so the logic, should then translate to more fans showing up at games and following the club, and subsequently more sponsorship. 'There is a sense of solidarity in the media fraternity now, between different media officers, from FUFA to clubs. The mindset is very strong. Doing club media now is a job – people get evaluated for it', the FUFA media officer observed.

The launch of FUFA TV received some criticism in the media, public space (comments from members of the watching public on FUFA's YouTube channel for example) and also from some respondents: that FUFA is too expansive, wants to satisfy its business interests, takes away business from private media houses, that the investment into equipment is not adequate, or that the broadcast has quality and reliability issues. That said, FUFA – thanks to its TV venture – gets content on the screen and promotes various leagues, teams, games and players that way. It also has established routines such as pre-match conferences that are broadcasted from FUFA house. This helps to promote FUFA's commercial assets/properties: leagues, competitions, etc. Crucially, this extensive media operation gives FUFA significant content producing infrastructure, and thus agency, ownership, and autonomy concerning producing, distributing and sharing content (also of lower-level leagues, competitions and games that no other broadcaster would arguably pick up). FUFA gets to decide what stories to tell, how and when. As the FUFA media expert emphasised:

We can tell our own story to people out there. We can broadcast details from football games in the regions and villages. We can offer live action. We can show that any organised football deserves to be on TV. And we can show that there is football talent. We can then go and invite sponsors to come in. Scouts get interested. For example, we get paid to broadcast secondary

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<sup>7</sup> <https://x.com/fufatvcup>.

schools' competitions during the holiday period when kids are at home. Private schools are very interested in that. This all helps the sector to get stronger over time, more professional, more competitive.

FUFA has thus content to feed its various social media channels and can help other media outlets in Uganda and abroad with content provision (audio, video, photography, text). For example, media houses can send their questions for a player to FUFA when they cannot send their reporter, and FUFA media team helps with the content production, in various local languages. This evidently contributes to a vast, up-to-date media presence of football on various Ugandan media outlets. It stabilises and enhances the media coverage of the entire sector, uplifts the competitions, teams and players, generates public interest, and directly and indirectly supports the asset and brand building of a plethora of actors from national teams to clubs and players.<sup>8</sup> It thus enhances the commercial value of the sector.

Criticisms of FUFA that were articulated by some respondents include, inter alia:

- it favours particular clubs that have in-house connections and/or disadvantages competitor clubs/clubs that have a strained relation with FUFA/FUFA management, for example, regarding the games schedules, penalties for fans violence, players' transfer issues etc.; the issue here was how some actors in FUFA were seen to navigate the issue of: interests of the specific entities they are close to as individuals (particular clubs etc.) vs. interests of other members/stakeholders in the sector (including competitors to clubs that are in FUFA's good books) and wider sector development needs,
- it has various in-house conflicts of interests (especially regarding business and sports matters) and wrangles generally that affect, amongst others, its management/decisions,
- it is too clubs-leaning (e.g., in some disputes with players regarding pay/welfare issues); note though that some clubs reportedly feel that FUFA sides with players in some transfer disputes when the player wants to move to a club that is in FUFA's good books,
- it is opaque and not transparent and accountable regarding some financial matters,
- it causes pay disputes (paying some players who played for national team late and/or less than agreed),
- it is not responsive/effective enough in addressing problems in the sector (such as players' welfare issues; operationalisation of the health insurance coverage; youth development; The Cranes' performance),

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<sup>8</sup> The video production capacities and competencies allow FUFA also to do pieces such as this 'Exclusive: How Uganda Won 2023 U18 CECAFA Championship | Head Coach Morley Byekwaso! Narrates' (FUFA 2023d).

- it does not have the strategy and priorities right (for example does not adequately support grassroots developments or women football),
- it performs below expectations: For example, it was argued that it negotiated for less than value in the UPL StarTimes deal and was opaque in how it secured this deal in any way. There was some criticism aired in particular regarding details of some of the contracts with main sponsors and the details of the use of the sponsors' money. Further, FUFA is yet to produce a competitive Cranes team (pointing to problems regarding talent development, coach decisions, conflicts of interests, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

That said, none of these criticisms - and the underlying issues, shortcomings, problems and conflicts - seems to plunge FUFA into a more full-blown crisis of authority or leadership, however. Arguably, this was amongst others also because FUFA got many things up and running and right over the years and was overall a remarkably active, constructive and effective actor in that regard (also vis-à-vis comparator organisations including other sport federations in the country). Note also this observation by a journalist: 'The problems are well known but FUFA is functioning and creating tournaments every day. If people feel they can play football, they will be willing to ignore other critical matters.' Further, the FUFA media staff noted that the federation regularly responded to some of the criticisms on their various communication channels and invited stakeholders for discussions. This was also done in the debate about the StarTimes deal, with a 5-pages document titled '*Explaining the Star Times Deal*' and authored by FUFA President Magogo (Magogo 2018). The president regularly offered his analysis in talk shows (FUFA radio/TV and other channels).

### **Marketing at FUFA**

I now explore changes in FUFA's marketing affairs. Marketing at FUFA includes managing all commercial properties of the association and handling matters of branding, brand activation, brand visibility, identifying and pitching for sponsor partnerships, property packaging, and market research. FUFA properties are the various national teams and leagues - and FUFA wants to commercialise them. National teams include for example: the male and female senior teams (Cranes and Crested Cranes), U-23 years (Kobs), U-20 (Hippos), U-17 (Cubs), U-15 Years (Rhinos), the Sand Cranes (beach soccer), and the Futsal national team. The leagues include: UPL, Uganda Cup (currently sponsored by another South African multinational: Stanbic Bank)<sup>10</sup>, the FUFA big league, and FUFA Drums, amongst others.

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<sup>9</sup> See for one string of criticisms the columns by Ben Misagga - first vice president in charge of mobilization of the UPL club SC Villa by the time of research - in the weekly *The Observer* (e.g., Misagga 2023a).

<sup>10</sup> The prize money for the winner of the 2024 cup is reportedly 50m Ush (funded by Stanbic Bank and Kansai Plascon).

FUFA's marketing arm has evolved and professionalised over the years. There was no marketing directorate in 2013. 'Marketing was done part time: FUFA delegates did marketing, and then there was one marketing and events officer who also looked after hospitality', the FUFA marketing staff noted. Marketing has since transformed over the years and today is a core activity of the federation. According to this respondent, at the beginning companies that would become sponsors would pay rather little cash to FUFA but come with in kind contributions and a lot of investment into advertisement, namely brand activation. Major sponsors were critical to engage the public and boost interest and excitement about football. For example, then Cranes sponsor MTN, reportedly flew a helicopter over Kampala and dropped leaflets and free tickets for the next match. Notably, the deal with the next Cranes sponsor, Airtel, in 2013 signalled a shift: it brought a lot more money to FUFA from the sale of the sponsorship rights (UGX 1.5billion/b annually). Accordingly, FUFA thus realised that there was now significant money that can be made from sponsorship and used to develop the sector (Daily Monitor 2017). Cranes sponsor Airtel (2013-2022) - and the other major sponsors such as Nile Breweries – also focused on rallying nationwide support (e.g., across major regional towns) for the team, with campaigns linking to national, regional and ethnic sentiments and emotions.

With every contract renewal there is now an increment in the fee to be paid. In the case of Airtel in 2017, the fee increased from UGX 1.5b to UGX 2.5b annually, when they signed a deal for the next four years (2017-2021). Moving forward, FUFA, according to the marketing officer, aims to have as many long-term commercial partners (also smaller contributors) for the different national teams as possible and is trying to go for partnerships rather than sponsorships. This strategy is to avoid restrictive quasi-monopoly practices by the main sponsor, which bar competing brands from co-sponsoring.

We want to have as much funds as possible. The funds we get from FIFA, CAF, and government are quite stringent regarding what we can spend the funding on in terms of activities. The money from commercial partners gives us flexibility and helps us to roll out our sector strategy. We want to upgrade our current brands, have more brands and more properties (...) We can help companies to take their own brands to heights they have never seen and spread awareness about their brands across the country.

A good example for this brand enhancement effect is Airtel: the company managed to significantly challenge market leader MTN over the years, in part thanks to its engagement with football and sports generally. Another good example is Nivana, a water brand that is bottled by Crown Beverages Limited that also bottles Pepsi and Mirinda and is now the 'exclusive national teams water

partner'. In September 2021 it paid UGX 500m for a three-year deal. Nivana was a late entrant into a competitive water market in Uganda that has a number of established brands (Newz 2022). The deal with FUFA gives Nivana branding opportunities. FUFA also attracts and/or retains partners for talent feeder and local leagues, notably Airtel and its Rising Stars initiative, a series of regional tournaments for youth aged between 13 and 17, in place since the early 2010s (Uganda Tribune 2019).

According to a FUFA respondent, some companies prefer to look for short-term, one-off activities that do not last long; a one-day corporate tournament event or the FUFA annual award for example. This is also because the Ugandan economy has many subsidiaries/franchises of multinational companies, whose decisions are made by head offices. These companies are limited by parent companies in terms of sponsorship engagements, including amounts and periods. Often these companies do not want to spend a lot of money and/or commit for longer periods, it was noted.

FUFA instead is keen that its commercial sponsors and partners that buy commercial rights invest significantly in brand activation, and promotional activities. Brand activation is a cornerstone of contracts with sponsors, but costs can be high, and come on top of the partnership fee that a firm has to pay. Given these significant costs, a high return on investment (property value/added value to the brand) is thus crucial for the companies: a high increase in consumers or subscribers for example. FUFA hires research firm IPSOS to do brand analysis at the end of the year and to generate respective data about the commercial results that the sponsor/partner achieved thanks to its engagement in sponsoring football.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, this data is important for decision making regarding retaining and renewing (or terminating) relationships with FUFA's sponsors and partners. FUFA also conducts benchmarking/due diligence of interested sponsors – for example regarding their statutory obligations' status (tax compliance etc.) - to avoid problematic/non-compliant companies.

It attracts big companies offering popular everyday products and services for a larger section of the population, such as telecommunication services and drinks (water, soft drinks, alcohol). Arguably, the brand power of these well-known companies and their association with football/FUFA - in a wider context of high competition for sponsorship deals from other popular and competitive sports in the country (rugby, cricket, netball etc.) - reinforce the brand and commercial reputation of FUFA properties when it comes to sponsorship offers and negotiations. It arguably also helps other actors in the football sector (clubs etc.) in their efforts to attract commercial partners.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ug>.



FUFA's strong emphasis on the need for the sector to commercialise contributed, together with other factors, to a change in perception that was recognised by many respondents. Whereas in the past, football was regarded as a hobby, fun, charity, and a past-time activity, it is now widely regarded as a business, a job, an activity that can bring a person income, source of livelihood, business revenue, contacts, networks (friends, professionals), and, importantly, transformative life opportunities, especially for players (and their family too). 'We can get something out of football now', a football observer and fan noted and thus summed up similar views of many respondents. That football is now also regarded as 'a job' also means – as several respondents emphasised - that one has to show results, namely perform in this job, be it as player, manager, coach, marketing staff, or fans' chairman.

There was an increasing realisation of the commercial/economic value of football as a game and profession across Ugandan society (also among, for example, parents who send their young children to training sessions with view to future career/income opportunities). This was shaped by the growing awareness about the commercial benefits associated with leagues in especially Europe (notably wages and sign-on fees, especially of EPL players), increasing interest in and viewership of EPL due to strong marketing of multinational broadcasters (such as MultiChoice), an increase in betting, and, importantly, examples of Ugandan footballers (male and female) succeeding in domestic football and earning from their sports, going abroad (neighbouring Kenya or Tanzania or further abroad) to play professionally for good/top teams (earning good signing fees and/or salaries), succeeding there (winning trophies, awards), develop themselves as players, posting about their enhanced professional and private lives on social media etc. (see the top female striker Fazila Ikwaput for a recent example, below). This also hugely advanced the interest in matters of information, data, statistics, and tactics all used by actors to manoeuvre the world of football business. This contributed to some new habits and cultural dynamics in the context of football as lifestyle and as work; this is an example of global trends' spill overs to local football.

Finally, thanks also to FUFA's work Ugandan football is by early 2024 remarkably broad-based and linked to various values and aspirations: love, passion and aspirations for the game, pride in one's city, region, country and culture, professional opportunities, jobs, business, incomes, and profits, uniting communities and strengthening identities, showcasing, supporting and celebrating talent; inspiring youth through being a role model in one's home community (generational aspirations) and putting all regions on the map of national attention. Though by no means all-round, football (and to some extent other booming/commercialising sports) was characterised - especially compared to the economy generally - by a significant level of (i) meritocracy and chance for social mobility (up to working successfully at global level) as well as (ii) support for, mentoring and investment (notably

training) in a young person's sport development (as well as character); particularly at the top level of football. This arguably mattered a lot and was attractive, also given the high level of unemployment, income-poverty and exclusion, marginalisation in the country.

For example, holding top scorer positions persistently in Ugandan football (club, league, national team) attracted global attention of talent scouts and club management. This is evident in the case of top striker Fazila Ikwaput (winner of the Airtel-FUFA award of Best Female Player of 2017, and one of three nominees for the player of the year 2021 award). She was re-signed by Indian club Gokulam Kerala FC - three-times winner of the Indian Women's League - in early 2024, after an earlier engagement there in the late 2010s. She scored twice in her first game at her new club and was headline picture in the news (Scroll 2024). Ikwaput had before also played, amongst others, for clubs in Kazakhstan and Cyprus and the Ugandan female national champion 2022-23, Kampala Queens WFC.<sup>12</sup> It is notable that several Ugandan female players managed to make moves to top clubs in Kenya and Tanzania (Vihiga Queens FC, Simba Queens FC) that offer conducive conditions for players. Notably, there was recently also a move from a Vihiga player to Kampala Queens (Ntege 2024). Further, UPL-six-times-champion Vipers SC's top male striker in 2021/22, César Lobi Manzoki (Congo, national team: Central Africa Republic) - who was UPL's top goal scorer, player of the season, player with most assists in that season - made a move to China (Dalian Pro FC) in August 2022, earning Vipers a reported €200,000 (Senono 2022). This, inter alia, evidences that sustained and significant success in Ugandan domestic football can open doors for players to financially more rewarding assignments abroad. According to one respondent, UPL players earn between UGX 500,000 to 5,000,000 per month (about \$135-1,350, depending on club). In the top women league, players earn between UGX 300,000-700,000 per month (\$80-190). Female players who move abroad to clubs in Europe or Asia for example can earn between \$2,000-3,000 per month. Ugandan male players who play in leagues in Europe can earn between \$5,000-12,000 per month. Sign-on fees earnings for players can be substantial, ranging between UGX 200m and 500m (\$54,070-135,170). Next, I turn to the analysis of some of the pertinent dynamics at club level.

### **5.3. Dynamics at club level**

Ugandan clubs - say, in the UPL - are: community owned, owned by individuals or linked to a state agency (prisons, revenue authority, police, army). To better prepare and position themselves for

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<sup>12</sup> See for another example the path of national team goalkeeper Vanessa Edith Karungi who is captain at Danish first division club B93 (Mugalu 2022). See also Mugabi (2023a) regarding players' transfers abroad. See FUFA (2023e) for information about the domestic and foreign clubs that Uganda's best female footballers play for.

the new era of commercialisation, some clubs, (especially the financially more strong and stable ones), made a range of changes to address pressing issues of fan base, staff, finances, sponsors, and quality of the squad. Changes included the following: first, various clubs professionalised their teams and operations in the key areas such as media and PR, marketing, fan affairs/management, medical support, accounting, talent recruitment & development, and players' transfers.

Media and PR teams especially were strengthened comprehensively. This was seen to be crucial for improving the quality of media content production (more and better pictures, videos, and tweets), and to lift the club's visibility on social media. The aim was to enhance the followers' base gradually, and subsequently, based on strengthened visibility and fan base, to attract sponsors. Social media was identified as a core area for activities by clubs that desired to attract sponsors. Strong social media performance - combined with strong success in the sport - was seen as vital in this regard. This trend was accelerated during the COVID-19 lockdown months when clubs had to find a way to reach and stay in touch with fans at home, for instance through the launching of club TV (as KCCA did, see KCCA 2023). There were different ways of achieving that social media boost, but having skilled and committed personnel was key. At the time of this research, clubs having social media handlers had become the norm. The work of these competent and enthusiastic, young handlers ensured that teams provide updated, detailed, and slick mixes of texts, pictures and videos about the latest happenings in their clubs, on all sorts of platforms: from Facebook and Twitter to Tik Tok, WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram. The top domestic male and female teams had usually very strong social media presence (see KCCA, BUL, Vipers, and Kampala Queens, for example).

One UPL CEO reported that he hired not just a sports doctor, orthopaedic, and physiotherapist but also a full-time videographer, photographer, graphic designer, and social media handler. Previously, the club relied on a consultant doctor on retainer basis and had just one person handling PR and communication. The aim regarding communication and marketing was now to 'be present, make noise, be seen, do the right thing, build a brand, and get the numbers. Then a sponsor will identify us. If you aim to be number one in the country do something that reflects that identity' (CEO). The quote indicates that a club's social media presence had to be linked to matters of club identity, image and brand as well as the imagined and planned future trajectory of the club and its top team(s).

Social media presence and numbers became 'areas of reference' in talks with sponsors, given also the power of numbers; 'numbers don't lie', several respondents noted when they talked about this issue. Key in attracting sponsors was strong sports performance and club management but also how one engages fans and the general public about activities at the club. A media officer in one club

reported that the club invested in a strong online media presence on all major platforms as well as a strong website (according to this professional, as recent as 2017, hardly any club had a website). This club invested in media equipment and the production of the club's own, extensive content. This trend towards in-house production (instead of a reliance on hired freelancers for video production) was accelerated and intensified during the COVID19-lockdown period:

The club invested into a video camera in 2018 so we could produce and own the content. We invested in web storage as well. During the lockdown we needed to stay relevant, so we produced our own club TV and aired it on a TV channel. We benchmarked European clubs. We produced one hour of material every week, full with news about our players during lock down. Nowadays, we produce content about all club affairs: management, players, coaching team - all in the club participate in that.

According to several respondents, a club also has to make sure it appears on radio, the traditional media platform, given that smartphones and use of data bundles are less widespread in the country's rural areas for example. One media officer in another club mentioned that the upgrading of the media department was slow in that club. Management there needed considerable convincing to make media more of a priority and to invest in the required equipment, so as to fully respond to the heightened relevance (and potential) of pictures and videos, for fans but also players and coaches as well as sponsorship prospects:

Our management did not understand the importance of video footage. We told them: we need to show footage of what our players do on the pitch, during training and match day. We need to show the good action of a player, a nice kick or movement. Fans then come the next day to the pitch to witness such movements. Fans love action photos and videos of their players; that brings traffic on social media and more followers. Some players have thousands of fans and fans want to keep themselves updated and follow up to smallest detail. They want proof [of good action] by photo or video. They also like things like a little dance of the players after training. Players need pictures and videos too, to update their personal pages, and have memories: 'See my goal celebration!' Players are motivated to do it again [if there are pictures/videos of their good actions]. Players get demotivated if there are no pictures, no footage and fans go away if social media is dormant. Also, there are thousands of sport events every weekend. Without photos that one can give to media houses one is also not in dailies, no one is thinking about you.

This excitement and demand from fans for well-done action shots and video material - and the high intensity and crucial relevance of the social media world (in terms of quick delivery of material and updates to excite fans) - was much emphasised by journalists, photographers and other club media officers. After all, fans themselves used this material provided by clubs to post on their own social media channels, and thus in many cases also please their own followers, boost their profiles and push their followers' base.

The second challenge clubs had to tackle and respond to was the needed extension of the fan base. This was interlinked with the challenge around growing clubs' media presence. Increasing fan numbers was a crucial precondition for brand building and thus attracting and retaining sponsors. Several clubs reported that they tried to increase fan numbers via: (1) better club performance (including style of game, display, and tactics), (2) an attractive club image (such as a particular origin-story, value set and vision), (3) a better fan-club relationship (a sense of togetherness: we are one, we have one goal), (4) a better fan experience which also included to respond to the fans' search for a sense of (i) identity, belonging, significance, and meaning, (ii) shared beliefs and (iii) joint future building, in short, their search for a home in a wider sense, and (5) improvements in key management areas including players' welfare. It was about giving fans a feeling that the club is here to stay (namely has a stable financial base or is building one, will improve in various key areas, and will be competitive, i.e., capable of beating core rivals and competing for trophies).

Clubs invested in strengthening the relationship with fans, for example through registering fans and distributing fans membership cards; better, more regular communications; and a more dialogue-based relationship that included clubs listening to fans, involving fans more in club activities and showing appreciation for fans' loyalty (such as an end of season party, small gifts, or offering affordable season tickets). As a club media officer explained: 'fans are part of the club's journey - they are important. Fans are the number one sponsor of the team'. Another measure in this respect was outsourcing some club activities to fans and thus also allowing fans to get some material benefits (e.g., the opportunity to earn something) from being a fan of the club. This included fans: doing fan registration, running the public speaker/entertainment system during home matches, or getting involved in club merchandise sales (e.g., club-branded juice and other articles) through sales to their networks and retaining a percentage commission from the sales.

Further measures included providing support to fan groups so that they could create an exciting atmosphere before and during matches (for example with club flags, music instruments and a band), and travel to away matches. Other strategies included: (1) recruiting fans from villages surrounding

the club's base. In one example, the UPL club aimed to boost recruitment in a radius of up to 50-100km from the stadium; 'the fans in the village feel left out; we try to get them involved', the CEO noted. Other strategies were: (2) recruiting players from other regions in the country and from neighbouring countries so one can tap into that fan base of the player and her/his home area for future fan recruitment; (3) conducting pre-season training camps in a region of the country where one wants to build a (bigger) fan base; and (4) setting up fan representatives across the country.

Key was furthermore the provision of a more comprehensive and easily accessible package of information to fans, and constant updates and entertainment on social media. The club's public image was improved through regular visible Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the community for example, showing support to the sick in a hospital, contributing to a child cancer foundation, and donating food. The aim was, according to respondents (a fan, media officer, and CEO), to live and demonstrate the declared values and identity of the club and fan base outside the stadium, and thus show that the club is a good community member (and thus strengthen and extend the fan base).

Clubs also invested in their players' recruitment, development and retainment strategies, for example via building and formalising relationships with feeder schools and academies to have an inflow of young talented players that can help a club in the medium future (three to five years). This talent identification and development was about 'seeing far' - e.g., five years ahead - as a CEO noted. Several clubs have strategic partnership arrangements (memoranda of understanding), with selected secondary schools to identify and develop talent. KCCA is one club that is active on this front: it reported that the partnering Schools of Excellence get between 3-5% of the net transfer fee when one of their pupils is sold by the club in future (as an adult player). There is thus a growing feeder system developing.

One club, the already mentioned UPL winner 2021/22, Vipers SC, located on the outskirts of Kampala, is linked to a huge secondary school, St Mary's College Kitende. The chief club owner, Lawrence Mulindwa, FUFA's president up to 2013 and reportedly a ninety percent shareholder of Vipers, owns and runs the school (Namanya 2022). This, according to respondents, helps the club enormously regarding talent development and recruitment for the club (by way of school bursaries for footballers and other incentives), has produced several leading national players and has made the club apart of a larger business imperium that relies on multiple strong income streams. The club has also been very successful in selling talented players to clubs abroad in recent years. This has helped to fund the construction of its state-of-the-art stadium, the most advanced stadium in Uganda currently, and the one where the Cranes played their AFCON qualification matches in 2022 given

that the stadium meets CAF standards. The club expressed that transforming talented players into full professionals who can go into fully-fledged international careers at top clubs abroad is a key objective (New Vision 2018). Other clubs thus are benchmarking the successful Vipers talent development model and strategise about how to best develop their own model.

Youth football in the country is very dynamic at both the school and university level. Private secondary schools have for years increasingly used football to market their schools to parents, notably through ranking among top performers in national football competitions. They reportedly also compete in attracting talent through support packages (scholarships, and other incentives) to young players whom they want to attract to boost the school's performance in competitions. Schools have also embraced partnerships and cooperation with clubs. This in turn boosts schools' reputation and attractiveness to parents - leading to more pupils recruited in the context of commercialisation of education (and a corresponding mushrooming of private schools). FUFA was criticised by some respondents for not investing enough from the sponsorship money that they received into youth football and talent development at the grassroots level (e.g. Misagga 2023a).

Some clubs improved their players' welfare to enhance players' satisfaction, motivation, morale and, thus, performance on the pitch. One club for instance boosted its allowances system and introduced health insurance cover that included a certain number of the player's family members. Financially supporting a player during a costly and lengthy recovery from a major injury (and showing patience during the recovery period) - instead of declining to shoulder the heavy medical bills and cutting loose the player - was also a reported change in practice in this regard. It is however unclear how widespread this change is across the UPL, for example. 'The player gives us 100 per cent on the pitch so we have a duty to support him and give 100 per cent too. Gone are the days when we just terminated a contract and let the player rot', a CEO reasoned. Club representatives at times detailed the cases where they provided good support to injured players, over a long recovery period. Such improved packages and care - and general payment predictability and stability - were highly attractive and motivating for players. Financially resourceful and reliable clubs in the UPL were the minority, about one third of the league by 2022: Vipers, KCCA, URA, BUL and Arua Hill were mentioned by respondents in the list of financially more stable clubs that generally pay wages reliably. These clubs were generally also top contenders in the UPL the time (some with strings of success to show).

Many UPL clubs however struggled with finding the resources to fund the budget to play the season. Owning and running a sports team in Uganda was considered 'A case of losses' as a recent

press analysis put it in the sports page headline of the day's issue ('Is it Worth it? the pain of owning a sports team in Uganda, solutions'). It was estimated that a football team has an expenditure of about UGX 100-142m per month, that is about UGX 1b for a season (see also appendix 2). For comparison, the UPL prize money for the champion in 2022/23 was UGX 60m and the annual pay from the broadcast sponsor is at around UGX 95m. The gap can be significant and has to be filled by owners, corporate sponsors if any, or other revenue streams. Many clubs are vulnerable to sudden adverse changes in owners' abilities (and that can include state institutions) to fund the club to the usual level (see below, New Vision 2024).

Clubs have also invested in their ability to sell strong players at a high price to clubs abroad. There have been several transfers abroad in the past years to neighbouring countries as well as leagues in Europe. Top clubs can make between \$50,000-220,000 in a good deal, which substantially grows a club's annual budget and allows for investment into club operations and infrastructure. This has raised interest in this part of football business - 'there is money in football now', was often remarked in interviews. Good deals were however rare. A FUFA statistic suggested about half a dozen commercially substantial transfers in the last two to four years. Many players transferred abroad without an income for their previous club, according to a FUFA staff member.

The transfer-successful clubs were strengthening their system of talent scouting and development and players' sales to benefit more from this business avenue in future. Other clubs aspire to do the same, respondents noted. That could mean, as mentioned, building better links to feeder schools (and scouts, agents), but also preparing young players better for the move and professional life abroad, especially in terms of (i) understanding the contractual obligations of a professional player and (ii) mind-set development (one club reported to have such a form of player education in place, see below).

One related challenge that clubs faced - and that motivated this new system of educating players on such commercially relevant off-pitch aspects - was that in the past talented Ugandan players at times did not fulfil their contract (or otherwise underperformed) after joining a new foreign club, for example in several North African clubs. There was a transfer fee, a sign-on-fee and a lot of expectations after strong performances in Uganda, but the player had issues once abroad. Some of these players abandoned their clubs a short period into their contracts and returned to Uganda (where they at times could rebuild their career, see e.g., FUFA 2022c). This happened for various reasons, including, according to respondents, insufficient inability to adapt professionally to the new situation including dealing with sports setbacks (not being in the first squad), a different climate and culture, the absence of family, and homesickness. This has affected players' careers but also the respective



home clubs' finances and reputation. It was regarded as bad for a club's relations with the foreign club of concern and could mean the loss of substantial money (notably payment of below par the agreed amount). It also damages the club's image as a business partner for foreign clubs in matters of players' sales, a club's finance officer noted.

One club had more than one case of such sour player sales deals. It responded by training players in professionalism and contracts literacy (terms, duties, responsibilities). The training was to ensure that a player understood the contract and committed to honouring it, especially in foreign clubs that had paid good money to the club and the player (sign-on fee). This sort of training to more holistically develop professional and educated players was regarded as an important investment into the future of clubs, players and sector at large. That is, in terms of the transfer-deals-making ability of a club, good relations with purchasing clubs (reputation build up), securing a (high) profit concerning a club's investments into players (players as assets), converting commercial possibilities into actual future sales, and the long-term career prospects of players and thus football development in the country.

In the domain of player transfers, notable problems, according to some respondents, included: player poaching by other clubs, agents 'confusing' players and/or parents (affecting matters of parental consent for youth players for example), and conflicts of interest at FUFA, such as on matters of transfer signings (given that some officials have reportedly club ownership interests, and agents pursue their interests in FUFA too). More generally, several respondents noted that a problem in Ugandan football is the absence of a technical director/sports director in many clubs which negatively affects matters of team and players' development; this constitutes a significant gap. One respondent also pointed to the need for more commercial directors that develop a club's business with a clear product portfolio and assets.

Notably, one club reported the use of a tracker system in the players' shirts which enables them to produce players' statistics. This has proven vital for sales' negotiations, but also for the work of coaches. Such statistics include how much and fast a player runs in a match. Having them available during a player sales pitching and negotiations is a strong winning asset for the club. This builds into boosting the selling points and negotiation position, thus a high price for the player (e.g. by over \$100,000), according to one interviewee. Such technology is expected to gradually be used by more clubs in future, financing permitted. The national team reportedly uses this technology as well.

Clubs furthermore invested in the attractiveness of their stadia so as to draw in more fans. The night-time games at KCCA referred to earlier, (see also below) have increased attendance and thus revenue significantly: for example, a KCCA game against URA that was played with a 4pm start previously generated UGX 11m, against UGX 20m when it was played with a 7pm start this season. The extra costs for light and security for the night game was UGX 1m, hence, the club made UGX 8m extra revenue in that game. The fan base appreciates the late start because of work commitments up to 6pm on weekdays. The club sees night games as significant pillars of future match day provision. This will further be strengthened when the stadium revamp project at a total cost of UGX 55b is finalised in the coming years (phase one ends towards the end of 2024) and the stadium capacity increased to eventually about 11,000 seats and new hospitality facilities (clubhouse, gym, Damba 2023). Kampala could soon see more nighttime sports events including nighttime football (e.g. UPL games) with the opening of the revamped Nakivubo stadium - redeveloped by business tycoon Hamis Kiggundu (also known as Ham), thus now called Hamz stadium - in the central business district of Kampala (the 20,000-seater stadium is expected to have capacity for over 30,000 people upon full completion). How this plays out, however, will also depend on the costs of hosting UPL games there, namely, prices charged for stadium use; starting with the 2024/25 season UPL games will be played there - and also at the reopened renovated Mandela National Stadium (Namboole) - and this should boost the league. Nighttime games might be particularly attractive for TV broadcasting. Floodlights are used in many Futsal and small sided games facilities (artificial turf and other essential infrastructure) that have opened in Kampala and beyond (Nsubuga 2023).

Clubs also invested in the appeal of their advertisement and merchandise, for example the quality and design of the club jerseys. A case in point: in 2020 the two top clubs Vipers and KCCA launched the initiative 'Wear Your Local Jersey' to encourage fans to wear their club's jersey on a Friday and post pictures about it on social media (Sang 2020e). This was a widespread practice across many clubs by 2022 and reportedly enthused fans. Another promotion measure from KCCA gives free access to home games to all undergraduate university students who show up wearing the club's season jersey (attracting the Kampala students crowd has remained a challenge nonetheless) and also offers free entry to pupils that wear school uniforms, while another club offers free access for women and students. This club also used an electronic ticket system provided by a specialist firm to ease ticket sales and smoothen ticket revenues, given that this system allowed to cut leakages due to gate staff malpractices within the old paper system. KCCA provided statistics about the club's revenues in the years 2022 and 2023 (see appendix 1). The table helps to get an understanding about the contribution of different commercial activities (namely ticket, merchandise and players sales, sponsorships,) to total revenues. Corporate sponsorship for example contributes around 13%). It also shows the

actual/potential relevance of players sales: a sale of one very good player (at \$50,000 upwards) could substantially contribute to overall revenues of a club (even more in clubs with smaller overall revenues) and thus stabilise club finances. Appendix 2 provides statistics about estimated monthly expenditures of a (UPL) football club in Uganda and gives again insights into, amongst others, the relative weight of each cost item.

#### **5.4. Regional dynamics**

Moreover, fan numbers and excitement were increased in significant ways by a wave of booming football in several regions outside the Greater Kampala region. By 2022, the UPL benefited from this trend: the growth and increasing strength of UPL clubs in the east (located in the town Jinja at the source of the river Nile) and north-west (in the West-Nile town Arua) for example, has added significant value to the league in terms of enhanced sport competition (league winner unpredictability) and fandom, thus overall league vibrancy. These clubs give the UPL much needed variety, enthusiasm and ambition. They also set a positive example vis-a-vis the fan base problems of some other UPL clubs, notably state agencies' sponsored clubs in Kampala such as Police FC, Maroons FC (Prison) or Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) FC. Various sporting rivalries have increased in intensity with the rise and challenge from the regions vis-à-vis the clubs based in Kampala: east vs central rivalries for example, or local derby rivalries in Jinja and Arua. All this attracted crowds because people were drawn in by the opportunity to watch and cheer players from their own town and region. Despite this, the UPL is still largely a Greater Kampala affair. The western region had no UPL presence at all, in the 2022/23 season after two clubs from there were relegated. Two western teams, Mbarara FC and Kitara FC, made it into the UPL for the season 2023/24. Kitara, for example, is a community club based in Hoima district (which is at the heart of the new oil economy in the country), has strong spectator numbers at home games, and calls itself also 'The Royals' and 'The Pride of Bunyoro'. The far eastern part of the country (Mbale/Soroti) currently has no UPL presence. This might change in the future as clubs there might emulate the role models of recently established successful clubs from other regions (such as BUL FC).

By late 2022 this was the state of affairs: Jinja now has three UPL clubs (BUL FC, Gaddafi FC, and Busoga/Jinja SS) and Arua two clubs (Arua Hill FC and Onduparaka FC). The two cities are setting themselves up as football mecca of the future and some of these clubs are articulating their ambitions to be top national competitors and trophy winners. BUL FC - thanks also to strong

management and sponsorship - has recently been in the top area of the UPL table and won the Stanbic Uganda Cup last season (against UPL champion 2021/22 Vipers).<sup>13</sup>

All these clubs have distinct, locally based ownership and sponsorship dynamics. Three of these clubs have a major commercial sponsor. BUL for example is a company club that was started by workers of the cooking oil manufacturing giant, BIDCO. BIDCO is the full sponsor and currently covers the entire annual budget of the club. The full name of the club is BIDCO Uganda Limited Jinja Football Club, abbreviated as BUL. There is a close association between the company and the club. Getting a contract as a player in such a financially stable club is regarded as a very big achievement. While a factory job in Jinja reportedly pays around UGX 240,000-300,000 (before tax) a player at BUL reportedly earned UGX 1.2-1.5m after tax, plus benefits (health insurance, and other incentives) and BUL has one of the best match allowances in UPL (UGX 400,000 for a win).

Gaddafi FC's sponsor is another manufacturing company in Jinja, Modern Group. Notably, when the club wanted to change its name to reflect the sponsor better, from Gadaffi FC to Modern FC, FUFA rejected the name change. Gaddafi FC was set up by a senior army officer from the army base in Jinja, who is the club owner and president. Gadaffi FC is therefore linked to the army (and government more broadly), but not institutionally. This has helped Gaddafi FC in various ways to become a professional, attractive, successful club in the city, not least because it has soldiers in Jinja as a fan base. Soldiers from across the country are also recruited as fans, for example when they spend time in Jinja during army courses or exercises.

Jinja has a significant manufacturing base. This has boosted the commercial fortunes of BUL and Gaddafi. Both clubs have strengthened their fan, infrastructure and sponsorship base and are eyeing to competing for the UPL trophy in the next two to five years, on the back of secure, long-term oriented, relatively strong sponsorship and growing fan bases. BUL has by now secured 4 titles as a club (FUFA Super 8 Winners 2023, FUFA Juniors League Winners 2022/23 and 2018/19, and Uganda Cup Winners 2021/22) and is at the top of the UPL table at the beginning of 2024. With several strong clubs in a city/region (such as Jinja/eastern Uganda in this case), inter club rivalries between such clubs will also be about who is the best in the region. BUL refers to itself as 'Eastern Giants' for example.

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<sup>13</sup> Blacks Power FC from the northern city Lira, a new entry into UPL in season 2022/23 could turn out to be a similar asset in a few years. The team was relegated at the end of the season but might well soon come back to the UPL.

Infrastructure matters and the lack of club owned stadia have slowed down the process of commercialisation at these clubs, but this is being addressed by some of them. By the time of research in 2022, Arua Hill SC had a construction company as main sponsor; the company executed some government programmes in the region, and reportedly has supportive government links. A construction company is a non-traditional sponsor in football. This is indicative of the potential power of the sport to cut across many sectors in matters of sponsorship and partnership. As mentioned earlier, Arua Hill is in the process of building its own large, state of the art stadium that promises to be an example in the country and wider East African region.<sup>14</sup> The club has diversified significantly, offering a range of products. Fans and members of the public can not only buy jerseys but also a club branded juice, and real estate products just outside Arua. It was also offering fans discount cards to for shopping in the city supermarkets and shops. The club played its first UPL season and performed very well. This mix of strong football performance and philosophy, plus strong marketing, fans relations and management, an attractive club-origin story and future-outlook has attracted more fans, in Arua and across the country.

The other Arua based club, Onduparaka, has a huge and enthusiastic following and a distinct origin- story based in a particular part of the town: linked to the struggle of the less privileged, and to an agricultural product grown in the area, sorghum (*Ondu*). The latter is reflected in the club's name. This resonance with a particular locality and social groups are the two key assets in seeking sponsorship and commercialisation. The club has struggled with financial matters (and fan violence) but it is hoped that players' sales might become an important pillar of the club income in a few years. Arua - at the crossroads of Uganda, South Sudan and Congo - has a lot of football talent in the wider region to draw from, according to several respondents.

Note that by early 2024 one of the two Arua-based UPL clubs, Onduparaka FC, had been relegated and the other one, Arua Hills, was at the bottom of the table. Both clubs were previously regarded as success cases but had suffered ownership/management related (notably financial) setbacks in 2022/23 period. By late 2023, the previously much hyped and praised stadium project was under investigation by government and calls were made for the anti-corruption unit to come in (suggesting higher level wrangles and fall-out in the various stakeholders (NTV Uganda 2021a, 2021b, 2021c vs. 2023). The owner of Arua Hills, a construction business' tycoon, reportedly moved on, leaving the future of club, stadium and the sports city project (and respective investments) highly uncertain. These two cases – and other cases such as Police FC that went into trouble also due to

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<sup>14</sup> <https://x.com/aitajoel/status/1531970744577576960>.

issues with the financial provision (notably unpaid for months) and was eventually relegated in the 2021/22 season - show the fragility of various ownership/management models, including the ones concentrated on the individual founder(s)/owner (Ssenoga 2022; Seaman 2023; Mwambu 2023; Bbosa 2023; Misagga 2023b, 2024; New Vision 2024). The decline of its two UPL clubs is a setback for this reportedly football-enthusiastic and talent-rich region.

## **5.5. Women football**

The popularity of women's football is on the rise. Fans were inspired by its technical and gender aspects. A media officer of a women's club reported; 'fans get excited and comment: wow, what a goal, we like this. Fans love nice goals and techniques, a nice cross into the box. They wonder: can a female player control and pass the ball like a man? Can they have chest control? How do they do it? Can the goalkeeper do a nice save?' This club had a policy that players had to be on social media too and brand, promote and market themselves. As the officer explained: 'I advise players: market yourself. I help them to increase their visibility, to be known by fans and public, and generate their own following. Once a player has her own followers on social media – there is an opportunity to attract sponsorship. It gives you deals.' The logic was to do well, make yourself known, increase follower numbers and thus your attractiveness and readiness for sponsorships. To give an example of follower numbers: Kampala-based team She Corporates, the 2021/22 winner of the FUFA Women Super League (FWSL) (but relegated after the 2022/23 season), had by late 2022, 8,900 followers on Facebook and about 3,260 on X. The team's key player - and MVP (Most Valued Player) FUFA Women Super League 2021/22, and USPA (Uganda Sports Press Association) best female footballer year 2022 - Phiona Nabbumba (currently playing for first division Danish club B93 Women FC) had almost 1,800 twitter followers (15.12.2022; 2,900 by early 2024).

The 2022/23 champion, Kampala Queens WFC, has nearly 9,000 followers on X by early 2024.<sup>15</sup> FUFA President Magogo is owner/patron of the club. The club has partnered with KCCA FC (for a period of three years, starting July 2023), following the new regulations by FUFA, CAF, and FIFA that clubs are required to have/be associated with a women's team. As input into the partnership, KCCA provides Kampala Queens technical expertise and knowledge exchange (on matters of training, and other aspects) as well as stadium use. The clubs see this as promotion of women football and gender equality in the country. The women team could in future principally also play night games at the stadium (if FUFA makes such a provision in the scheduling), a respondent from KCCA

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<sup>15</sup> <https://en-gb.facebook.com/shecorporatefc/>; <https://mobile.twitter.com/shecorporatefc/>; <https://twitter.com/nabbumbaphiona8>; <https://twitter.com/FcKampala>

reasoned. UPL clubs starting or partnering with a women team was a wider trend in 2023, following the new regulations (Kiyaga 2023a; Tabu 2023c).

Given that Ugandan women's football is (i) widely played in schools and universities, (ii) equipped with skilled, committed and charismatic players, (iii) successful internationally, and (iv) popular domestically with a growing, enthusiastic, young fan base and engaging league competitions - and good coverage of the top league in national media - it will be interesting to see which companies will take the lead in as the top-league sponsors and major club sponsors or contract players for product endorsement deals that include big billboard posters. Particularly, it will be interesting to see how and why, including with what sort of rationale and marketing slogan, the sponsors will engage with women football in the country. Winning trophies or going far in international competitions and getting major awards such as player of the season, will likely be a key ingredient for achieving professional and commercial success. The international success of the national female netball team can be a yardstick and incentive to invest in and sponsor female soccer. It will help more women footballers to make the move abroad, to a football position that pays a livelihood, into positions that can pay \$1,500-2,000 a month.

By the time of research 2022-24 hardly any top league club had a sponsor. However, in late 2023 the top team Kampala Muslim Ladies FC (linked to a school Kawempe Muslim SS, a football trophy winning stable) signed a significant deal effective from season 2023/24 with the beverages/food company Harris International based in Kawempe, same locality as the school. A Proudly Ugandan company, in the fast-moving-consumer goods (FMCG) sector, Harris International manufactures and markets the brands Krystal Mineral Water and Riham (the company's flagship brand) in Uganda and across East Africa. The other sponsor of the team is Shakazulu Foods. The Krystal logo is on the jersey. The club is reportedly signing foreign players to strengthen the squad.<sup>16</sup> It produces TV broadcasting. The senior team was leading the top women league by late January 2024 (Mugabi 2023b; NTV Uganda 2024a).<sup>17</sup>

The various media channels and formats also build up and strengthen the public profile of the key players and major role models. The popular newspaper *Daily Monitor* reports at great length about

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<sup>16</sup> Notably, one of the former players, Yudaya Nakayenze, returned to the club in 2023 after studies in USA. She that won the club multiple titles between 2015-18, then went to Uganda Christian University for a season and later to the USA, where she played College football (Senoga 2023). Regarding Proudly Ugandan see among others the Buy Uganda Build Uganda (BUBU) Policy (Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives 2014).

<sup>17</sup> See also Hariss' company website (<https://www.harissint.com/about>). Notably it is reported there: 'In 2020, Oppenheimer Partners; a global investment business with roots firmly in Africa, invested in Hariss International Limited.' Accordingly, this has strengthened the growth drive of Harris.

women's football and regularly runs detailed long-read stories about particular women players. On some days, there was almost equal coverage of the weekend's men and women football games. The extensive media celebration of a women footballer who scored her 100<sup>th</sup> goal, the iconic Hasifah Nassuuna (the national team captain by April 2022, who started her senior career at Kampala Muslim LFC and currently plays for Kampala Queens WFC) is an example of how extensive, broad-based and enthusiastic the media coverage of women football can be currently.

Women's football is very well supported and promoted via social media spaces by committed journalists, public relations officers and others. The top women's league is not broadcast on StarTimes TV though and has not yet secured a title sponsor. A few games including the final-day league decider between first and second table placed She Corporates and Kampala Queens (both teams had the same points before final match day) are however broadcast live on FUFA TV. The CECAFA tournament 2022 - played in front of a significant fan crowd at the FUFA technical centre in Njeru - was broadcast fully by FUFA as well. This helps to attract more fans to the game, live and online. Fan bases for women's football are increasing and dedicated, also due to attracting more males' spectators. The matches of the top league are rarely followed by more than 500 people though.

One young journalist, Omulongo Hassan Wasswa, has for years now, specialised in providing information and analysis about women's football in Uganda, and also subsequently the east African region (and the whole continent). He had around 8,000 followers on Facebook and 2,260 on X before his account was hacked. He is now rebuilding his follower base again. Wasswa provides a lot of content on WhatsApp.<sup>18</sup> This online centre of information and analysis can be regarded as a hub, a one stop centre of women football in Uganda (and arguably the region). It helps to stabilise, grow and popularise women football, by boosting football following (and pleasing thus retaining followers), excitement, confidence, involvement, and communication, among others. The journalist provides reporting of upcountry matches (also to identify and showcase young talents there), keeps and shares statistics about players performances (vital also for players' negotiations with clubs) and reports about the performance of Ugandan women players abroad who are based at clubs in Denmark, Cyprus or Kenya for example. Wasswa also advises female players, works for football bodies, and is present in TV studio discussions. He is PR adviser for several Ugandan footballers, some of whom are among the highest social media following (e.g., Aucho Khalid, Watenga Ismail, Zainah Nandede).

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<sup>18</sup><https://twitter.com/MulongoSports1?t=st3GDiaIL3J46My6PhVCxA&s=09> .



A lot of the work of experts such as Wasswa is currently based on volunteerism, and only partly paid-for (funds from well-wishers, and appreciating players,). The financing model of the online service is not secured. Thus, strong performance and relevance have not yet translated into funding or sponsorship deals for this content, vibe and community provider (see also example of Tisini in Kenya below). But the plan here is to build a commercially viable activity, format and entity and thus be able to expand and run the service effectively, extensively and sustainably. Wasswa has travelled to Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda to establish and nurture networks with the female football scene – including associations - there. One motivation of such trips, he notes, is to become the best, the most followed journalist in the CECAFA region for women football. Talking about a work trip to Dar es Salaam recently, he explained: ‘I have to push myself, promote my brand, make sure the brand is ok’.

Significantly, Wasswa was in September 2022 appointed as the CEO of Uganda Women Football Association (UWFA), at the age of 25 (NTV Uganda 2022a). This might well make him the youngest sports/football official in such a leading association management position in the region. The appointment is a positive sign: that relevant administrative actors reward a young, media-savvy professional with such a responsibility and task and trust him with steering and advancing the sector’s development in his position. And that a highly skilled, committed and charismatic-diplomatic professional is recognised and appreciated for the invaluable contribution to the sector in this growth phase of women football in the country. Wasswa also now works as media officer for the current national title holder Kampala Queens and aims to pursue further studies in sports management.

## **5.6. Sponsors**

Many sponsors are joining the football sector or renewing their engagements with it. Sponsors are varied and include firms from across the economic spectrum. Sponsors in the UPL at both the league and club level have increased to over 40, from less than 10 a few years ago. They include firms from sectors such as: telecommunications, construction, cement production, agro-processing, beverages (sodas, energy drinks, water, beer), painting, banking, insurance, betting, electricals and more. There is now a combination of multiple multinational and national brands as major sponsors related to the UPL and this is crucial to injecting money, vitality, and confidence into the sport and the future trajectory of football in the country. There is no over-reliance on betting firms in terms of sponsorships. A recent press report on UPL clubs’ finances ahead of the 2023/24 season was titled ‘Most clubs sponsored...’ and stated that the vast majority of clubs had a sponsor, beyond the general StarTimes broadcasting sponsorship for the league. It provided the figures of sponsorships in detail (Business Focus 2018; Mwanguhya 2023).

Notably, in 2022 UPL secured MTN as the Official Broadcast Sponsor of the StarTimes UPL. The beer brand Pilsner - owned by Uganda Breweries Ltd., a subsidiary of East African Breweries Limited (EABL), in which Diageo, a British multinational alcoholic beverage company, is a majority shareholder - also joined as a man of the match sponsor. Sponsors working together and pooling resources to build the sector – instead of one major sponsor operating exclusively – was seen as important by respondents who represented UPL sponsors. There was a perception that the sector is still in its early stages commercially and requires a lot of work, thus necessitating an alliance of partners, meaning that one major sponsor alone could not lift the sector successfully. One way in which sponsors came in was awards. Sponsors have supported several awards categories (player of the month, the season, real stars sports awards and others) and this has given the sector a sense of vibrancy, recognition for achievement and media visibility. Awards have also been much liked by players. Cash awards can be between UGX 100,000 to 1,000,000. Notably, other global brands and multinationals were active in the football and wider sports sector too: Guinness, also owned by the Diageo, run respective marketing campaigns. The multinational bank Standard Chartered (UK), commercial partner of Liverpool FC, was sponsor of a Futsal tournament (five-a-side), the Standard Chartered Cup, that was in its 6<sup>th</sup> edition in 2023. It was linked to a ‘Road to Anfield’ campaign, i.e., the chance to win a team ticket to travel to the UK to go to watch a Liverpool match and benefit from a training session with Liverpool FC legends and coaches at the club’s academy (see e.g. Kule 2023; Kibuuka 2023a).<sup>19</sup>

The sponsor spectrum in Uganda is more varied than in Kenya where there is an over-reliance on betting firms. That the UPL attracts the biggest brands in Uganda across sectors (again, while other sports are also seeking sponsorship funding from the same brands) is very different from Kenya where major sponsors, other than some betting companies, have largely shunned the KPL (with notable exceptions). This is due to long-standing management issues and wrangles in the sector there, including more recent problems with the management of the football federation (peaking around 2021-22) which led to a prolonged period of uncertainty, negative image and stalemate. However, since 2023, a notable revival is taking place in Kenya, as highlighted hereinafter.

There was agreement among many respondents that football can significantly enhance brand visibility and loyalty in the country or in a given region that a firm operates in and thus targets for promotional activities. Given that popular clubs have thousands of followers on social media (and hundreds of thousands of followers in exemplar clubs), a club can link firms and fans including

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<sup>19</sup> See further: <https://www.diageo.com/en/our-brands/brand-explorer/guinness>; <https://www.sc.com/ug/about-us/>.

corporate leaders and influencers (who again have many social media followers) connecting a wide and important spectrum of Ugandan society. ‘Football can make brands. If brands work closely with clubs, all brands are acceptable to Ugandans. All brands can get a lot of followers and supporters through a connection with football’, a sports official noted. The press played a role here too, giving football including the UPL significant coverage, thus visibility to sponsors. Sponsors - similar to politicians - could project a particular image via engagement in football/sports: as supporters and enablers of communities, regions, nation (national pride), unity/togetherness at national, regional and local level (beyond/overcoming political and other divisions), talent, youth, development (economic, social, etc) and so on.

Multinationals (or local bottlers of) Coca Cola and Pepsi are more engaged with the younger segment of the sector. They are main sponsors of school competitions and the university league and have achieved strong TV and print/social media visibility (with logo display) from that. University games players wear branded Pepsi T-shirts for example. Spectator numbers and event vibrancy (in this major cohort for many brands/firms) - judged from TV news footage - was remarkable (Abdusalam 2022). One sports marketing expert noted that one reason why companies try to sponsor an entire competition (in this case exclusively) is so that they can organise these competitions themselves (with the help of specialist marketing firms for example) and thus have control over various aspects of the competition and how it advances the firms’ marketing interests. Pepsi’s water brand Nivana is also a sponsor of The Cranes. Some owners of major companies had close ties with the party in power, the NRM - notably Amos Nzeyi, the Executive Chairman Crown Beverages Ltd. that bottles Pepsi, Mountain Dew, Mirinda, Evervess Tonic and Nivana Water - and this arguably eased sponsorship arrangements (Crown Beverages Limited 2022). There is a converge of business and political interests in football, in particular its youth section. Uganda has reportedly the second-youngest population in the world; 78% of its population is estimated to be below the age of 35 and 55% below the age of 18 (median age: 15.7 years; UNICEF Uganda 2024; Burton 2017; Troyer 2020).

Notably, major corporate sponsors promote the ambitions of clubs they engage in. For example, the Jinja clubs, Gaddafi and BUL reported that their industry sponsors want them to compete for and win the UPL premiership. Accordingly, companies reason that they are number one in their sector, product line or segment (such as cooking oil in the case of BIDCO), so want the club to also be ambitious, a champion, and to send players to the national league. They want clubs to deliver top results and become achievers. The over-riding interest is companies associating with – building up or backing - a winning club, thus deriving mileage in terms of sales and market share. They want to

benefit from the symbolic capital of a champion/rising star. The vast amounts in sponsorship form a substantial percentage of the company's marketing and brand visibility budget.

Arguably, this leads to competition among sponsoring companies, i.e., who will partner with and back the next champion? Foreign firms in particular try to grow their brand through football, including lesser-known firms and brands or brands that have just entered the Ugandan market from abroad. Market leaders in a particular sector seek to partner with leading or promising teams to display, in tandem, a spirit of ambition, competence, skill, leadership, and power (we are number one in our business - we want this team to be number one too).

The sponsors' financial input and ambition projection (expressing expectations regarding sports performance) seem to trigger positive club dynamics including ambitious target setting. This is evident in several clubs from the regions - on the back of significant sponsorships - challenging top Kampala clubs that have won trophies for years. This might become a dynamic that spreads and intensifies over the years. This would benefit more clubs as more business champions (or those aspiring to become one) look for future football champions, as they seek to reach, defend and extend their market dominance in their sector or major product line in the country, and, in some cases, the wider eastern African region.

A good example of a major sponsor from a more non-traditional sector is Plascon, a South African company that operates across southern, eastern and western Africa, and is in its own words the 'largest paint manufacturing company in Uganda'.<sup>20</sup> The firm effectively markets itself through a range of sports sponsorships, including football (Kyazze 2023a). It is a major sponsor of champion team Vipers – at UGX 400m for two years, a deal signed in early 2021. The company signed its second deal with a UPL club in early 2022: a three-year sponsorship deal with Arua Hill at UGX 500m (Muhimba 2021, 2022). The remarks of the Plascon managers at the signing of the deal fits the pattern identified here: an ambitious, achieving, leading firm looks for the same qualities in a football club. For Plascon, the reason for entering the sponsorship was the 'good corporate governance exhibited by the club and achievements in a very short time'. In his words:

Kansai Plascon is excited to partner with Arua Hill Sports Club. Sport is a unifying factor that brings people together. Kansai Plascon as a product is super delighted to be associated with sports development. The West Nile region has been very supportive in using Kansai Plascon and this is

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<sup>20</sup> <https://en-gb.facebook.com/plasconuganda/>.

payback time (...) The decision to work together was very easy. The club has got the attention of everyone in a short time across the country. They have the *same DNA like us*. We are happy to be here. (Isabirye 2022, emphasis added).

Another news report about the sponsorship signing quotes a Plascon manager saying that sports provides ‘the brand a platform to actively engage with its customers *at their passion points*’ (emphasis added). And further, that the company hopes that ‘global icons’ will one day come from the club: ‘this is a start of a long-term partnership that we hope will give birth to various icons that will fly the country’s flag internationally (...) we are very proud to be part of the process that will discover and nurture the *next global icons*, hopefully some will come from Arua Hill FC’ (Sports Ocean Uganda 2022, emphasis added). Further notable: the coating manufacturing company gave the Vipers stadium a fresh coat of paint and uses the painted stadium walls to showcase its product range. The marketing slogans displayed in the stadium combine paint and football matters. The sponsor here advertises its logo and product marketing lines beyond the traditional brand display areas (jersey, perimeter advertising boards) onto stadium walls.

Another example: the floodlight-games at KCCA FC. This is possible thanks to the support of the club’s newly signed jersey sponsor, Chinese multinational Chint Electric Uganda, an energy solutions company. The company has installed state-of-the-art floodlights in the club’s MTN Phillip Omondi Stadium, in Lugogo. The two partners signed a three-year deal in 2022, up to 2025. KCCA’s main jersey sponsor since season 2022/23, Chint Electric, can advertise using the stadium floodlights during the club’s night games. Again, the company can showcase its products at large scale format - beyond jerseys and perimeters - while top league football is played live. Kampala City Lord Mayor and KCCA patron Erias Lukwago remarked that this floodlights provision is a ‘huge milestone in the area of soccer and in the development of sports generally in our country’ (Ainembabazi 2022). This initiative is very high-profile and linked to the aspirations of national and local development, thus enhancing brand visibility and awareness in a significant way (Isabirye 2023).

These examples show that milestone-type stadium infrastructure facelifts agreed to in sponsorship deals are used by (in this case especially foreign) companies to showcase their products in a large-scale way. Notably, the company - whose slogan is ‘switch to the best’ - taps into the huge twitter following of KCCA: 83,900 versus 238 followers for the company as of the start of the partnership (26.10.2022). The sponsor’s product (lighting solutions, floodlights) was right away integrated into a KCCA bragging tweet against reigning champion Vipers, and #switchtothebest was

used in KCCA-Chint tweets.<sup>21</sup> This is an example of the mutual benefit between big clubs and big companies and brands. Where both partners have significantly different levels of follower numbers, and the sports partner can boost the social media presence of the commercial partner.

That said, one CEO remarked that having a mighty corporate sponsor or owner is no guarantee of running a UPL club with ambition and success on the two key fronts: sports and business. If the sponsoring company is in the partnership majorly for CSR/PR reasons, i.e., for brand promotion and protection, it will likely be reluctant to invest the amount of money required to run a top UPL club and its title campaign. According to the respondent, the sums paid by even a full corporate or institutional sponsor/owner are currently too low - in the range of UGX 1b p.a. (about \$260,000) - to fund a more comprehensive, ambitious and fast-track club growth project. Hence, there is need for sponsor' diversification in such cases, where negotiation and agreement with the core sponsor has to be managed skilfully. It was noted that sponsors at times have problems grasping how football-as-business works, how much money and time was needed to run a club successfully, how to develop a profit generating business, and how powerful football (and sports generally) can be in adding value to growing a brand.

One football veteran gave the examples of Barclays (sponsors of EPL) and Standard Bank (sponsors of Liverpool FC). These firms strengthened their brands substantially through football sponsorship, in terms of the increased brand visibility, association, and loyalty. Accordingly, brands such as Pepsi and Coca Cola understand this brand-enhancement power of football too as their type of engagement in football sponsorship in Uganda, characterised by a lot of well-funded brand activation activities, shows. However, UPL clubs are yet to secure this type of solid sponsorship funding that would support a more comprehensive growth and transformation. A comparison with the leading clubs in Tanzania may be instructive here: Have they found sponsorship models that channel more substantial funds their way?

Note that some sponsorship deals are disallowed due to the FUFA-Star Times contract. No other TV broadcaster for example can sponsor a UPL team (say as jersey sponsor). This has led to a loss of sponsorship deals (from other TV companies) for a number of clubs in the past. The management of sponsors' preferences regarding presence vs. absence of other major sponsors, including competitors from the same sector - and respective conflicts between companies - is a crucial aspect of managing the sector's commercialisation.

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<sup>21</sup> #SwitchToTheBest; #KCCAFCHINT.

Significantly, there is no one in-country football star who by the time of research was on a billboard to promote one commercial product or service. Uganda’s internationally most well-known footballer, Denis Onyango, was part of a joint global Pepsi advert some time back. National footballers were, as a group, on a telecom advert in the past, and a selection of famous UPL players were also on a billboard for the UPL broadcaster StarTimes. But major product endorsement deals that lead to a strong billboard presence for a single footballer player seem absent (a respondent suggested that active footballers are currently known in football circles but not much beyond, in the general population). Instead, major brands use a single brand ambassador. Notable among these include popular Ugandan comedians; Mendo Herbert Ssegujja aka ‘Teacher Mpamire’ (who has 84,000 followers on Instagram, 331,000 subscribers on YouTube) and Anne Kansiime (1.32m subscribers on YouTube; 20.12.2022), or athletes such as long-distance champion Joshua Cheptegei who signed a major one-year deal with MTN Uganda in 2021.<sup>22</sup> As MTN MD commented at the announcement of the deal: ‘we are doing this because he is the best... when you break world records the way he is doing then you are the best. A brand like MTN wants, of course, to be *associated with the best*, like him’ (NTV Uganda 2021d, emphasis added). This is in line with the earlier identified pattern of sponsoring the best champions in sports, especially if one has achieved accolades in major competitions abroad.

It is worth noting that in a recent listing of the top 100 celebrities, the most highly ranked sports person came in only at position 49 (Kabuye 2024): Farouk Miya (Vipers) (followed by footballer Emmanuel Okwi/Erbil SC: 51, runner Cheptegei: 70; footballer Onyango: 79). The newspaper analysts commented on that ‘There was a time when sportsmen and women dominated the list...’ and further found it surprising that a footballer (‘soccer has been at a low [in 2023]’) instead of an athlete from a sport that has given the country more recognition (athletics, rugby, cricket, netball, basketball) is the top sport celebrity. None of the high achieving sports disciplines, rugby, netball basketball, and cricket made the list, they really should think about building their brands’ (ibid). In terms of social media following, footballer Aucho Khalid (Young Africans SC) just celebrated reaching the 100,000 X followers mark in January 2024 – a high number in comparative terms (Miya, 28,900; Cheptegei: 64,600, Onyango: 93,800, 23.01.2024). Where, when, how and why this will translate into sponsorship deals for Khalid – currently not only the Ugandan footballer but sports in general with the highest following across social media channels yet without a corporate sponsorship - will be of analytical relevance.<sup>23</sup> According to a ranking of the 13 Ugandan athletes with the highest following

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/teachermпамire/?hl=en>; <https://www.youtube.com/@TeacherMpamire2022->;  
<https://www.youtube.com/@KansiimeAnneEntertainer>.

<sup>23</sup> [https://twitter.com/aucho\\_khalid08/status/1749677111613309236](https://twitter.com/aucho_khalid08/status/1749677111613309236); <https://twitter.com/joshuacheptegei?lang=en>;  
<https://twitter.com/faroukmiya?lang=en>

on social media channels (X, Instagram, Facebook) published in May 2023, Khalid was at the top of the ranking with 1,000,000 followers (compare with 6<sup>th</sup> - Onyango: 286,000; 5<sup>th</sup>: Cheptegei: 382,000; 4<sup>th</sup> Taddeo Lwanga: 603,000; 3<sup>rd</sup> - Miya: 760,000; 2<sup>nd</sup> Okwi: 817,000) (Tabu 2023a).

In addition, women footballers were not in advertisement campaigns at all by the time of this research in 2022. The women's top league never attracted a title sponsor to-date, though that is expected to change at some point in the near future given the growing popularity and recent international success of Uganda's women football. Women's football (different from, say, athletics) has particular marketing issues related to prevailing (though changing) gender norms in the country (and also in Kenya).<sup>24</sup> One preconception was that girls don't do contact sports such as football (which are traditionally male sports). Another one was that when women become football players, they become muscular, lose the feminine shape and looks, and look and behave more like men (e.g. become/are tomboys, 'men women' in Ugandan parlance). A media officer at a female club thus produced clips featuring the lives of women footballers off the pitch, emphasising that fact they are like other women at their age. This sort of cultural work was also carried out to inspire other young girls to join football and convince parents to allow and support their daughters to pursue football as a hobby (and later profession):

There is a phobia that female footballers turn into men, in their physical appearance. We show that our players off pitch are like any other females; they are students, they balance education and soccer, they wear earrings, lipstick and jeans, and go swimming or to a movie. We interview them about why they might prefer jeans rather than skirts. We show while the play soccer they remain like other females.

Several actors (club management, advisers, FUFA) reportedly discussed behavioural matters with female players, in the context of the noted preconceptions about women's football which also affect sponsorship matters to-date. How female players think about and assess these advice sessions requires more research (some of these advice sessions on physical appearance seemed not welcomed by some players, according to one respondent; another respondent appreciated advice in this direction).

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<sup>24</sup> And yet, female football in Tanzania – at least in one of the top clubs - seems to have attracted sponsorship by 2023 (a brewery product displayed on player's jerseys; perhaps this was cross-support from the sponsor of the male team of the club). Future research could shed light on this.



## 5.7. Fans

In this section I highlight reported dynamics regarding fans and fandom: What is different about fans nowadays compared to a few years back, when local football was in severe crisis? What are the most recent trends? Generally, Ugandan football has gained significant popularity throughout the leagues. Though this is a trend with important variations. Several UPL clubs have problems with growing their fans numbers, but some are managing to enhance dedicated fan bases, in their home areas and across the country. Fans and those responsible in clubs for fans and PR management reported the following: First, Ugandan football has achieved something remarkable. The dominance of EPL has significantly reduced, according to many respondents, to a situation of ‘more balance and better coexistence’ - as one marketing professional put it - between the EPL, the UPL and Ugandan football generally. Compared to a decade ago, dedicated fans now prefer to go to live matches rather than watching EPL games on TV when this happens concurrently. That is, they reportedly give preference to their own club, to the chance to see football with their ‘own eyes’, and to experience the various emotional and social aspects of attending a stadium match. There is a high and distinct sense of fan culture, including identity, pride, rituals, self-organisation and engagement with club management. Fans also buy and increasingly wear the shirts of their local club and spend money more freely on merchandise.

Equally noteworthy: fans nowadays are much more interested in all sorts of details about their clubs: from matters concerning players (such as player profiles, transfers), trainings, past and upcoming matches, performance, injuries and injury recoveries, to match reports, goals and highlights, assessment of the coach, as well as details about the private life of players and coaches. They want extensive, detailed, up-to-date and easily accessible information (‘at their fingertips’, as a media officer noted) from their local club. The officer remarked that fans articulated that they want a level of information on accessibility, quantity, type and variety (player birthday announcements and other anniversaries) which measures to the social media work of their favourite clubs in EPL and other major foreign leagues and that the club did not provide information properly. This club thus changed its communication accordingly. Accordingly, a football club nowadays has to generate ‘noise’, to communicate to fans (and the general public) and provide information, picture and videos, thus enable fans to talk about and share relevant material on social media (in their own announcement and memes). Such forms of information provision ‘made fans buy into the club’, the officer observed. ‘They are now attached to the club. We are top of mind; they see our colour and think of our club. They wear our T-shirts instead of European club shirts. Some buy a lot of jerseys – both the home and the away kit; they buy for family members and friends too’.

Clubs were said to create fans' attachment and excitement and a sense of a growing and exciting collective through intensive, well-choreographed social media communication. Several respondents who work in club marketing and PR mentioned that the communication was about aiming to get 'top of mind' status, getting people to know and talk about the club (also about activities that are beyond football and the ninety minutes pitch time such as the club's CSR), and associate the club with core pillars of the club identity and brand. A media officer reported: 'When you unveil a new player or the jerseys for the season, you have to do things that are extraordinary. The video has to be a blockbuster, for example with the player driving in a car or coming with a plane, with a hoodie on. The video for the kits this season was shot in five locations to make it special. We benchmark globally, for example, how clubs like Milan unveil a player'.

Accordingly, an unveiling-a-player video was thus 'disruptive content', 'disruptive marketing' with the goal of creating attention and engagement with a new player, a new sponsor, or a new jersey. Fans' demand for information and well-done social media communication thus drives the increasing importance across the sector regarding the paramount importance of statistics, data and updates as well as high quality pictures and videos. Fans want all sorts of information and fan-successful clubs provide exactly that to their fans. The drive for, interest in, and use of statistics and data - by fans but also players, coaches and pundits - is a major feature of the sector development. This is also due to the culture shaping influence of betting that relies on actors having a lot of statistics, updates and background information available. Another media officer pointed to the various functions of social media, beyond information provision. 'We inform, educate and entertain our fans and close the gaps between club and fans – some fans live far away from the club's home'. Social media bridging the physical distances between club base and fan home was seen as valuable. A fans chairman of a UPL club observed: 'We want to know what's going on with our club. We want to know how the game went in detail, how the team lost or won; was it a hard-felt draw, a deserved loss? We want to form our own good judgements about what to make of the team's performance'.

Fans desire to update themselves was thus also about building up, strengthening, exercising and showcasing their own expertise, about being a connected, informed and competent fan. This was also important to follow, participate, and enjoy the various social media groups' chats that fans were part of, from telegram to WhatsApp. One fan in Jinja reported that he was a member of the WhatsApp or telegram group of all the three UPL clubs in Jinja as well as the UPL general one. Fans thus also had to keep up-to-date and go through a lot of social media content (and this arguably deepened their engagement and connection with the domestic football sector and their favourite local team(s) (see

for background Chiweshe 2014 regarding fandom in the age of social media, and Chiweshe 2011 on the process of becoming a football fan).

Next, fans, according to fan representatives, want to get more involved with their club. They regard the club as home, family, community, and a social network. The club is a space for emotions (excitement, enjoyment, thrills), for making new contacts and friends and for tapping into resulting opportunities ranging from chat, advice, activities, and business. Being an engaged fan boosted a sense of agency, achievement, status and belonging. At times, a club might take time to notice and respond (adjust its fans engagement practice) to this desire from fans to participate. According to a supporter of the club that the chairman above was a fan of, at the beginning club management was not so interested in fans and assumed that money alone can yield club success. But this was revised by the club after realising the pitfalls of that outlook:

They thought they can run football without fans, that because of the club's financial position they don't need fans; that they can just rely on their logistics. That has changed and the season is now ignited because of fans. The club now considers views of fans more. There are general meetings, sharing information with fans, small appreciations. Fans want to engage and support the club. We look forward to our club reaching its goals.

Further, fans in some clubs do a lot of self-organisation and self-governance. They are highly interconnected, through various groups on social media channels that they participate in. They are active in fans recruitment, registration and management, including matters of good behaviour and morale in their group and good relations with fans groups of other clubs that their team plays against. There are elected fan coordinators and chairpersons in clubs and women are active in these roles too. Women are becoming increasingly involved in club activities.

Fan recruitment, including beyond the locality of the club, is high on the agenda of fans and club management. There is significant cooperation here in some instances regarding the planning and execution of this important activity. Fans strategise how they can best support the fans expansion objective of their club, and thus 'bring something to the table and make a difference... We are serving terms as fan leaders and want to make a difference' (fan chairman). Organised fans also help identify and deal with problems at the club that fans or players raise, including players' welfare issues, stadium ticket prices, or relations with the community around a club. 'We report and discuss problems with club leaders, also what whistle-blowers tell us', the chairman noted.

Fans thus played a role in club development and employed their respective skills and collective power for that purpose. They too 'delivered' like others in the various club departments who now had jobs that required them to produce positive changes and results. A club management that was open to communication with fans, and that was responsive to fans' feedback, ideas and suggestions was appreciated. The group the chairman was active in building and keeping good relations with the community around a club; in being a positive force that strives for positive change and harmony in the neighbourhood: 'We try to offer love, support and encouragement to people, boost morale, energise, bring happiness and change lives, and show humanity. We are leaders who understand life. People need support and get energised... The club brings us together. It builds unity: without it there would be no togetherness, no relationships' (chairman).

Arguably then, fans saw themselves as part of a larger engagement and support system that was emotionally highly charged and that collectively confirmed values and outlooks linked to community: doing good, being together, showing love, boosting morale, and looking after everyone. Further it allowed people to get involved in emotionally positive, meaningful, transformative work (such as community projects) in and outside their clubs. 'It is a feeling within us in the community. And if we are good in the UPL table, it means our home is doing well, and we market our home, our city' (fan chairman). Fans were proud about the talents of the region, and hopeful that many players from the area will do well in professional football, and that more scouts and sponsors will consider football teams in their town. In sum, fan groups are an invaluable part of a club's organisational day-to-day life and longer-term success.

Travelling to away matches was increasingly part of the fan culture too. These trips were principally self-financed, priced affordably (bus owners were fans too in some instances) and could take several days in a round trip (to far-away destinations) and involve around 100 fans. Pooling resources to hire a van (a 14 or 32-seater) and purchase fuel was significantly cheaper for a fan than having to drive one's own car to an away match. It was also convenient to travel with people that one knows are headed to and from the same destination than going to the bus or taxi park to get public transport. 'We have to move with drums, whistles, and vuvuzelas, have barbecue and drinks, and enjoy ourselves. We work with counterpart coordinators. We make friends, leave a mark and come back with new contacts' (fan chairman). Let us look at what the newly introduced fan registration card did to the chairman's feeling of belonging:

The card has bio data. It is like an ID card, like a company card. When you have an accident, you can show the fan card [to police] ... The card brings identity; the club is family; when I go to a

function there is respect for me... It is emotional when you see person who has a fan card from your club. We recognise each other and it is like moving with a brother or sister. We support each other. People look for something to relate to each other. So, it is a big feeling when I see another fan with a card. It is very emotional. I am not the only one here [i.e. the card brings connection to someone with a similar interest]; it gives you a feeling of being secure. The card is identity, it is part of us, one can interrelate [in public] and talk about clubs. It kills boredom.

The fan card has had wide ranging effects, including helping in encounters with state authorities, helping in contact making, in feeling secure and connected, and in being respected. Being associated with a club via a card is not only about recognition but also security. In short, a fan was somebody, associated with an organisation that was generally associated with being 'good' and 'positive'. One can imagine why a fan would generally not want to leave such a club: the benefits, tangible and intangible, were too many and, in various ways, too relevant and important. It mattered deeply, especially for this category of very committed fans.

Fans also mentioned why these very local, real-life connections and experiences of being a fan of a UPL club helped to draw people in, and thus away from their previous preoccupation with their favourite EPL club in far way places, and to switch their mind to local. A fan explained:

We can talk to a player on the street, we can enjoy football together and discuss tactical matters: how to do better passing, how to achieve goals, the reasons for underperforming. We can discuss mistakes with players too. We visit players at their homes, to share, to discuss their performance, to analyse together. We are neighbours and friends. When we come back from a game, we chat. When will you ever meet Arsenal players?

The attractiveness was the real-life connection to players a fan of a local club could have, and the joy, connection and recognition that comes with that. As the fan noted, this experience, was de-facto impossible with one's favourite club in Europe. As the chairman observed: 'Being a fan is about sport, leisure, emotions, meeting friends, seeing new faces and new fans. We want to see players on the pitch. We want to see what's going on, rather than being reported to'. He also argued that this was a generational issue. Young Ugandans want to watch their teams live, they leave TV football to watch a live game.

This overall positive trend has also improved merchandise sales. The merchandise quality and attractiveness of jerseys. is very high in several UPL clubs. Thanks also to the use of designers and

creatives, dialogue with fans about jerseys, and manufacturing partners. Some clubs reported an increasing demand for their jerseys. Merchandise and fan coordination officers reported that fans inquire eagerly about new jersey releases, are more willing to spend on merchandise, and see such purchases also as their financial contribution to the clubs' development.

Some clubs however have severe problems with fan numbers, including some of the clubs that have institutional links with government agencies: for example, the URA FC, or Police FC. This impacts the entire league. There seems to be a severe disconnect between UPL and the youth in Kampala. The UPL does not commonly fill stadiums in the capital. Some respondents have argued this is because StarTimes does not promote the league properly, compared to a previous broadcaster DSTV for example. Another issue here is, as one respondent noted, that people still love to watch the EPL and European Champions League; so, people still buy DSTV decoders in significant numbers - also given that the StarTimes does not fully broadcast these leagues. DSTV owners might not watch the UPL adverts on StarTimes. Digital migration of the local channels (moving all of them to digital platforms) essentially dictated that one must own a decoder to watch any kind of television in their home. Yet, as this respondent asked: How many football fans in Uganda are going to buy more than one decoder to meet all their football passions, to follow all their league interests?

There are furthermore issues with some of the venues, and with off-pitch entertainment. UPL football to-date rarely mixes with the entertainment industry and night-time economy; fun evenings, family afternoons, high profile exhibition matches, or night events seem rare. This is however likely to change given recent developments such as the floodlit evening games at KCCA or initiatives that explicitly try to draw in the student community: KCCA for example gives free access to home games this season to all undergraduate university students who show up wearing the club's 2022/23 jersey. Notably, fans in Uganda enjoy the availability of food and alcohol at some UPL venues at the KCCA FC venue in Kampala. This was markedly different from Nairobi where alcohol was not sold at venues due to the country's regulatory regime on alcohol sale, and also - given past experiences - fear of fans' violence that would make sellers lose their merchandise and stalls.

Significantly, amateur football is already connected to the night-time and entertainment economy in some instances. One of the popular weekend amateur competitions that is played on artificial turf grounds was played with flood light and went on into the late evening, with a DJ, bar, food, drinks and dance. There are exemplars in other sports too: for example, the newly created Uganda Boxing Champions League (UBCL) - which was in its 3<sup>rd</sup> season by 2024 - has its match days in the evening (often on weekends), in popular indoor venues in the heart of Kampala (MTN Arena Lugogo, Club

Obligato) and with DJs performing. This was very popular with fans and has strengthened boxing in terms sports, popularity and commerce. Basketball was another sport that collaborated with the entertainment sector; musicians do live performances at some play-off games, for example.

## **5.8. Media**

The social media presence, delivery and performance is very strong in the sector. Social media content production (X, TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook) stands on a strong foundation, fed by numerous skilled actors. The actors include FUFA (both, organisation and particular staff), clubs and their media/PR staff, players, fans (both, individual and organised as fan groups), media professionals (individual journalists and photographers, newspapers/TV stations, analysts and pundits, amongst others).

Individual WhatsApp accounts of key actors have daily updates and share plenty of information, pictures, memes, and videos related to national and global football. They provide excellent, up-to-date information and - importantly - emotions coverage & commentary and entertainment as well. They provide information about fixtures, results, tables, players (including their injuries/injury recoveries, birthdays) and coaches; offer pre-, match and post-match updates; post action and team photo shots and videos of goals, match highlights and coaches/players' comments; release sports-related motivational statements to audiences (regarding life's journey, struggle, motivation, goals in life ).This ecosystem produces and gives a highly collective, sector-uniting (in some ways almost community-/family-type) feel. The skills and dedication of the respective professionals - from social media handlers and writers to designers, photographers and videographers - are very high. There was reference made in interviews with such media practitioners to a sense of solidarity in the profession and joint efforts and aspirations to make Ugandan football bigger and more engaging on social media and help players to pursue their professional goals, and related aspirational life goals. There is also a culture of appreciation (for skills and hard work), learning, cross-benchmarking, improvement and excellence in the social media area. Media/PR staff reported to keep up to date with latest fan engagement strategies of top clubs on the continent and beyond. Learning from other clubs is part of the invaluable benefits of playing in continental competitions at a club level, a media officer at a top UPL club noted.

These club-level media professionals are usually young professionals who are in their mid to late-20s. FUFA also has a very young media team. This helps to connect with audiences given that, as mentioned, Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world. Thanks also to a significant

professionalisation of the sector, with clubs now hiring for PR related work and these roles thus moving gradually from volunteering to paid (part-time) job positions, there is high quality graphics, videos, pictures and word phrasing. These social media posts regularly come not only with a strong dose of expertise but also emotions and wit. This vibrant world of posting is a key component of the sector's ecosystem and its emotional centre. It is arguably driving and cementing domestic football's attraction and popularity, especially among younger cohorts. The captivating social media presence of football is appreciated by fans, and the entire football fraternity including players, who get drawn into the world of emotions, information, pictures, videos, updates, and bragging. Social media follower numbers can be very high and in many cases are trending upwards. There is then a distinct social media advantage of domestic football versus EPL and other foreign leagues.

The social media posting about football in Uganda is deeply embedded in local history, culture, economy and everyday reality of people that follow, consume and interact with it. There is a cultural affinity between handlers and audiences. Handlers understand the lifeworld - including emotional world - of local audiences (and specific categories there, along axes of age, gender, region) and produce posts with that in mind. Producers and audiences are connected also via shared generational aspirations. In that sense, they occupy the space of locally oriented posting (memes and all) without competition from the social media handlers of foreign clubs that Ugandans are also huge fans of. If Ugandan football fan wants to enjoy local content in terms of football social media – for example, memes that reference/are grounded in Ugandan life worlds - local providers (the PR/media handlers, players, journalists) are de-facto the only (and most skilled, effective and captivating) providers.<sup>25</sup>

Tweeting is a skill and an art. Effectively advertising for a match and building the match anticipation, for instance is work building on the emotional script and layering of a match. This aspect, this quality of social media work came out well in a recent tweet in which praise was expressed about a Ugandan media officer: ‘... this guy can control the fans through a 'tweet'. This ability to emotionally speak to, move and grip fans is important.<sup>26</sup> Emotions displayed in social media posts during the research period made reference to: the emotions of preparing for, winning or losing a game (celebrations); love for the game; feelings of community/region; admiration for and pride in a player (and her/his skill), club and country; encouragement, motivation, inspiration, togetherness (team, fans-team), solidarity and friendship; gratefulness; bragging; and religion. Reference to religion - both Christianity and Islam - is a major component of the posted content, throughout the year. ‘We

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<sup>25</sup> Future research could explore this aspect of audience appreciation for local content.

<sup>26</sup> [https://mobile.twitter.com/frank\\_graphix/status/1587494727208914944](https://mobile.twitter.com/frank_graphix/status/1587494727208914944).



try to be a prayerful club. One needs to pray for success in the game. The national team does it too', a media officer reported.

Overall, football in Uganda has a remarkably broad-based and positive image which is shaped by and reflected in the media. Football is emotionally linked to notions such as: talent, skill, passion and aspiration (individual and collective); opportunity (from school and university scholarships in the country and abroad, to a footballer career, 'going international', and more ); changing lives; excelling in life; starting from humble background and making it (and leaving a mark) thanks to talent, motivation and hard work; giving the young/next generation a chance; Africa rising, celebrating Africa (); local, regional and national pride (aka, this great player is one of our own), achievement and glory; as well as history, culture and belonging. The motto 'football can change lives' was very evident during time of research. One media officer noted, 'of all the sports, football has the highest rate of going international; there are many who got university scholarships'. This in multiple ways highly positive image is different to Kenya, where football is in a significant way explicitly linked to imaginaries of 'ghetto' and 'slums' (and respective imaginaries of 'crime').

Commercial considerations do shape some of the posting. A major aim is to increase followers' numbers for club and players, and for individual handlers such as pundits and analysts. It was repeatedly emphasised in interviews that actual or potential sponsors want numbers and that 'numbers don't lie'. A club media officer noted: 'you can tell a sponsor - these are my numbers'. Numbers are important in talks with sponsors given that a club can link a sponsor to thousands of fans via social media. Some respondents argued that this would be more effective marketing and better value for money than going through traditional (print) media. Posting is part of brand building and strengthening for various players and clubs and other professionals in the sector and a vital part of searching for new and pleasing existing sponsors. Social media channels are 'areas of reference' (club CEO) in building a brand. Indeed, many players also have a social media presence. This also strengthens the overall trend described, namely contribute to the vibrant ecosystem of football (and business) related social media communications. There was a wider trend of a rise of digital influencers who promote brands in Uganda by the 2020s, embedded in a wider 'ideology of entrepreneurship-for-all' (Pier 2022). Sports, however, seemed still rather marginal in sphere of 'influencers' (see also the earlier mentioned recent top-Ugandan-celebrities 2023 ranking that had only four sports personalities ranked in the top 100, at the mid to lower end of the list).

One interviewed women footballer had a professional handler for social media (also interviewed). This practice has become more common in the sector. The rationale for this is manifold. For example,

to allow the player to concentrate on football; to do the social media work as professional (skilful, effective) as possible; to minimise the risk that the player makes an ‘inappropriate’ post in the heat of the moment (say about sensitive matters) that could lead to reputational problems afterwards (for the player, the club) and negatively impact the future career of the player; or to shield the player from engaging in types of communication on social media (such as with romantic admirers) that could harm the player’s sports performance and career prospects. This handler advised the player about such risks and pitfalls and this guidance and mentorship was seen as crucial by adviser and player to protect and preserve the talent of a player by avoiding scandals, private life crisis, unwanted pregnancy.

Media and PR officers contributed further ways to the sector: One media officer for example reported that he guides the club and team in image building. ‘I guide them in that. I taught them to applaud fans after every game, no matter if we win or lose. Applaud the fans. We need them more and more. The fan is the number one sponsor of the team; the fan is valued, loved, and liked’. Further, uniformity of training dress was a point this officer insisted on. This was important to show a level of organisation at the club, on and off the pitch; and this was regarded as crucial for brand building/strengthening and sponsors’ search:

You can’t train in an Arsenal or Manchester city T-shirt. Train in your club kit; show that this is a serious club. This is what sponsors look for when they search for where to invest their money. They want value. Class attracts class. Value attracts value. If your brand is very strong - you attract a brand that is also very strong. Be of the same class. Know where you want to be in some years and undertake efforts to achieve the targets.

Accordingly, what sort of ‘categories of people’ follow and watch a club (i.e., the segment of population in terms of age, economic/social standing) was important for sponsors in search for value.

Another key supporting factor in the revival of Ugandan football is that the UPL has a live broadcasting presence on TV. Uganda lost DSTV as a broadcaster some years back (like Kenya), then had other providers for shorter periods (Azam TV) and currently is some years into a ten-years partnership with Chinese StarTimes TV. There were some criticisms regarding the deal. Some respondents argued that FUFA should have achieved a higher price, that the deal making was not transparent, that clubs didn’t have a say in the deal making, and that clubs get too little of the

sponsorship money. Criticism was also aired about the performance of the broadcaster to-date (by April 2022) in terms of marketing/brand activation and broadcast quantity and quality.<sup>27</sup>

However, long-term planning stability and broadcasting security are arguably key positives here. Football is on the TV screen and the broadcaster has not pulled out. The good relationship between the governments of Uganda and China arguably further stabilises the arrangement. Uganda is a major economic and political hub for China in the east African region; the two countries aim to expand their ‘pragmatic cooperation’ (New Vision TV 2024). This broadcasting partnership is in important ways beyond football. StarTimes is a major player in Africa by now, and a key pillar of China’s media expansion in Africa and soft power apparatus, and thus of the deepening relation between Chinese media and audiences on the continent (e.g., Jedlowski 2021, Mambwe 2023, Lewis 2024, Gondwe 2024, Artz 2024). Representatives of the broadcaster argued that such a broadcasting endeavour takes time to get up and running. It is long-term oriented, and they had to build a lot of capacity (equipment, human resource) at the beginning to get the quality and quantity up. Notably, the Chinese company partnered with a Ugandan media company eventually, Sanyuka TV, to deliver the expected broadcasting. They outsourced some of the production.

One media respondent noted that the UPL needs to yet get stronger and more exciting to attract more spectators and for StarTimes to achieve its commercial aims (significant increase in subscriptions) in the medium term. Accordingly, by 2022, there were not yet a sufficient number of high-interest games in the season schedule, beyond some key fixtures, that could be used for effective marketing campaigns. It was observed that the fact that some of the best UPL players leave the country to go for ‘greener pastures’ (see the recent cases discussed earlier) weakens the attractiveness of the league and explains in part the continuous challenge of attracting more fans, and subscribers (the argument was also made in interviews in Kenya).

There has been a surge in broadcasting many local sports in Uganda, and this trend is expected to continue. It is not just football that is on a significant upward trend but the sports sector as a whole, including in netball, basketball, rugby, boxing and athletics. Various broadcasters look for sports content. Football feeds and benefits from that general national direction of travel and the corresponding expansion and professionalisation of sports media in terms of technology, staff skills and experience. There were several regular sports shows on TV (e.g. NTV Sport Knights, a sports analysis show), including on FUFA TV; TV and radio stations had sports sections. In mid-2022,

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<sup>27</sup> See for comparison Darko’s (2021) study on ‘Television Rights and its Effects on the Ghana Premier League’; see also Smith (2016) for the case of South Africa.

Multimedia company Next Media launched NBS Sport, a 24-hour sports-dedicated channel, to extensively broadcast local sports including live-action and talk shows. Joseph Kigozi, Next Media's Deputy Group CEO and NBS Sport General Manager reportedly noted: 'We have put together a platform where Ugandan sport can leave the back pages and small segments of daily content ... Sport can be a source of income for all stakeholders ... We look forward to working with all involved to make this a success' (Agaba 2022). In short, the media platforms for extensive coverage of local sports including football are in place by 2024 and the work on expanding and stabilising the local sports content provision is underway. Football has good TV-visibility; this is an important fact for sponsors, players (who can use video clips to showcase their talent when searching for and negotiating with a new club), fans and others.

An illustrative news from 2023: Police FC went into a one-year partnership with SuperSport. The channel will regularly produce and broadcast (in Uganda and beyond: across dozens of African countries) content about the club's activities. This is not only expected to bring in new sponsors for the club and thus enhance revenues, but also showcase the clubs' players. at the partnership launch event a senior staff of SuperSport reportedly:

said that the platform is open for all clubs in Uganda and will also be paramount in the implementation of the Pamoja Project where East Africa won the bid to host the AFCON 2027. 'This is an opportunity for clubs to market themselves. Football has changed over the years in management and we are ready to market Uganda football'.... The other partners in the project include Lisbat Consult, Spackle, Multichoice and Plascon. (Kibuuka 2023b)

A few points are noteworthy; that: the broadcaster offers this broadcasting format; the club secured the partnership while not being a UPL club (FUFA Big League, top of table, 24.01.2024); there is an alliance of actors advancing the project (see Wiegatz and Rofe 2023 on the relevance of alliances in the ASE); the format is offered to other Ugandan clubs - while the UPL is aired by another broadcaster (indicating the potential for various multinational broadcasters to operate alongside in the Ugandan football sector); the prospect of AFCON 2027 animates commercially oriented activities.

## **5.9. Other commercialisation trends and schemes**

Formats such as Futsal are popular. The Uganda Futsal Super League has a betting company, betPawa, for a sponsor. The African subsidiary of the Estonia based company is owned by a firm

based in Rwanda; operations are in 11 African countries (including Kenya and Tanzania). The sponsorship resources have been used to give the Old Kampala Futsal arena (home of the Futsal Super League) a facelift and provide players in teams that win a match an ‘instant cash’ reward, called ‘Locker Room Bonus’. One quarter of the deal package is spent on these player bonuses (NBS 2023; Katongole 2023). The company marketing manager reportedly said that ‘the rapid payment to winning players aims to motivate the players’; the speed of payment (aka ‘fast and direct benefits’) mirrors the pay after winning a bet. The sponsor here markets its product beyond the usual brand visibility: it promotes a financial reward culture (that it arguably expects to lead to an increase in betting customers and size of betting activity and placements). Notably, betPawa is also title sponsor of the FUFA Big League (the second-tier league in Uganda) and operates a similar system there; it is also invested as a sponsor in the FUFA Drums competition. Altogether it has thus sponsored three FUFA properties (Ssenoga 2023).

There is further a range of very strong and popular amateur competitions and events, especially in Kampala, usually played over the weekend; these activities are outside FUFA-organised football. Artificial turf grounds have been constructed, and these for-hire pitches (regularly supported by floodlight equipment) support the football of amateur teams (neighbourhood, friends, corporate, kids’ soccer especially in school holidays), competition organizers, schools, academies, and communities. These pitch centres and amateur competitions have increased the overall popularity of football enormously. They have a strong social media presence too and are a key component of the national online football ecosystem. Examples of popular amateur competition in Kampala are: (i) the Leisure Park Turf League (LPTL, analysed in more detail below); (ii) the ‘Corporate League’: played on the sports ground at Makerere University and attracting teams from across the corporate sector, amongst others. There were also league formats for children; and (iii) the SMACK League: this was played not on turf ground but on the rugby club grounds in the centre of the city. It was organised by alumni of one of the most prestigious secondary schools in the country. The Smack league recently launched the e-sports league (Tabu 2023b; Edgars Youth Programme 2024).<sup>28</sup> Regarding (iii) note that other schools also have their alumni leagues: Ntare, NGO (for Namilyango), Budo, Kibuli, Jovoc League for St Joseph’s Vocational School, Kisoba League for Kitabi Seminary, and others. There is a new alumni league for International Schools too (the ones with the Cambridge curriculum). Notably, all these are expected to combine forces and organise their own version of the Champions League at some point in 2024. Pepsi is a prominent sponsor in this segment of the sector. There is also the Kampala Kids League which is the oldest league of international schools in Kampala.

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<sup>28</sup> See further: <https://x.com/LPTL256>; <https://www.facebook.com/UgandaCorporate/>; regarding the SMACK league see: <https://twitter.com/thesmackleague>; NTV Uganda (2022b, 2024b).

According to interviews during a LPTL match day (played on Sundays, from early afternoon to late evening), the league is popular with participating teams (14 teams during the research time) for various reasons, including:

(1) It offered a combination of well-organised competitive amateur football, on a great pitch, with a strong weekend entertainment character, with a bar and restaurant that overlooked the main pitch, and bar music and a live DJ. Spectators included friends, families, players, community members and others. This mix of sports, leisure, family, and community combined with a great view of the entire area and surroundings, much praised food at reasonable pricing, ample parking, and a football enthusiastic local area was attractive to teams and spectators.

(2) The league mimicked in some ways the practices/routines and vibes of professional leagues in various ways: it had various award categories (such as player of the match, player of the month, most valuable player of the season, best scorer, best goalkeeper, team of the week, and more); competent judges and referees, entertaining ceremonies (a guard of honour), and an attractive social media presence. Players were given official recognition, and their talent was celebrated. Awards noticed and praised individual and collective effort and performance generally. Awards were sponsored by the owner of the sports complex.

(3) The type and quality of the pitch. A member of the organising team noted: ‘We are used to playing on dusty pitches, with anthills and uneven grounds. This is different... The middle class can’t be seen playing on dusty grounds [but they can play here]’.

(4) The way in which the competition allowed different social classes and age groups (mostly ranging from 16 to mid-30s, and at times older) to mingle, play with and against each other, chat and network (also for job and business purposes).

(5) The competition allowed teams to show their skills in organising their teams, doing training and preparation, employing fitting tactics, and so on. The competition was a platform to excel, lead and learn, and to motivate and celebrate each other (and tell others about it).

(6) There was a strong sense of organisation, formal process, rules (such as appeals), checks, and procedures that were designed to uphold fairness in the game and teams appreciated that. The organisers were young professionals and committed football enthusiasts who wanted to get the organisation of this tournament right. There was a lot of work and learning (from mistakes in the process and action) involved on their part.

(7) There was a sense of spectacle, excitement, community and aspiration: There was a strong sense of belonging, spectacle, curiosity (seeing new/exciting players and teams), motivation, dedication, excitement (being part of a strong/winning team and of a meaningful competition), and appreciation.

Teams enjoyed playing with attentive and appreciating spectators in the stands, and DJ music blasting from the boxes.

(8) The competition was a platform to showcase, watch, enjoy and talk about and applaud talent. It put amateur talents on the map. People talked about strong teams and players. Some players got scouted for official leagues - e.g., the FUFA Big League (division two).

(9) It was furthermore a platform for players to 'live the dream'. Some were reportedly talents when they were youth, but could not pursue a professional career, for example due to financial problems then. Now in their 30s, such players could return to a competition that mattered, one that was noticed by peers and others (including the national press, see e.g. New Vision 2023). They were able to develop and show their skills, meet strong opponents, focus on winning trophies and awards, and enjoy the emotions of victory. A player noted for example: 'we are catching up here: we used to play as boys against each other; now we do it again'.

(10) It was prestigious for teams to play in the league. The league was well known (for organisation, sports quality, and thoroughness) and there was a waiting list of teams that wanted to join the competition.

(11) Other benefits that respondents noted included health benefits for players, or engaging the youth of the surrounding community that can therefore become active and fit, or even pursuing their talent further into national level leagues.

Notably, organisers had to address and manage challenges linked to the role of money and sponsorship, including the impact of enhanced commercialisation on the character and smooth running of the league. For example, it had to regulate how teams could poach strong players with attractive packages. It had to manage with care the process of attracting corporate sponsors (this was also noted as a challenge by an organiser of another amateur league, SMACK). Sponsors could change the league's character and endanger the future of the league. Interested sponsors reportedly expressed that they would prefer to take over the entire format, and thus control the organisation and management of the league. Organisers were against that for various reasons including the fear that such a sponsor-run competition would bring all sorts of organisational problems and increase the influence of money to a level that could impact negatively on the competition. For example, too much prize money could lead to incentive problems (increase players' poaching off the pitch, or foul play on the pitch). By the time of research, the winning team got UGX 300,000 which was regarded as low by some players and teams. Significantly, the sports complex was said to expand, with plans for basketball courts and beach football facilities. A respondent from the restaurant and bar noted that business was very good when the league was on.

### **5.10. Challenges: players' welfare**

Problems, tensions, and conflicts that characterised and affected the commercialisation processes in Uganda were principally financial: at club level and the overall limited funding of the UPL. Out of the fifteen UPL clubs, only about four to six were regarded as (relatively) financially stable and well-off by 2022; that means that they can pay their players regularly and according to terms of their contracts. Other clubs have significant financial troubles from time to time, for various reasons, and their players can go unpaid for months in some cases (e.g., Isabirye 2020; Sports Nation 2020). Many clubs are de-facto severely underfunded. The sponsorship money they get from the StarTimes TV deal (about \$25,000-30,000 per season) only covers a few months of expenses while ticket and merchandise sales (or corporate sponsorship if any) are insufficient to fund the rest of the budget. Some respondent argued that what clubs get from the TV deal is far below what is required. This leaves a budgetary hole that gets filled by owners and well-wishers. The de-facto-pay to players is regularly lowered in some clubs by non-payment or far-below-contract-pay of players, or cuts that coaches demand informally. This model had severe financial instabilities and risks, for example, when owners/funders have financial problems in their core business from which they source money to fund a club, get (drawn) into political wrangles, or lose business interest in the club, thus shifting their financial gaze elsewhere, or when the sole corporate sponsor drops out (see the Arua Hills case as an example for some of these dynamics).

Inadequate clubs' finances also affected player' welfare. It could result in players in some clubs going without pay for several months and only getting a fraction of their wage arrears (if at all) in the end. This payment problem also affected coaches and other members of club staff. There were severe issues concerning players' welfare in a significant section of the UPL: not just non- or late payment of players, players leaving clubs with significant pay arrears, non-payment of players on contract when a given season is over until the next season begins, or players facing financial problems during injury and recovery time (clubs are not always supportive to injured players).

This made a section of players arguably the most disadvantaged and vulnerable actors in this commercial system. Their individual and collective bargaining power was severely constrained: given for example the lack of well-paid alternatives for many players (in football or outside) and the competition for a place in the club's team to showcase one's talent in the hope to secure a better position with a better club (that pays wages regularly) in future.

According to interviewed UPL players, players seem to operate in various clubs with a very high level of uncertainty, vulnerability and precarity (and related emotions: frustrations, low esteem and



morale.) and in several instances face significant intransparency and ‘hard ball’ from their employer. There was significant criticism by several respondents from various categories (including fans) of how a section of the owners handled players’ welfare including using rogue practices in some instances. One club reportedly got rid of and reduced outstanding arrears by releasing a large section of the wages-waiting squad at the end of the season. Several respondents suggested that the players’ severe financial problems, in cases of several months of no or far-reduced pay from their club contributed to the phenomenon of match fixing. Accordingly, players were forced, due to their very difficult financial circumstances, to participate in such schemes. Problems with timely referees’ pay was noted to be another factor here.

The problematic situation regarding the welfare of a significant section of UPL players, respondents argued, severely hampered the sector: It was said to reduce the length, level and quality of players’ careers. A lot of talented footballers reportedly resign from the sports at some point due to payment issues. Respondents also noted that the pay situation lowers the quality, integrity and sustainability of the competition (the case of the UPL), increases the level of match fixing (unpaid players are looking for money); heightens the actual/perceived unfairness in the sector (the emotional and financial upset of UPL players, clubs and fans who were at receiving end of match fixing). The practice equally lowers the enjoyment of fans who are often aware of and disturbed by welfare problems of the players and cases of match fixing that involved disputed referee decisions as cited. In some situations, fans took their protest to social media, posted video footage of the disputed incident and demanded FUFA to react, or even appealing to the club sponsors to review their relationship with the club.

The problem of players’ welfare and that the pay reality is severely at odds with clubs’ contractual obligations, was recognised by FUFA, the UPL Secretariat and other stakeholders. ‘Only about 5 clubs in the UPL fully comply with payment matters as per contracts. There is also unfair termination, and other abusive behaviours by clubs’, a football official noted. Abusive behaviour here referred to: extremely low payment, refusing a player to train or play, forcing a player on a loan without consent, terminate a contract without consent, no-payment over months, changing the contract without knowledge and consent of a player, or forging disciplinary matters to expel a player (‘there are so many of those’, the official noted regarding the latter).

Various measures have been taken over the years to address aspects of the welfare situation and this is notable; achieving progress was overall slow and difficult, nonetheless. Recently there has been some movement, however. FUFA, for instance, has introduced a health insurance card that

covers injury expenses up to a certain level for a given number of players per club; an initiative which was welcomed by players. Interviewed players from one club reported though that they have not actually received the card yet (months after the scheme was introduced), and that the club did not distribute the card as intended. Further, according to recently introduced rules, players can now leave a club when they have not been paid for three months. Some clubs responded to this by paying some of the outstanding money just before the three-months period ended.

There is also a dispute resolution chamber and players welfare committee at FUFA where players and coaches can bring their grievances. However, according to interviews, only a small fraction of players utilises this forum. Most of those who have a case do not take it forward due to: fear of reprisal by their current club (or problems in future talks with other clubs), fear of finding no new club if the current club terminates the contract, valuing the opportunity - despite payment problems - to continue playing in the current club, thus showing one's talent and hoping for a new signing with different club in future, lack of money to pay a lawyer, or a low educational level and a language barrier (where a player cannot express the grievance case in English as required). As the official notes: '90% of players don't know their rights. 99% of players don't petition. There are 5-10 cases per season'.

A few players have used lawyers in these disputes with clubs and have won. Some of them already had a contract from another club thus felt in a better position to challenge their club. Clubs often respond in a particular way to such a challenge from a player: 'Once a player petitions, the relationship with the club ends. It is dead; there is now real contestation and conflict. Going to court is like going to prison. A player is not allowed in training, is ignored, is now seen as an enemy of the club, and released' (official). Even if a petition gets a ruling in the player's favour that does not automatically mean the player actually gets the money as per ruling. There was reportedly a problem with enforcement, and the inability or unwillingness of clubs to pay. There are several cases per year of that nature. A club can say it does not have the money to pay and then the case drags on. The player then has to agree to settle for a fraction of the owed sum (UGX 100-200,000 out of 1,000,000 in one case, or 50% of outstanding arrears/compensation for early termination of a contract in another), and to a payment plan. Several UPL players interviewed had lost payment from clubs for their work over the years. One player had experienced several such cases in his career including from his current club. He was hoping to move to a different club but in the end stayed for another season.

At times when a club has owed several players money, club owners contend that paying the outstanding sum would bankrupt the club (there was a case where a club owed ten players altogether UGX 80m). The UPL Secretariat in rare cases keeps some of the TV sponsorship money allocated to

clubs, for paying players' arrears. There are however limits to this given the enormity of the problem: in terms of number of clubs involved, the sums of money it entails, and financially highly precarious situation of some clubs that are part of these cases. The larger the arrears accruing, at times, the higher the risk that a club might not honour their games if their TV deal sponsorship money is cut. Those handling these matters, the FUFA committee and UPL Secretariat, face the tension between players' welfare versus a club's financial situation and potential bankruptcy (owners pull out). One thus 'cannot push clubs too hard', a FUFA staff remarked. 'There is a dilemma: you don't want to sanction the club to an extent that the sanction extinguishes the club. One has to balance: the club has to continue to survive versus players' welfare. If you punch clubs too hard, they owners might abandon clubs... They make no profits'. Importantly, clubs also had influence at FUFA and could thus shape the course of action in such welfare cases in more direct ways too.

Clubs payment issues were seen to be caused by several factors not being organised, poor planning/management, not being run as a business, owners waiting for money from their salary/business, a club's owners disagreeing over investment matters or not interested to invest properly, a politician who had paid for the club before now losing interest in a club (such as after an election cycle), and some club owners having an exploitative mindset.

What might then be forces and dynamics of change regarding the problematic treatment of players in some clubs? Instruments that were under discussion, according to an official included FUFA and UPL Secretariat taking a yet bigger and more active role: such as taking off league points when a club is faulted of significant players' payment issues; or tightening club licensing and thus checks regarding the truthfulness of a club's submitted budget. There were ongoing discussions in the directions that: clubs during the licensing process might have to prove more thoroughly their financial abilities (sponsorship deals, owner's financial capacity) versus contractual obligations to players to get/renew a license. The aim here is for example to find out, as an official noted: 'Can a club prove that it can pay salaries as per contracts?'. This can be followed by a monitoring mechanism to check whether players are actually paid, via quarterly spot-checks on club's financial records or random inquiry from players. An official observed that in past years there was a degree of laxity regarding standards and requirements, for example, in confirming the state of a club's finances. Accordingly, at licensing of clubs, rules were not always tightly observed and there was a lack of strictness. In some cases that allowed clubs that were actually financially unstable and/or incapable to get licences: 'During the licensing process, we need to check better: Is the budget realistic? Is there financial stability and capacity? Is there evidence for the expected inflow of finances? Does the declared

sponsor really exist? Is there an indication regarding the sponsors commitment to pay the declared sponsorship money? We need a more preventive approach rather than reactive approach’.

Another official noted that discussions were ongoing regarding how to better handle these situations in future. ‘FUFA wants to more proactively go to a club now – before there was waiting for problems to arise.’ Increasing the revenue streams for clubs is a crucial way to also deal with players welfare issues (increased, stable pay). The discussion here was about the role and significance of addressing welfare matters (of players, coaches, others) in the sequencing of sector’ reforms and improvements. ‘Does welfare come first or last? It is like chicken and egg’, the official observed.

Fans also played a role in advocating for players’ welfare and protection. One fan representative and organiser reported that in club related WhatsApp groups that have both fans and club managers as members, payment irregularities got discussed and this was a force that motivated management to clean up problematic practices. Also, sponsors at times took a more active role in bringing about change. In one case a sponsor told the club that the money was given for players’ wages, in another case a sponsor talked to players about pay problems and why they were not performing. Major sponsors who attach their brand to a club reportedly do not like to see their brand in the press due to pay scandals at the club they support. A player noted that the more the UPL and the country has stronger clubs, the better the bargaining power of players in contract negotiations generally. In other words, the higher the share of UPL clubs that are financially stable and performance ambitious (seeking enhancing the competitiveness of the team). There is also the factor that: if clubs which graduate to the UPL from lower leagues have better management and financial models, that can empower players in matters of bargaining with clubs. This might then enable them to secure a transfer to a club that pays a high sign on fee and wages timely or renew a contract with their current club with better terms. Other problems that players reportedly faced include the following:

- Pay to play: several respondents reported that some coaches demand that a player gives a share of the salary to the coach in order for a player to get playing time (for example 20% of the salary), and sometimes a share of the signing-fee is also demanded (in some cases 5-10% according to one respondent). This was said to be more common with young players. Talented players who would not be able or willing to pay such cuts might face problems getting into the team, or to secure a transfer to a better club.
- Players also reported that they are never aware as to whether interested clubs have approached their current club with an expression of interest regarding a transfer.

- Clubs and agents demand over-the-top sums for a player transfer which leads to the collapse of a promising transfer deal, to the disadvantage of the player.
- Clubs and agents are interested in the highest-fee transfer deal, regardless of the player's future: for example, does the club have a good reputation for developing young players further, say good coaching and mentoring? There is thus a risk of stagnation of talented players after transfer.
- Conflict of interest. A good number of coaches/club CEOs act as agents too; some have player scouting agencies. This has reportedly various effects, including which player gets playing time. A player that the coach/CEO hopes to sell might get playing time, though the player might not be the best in the squad for the position and another player deserved to play if only performance mattered.
- Problems to get talented players into strong developmental clubs abroad, for various reasons including lack of fruitful contacts with partners abroad, lack of exchange programmes with foreign clubs' academies, and high fee demands of some local agents. One respondent mentioned that though the Ugandan under 20 Hippos team made it to the AFCON U20 final in 2021 there were only two players who secured a transfer abroad afterwards (one was the top scorer of the tournament, Derrick Kakooza, to a club in Latvia, with a package that has a good development component). This is against the Ghanaian team (that won the competition in a 2-0 final win) where about 10 players secured contracts, according to this respondent (see e.g. Muganga 2022a for more background on this issue).
- Only a few of the agents that operate in the country are capable agents and command the ability to negotiate and secure a contract abroad (3-4 agents, according to one player's estimate).
- The absence of technical director/sports director in many clubs who would have significant capacities and time to handle vital matters relating to players (including talent/career development).
- The artificial turf pitches that are popular with some clubs are more likely to cause injury/wear-and-tear (such as knee-injury) as opposed to natural grass pitches.

### **5.11. Recent dynamics**

That said, 2022 evidenced that Ugandan football is thriving, and it is increasingly successful internationally, with notable milestones that include the following (see e.g. CAF 2022a, 2022b, 2023; FUFA 2022d; CECAFA 2022; Azam TV 2022; East African 2023d):

- The U-20 male national team qualified for the 2023 Africa U-20 Cup of Nations,
- The winner of the last season's UPL, Vipers SC, reached the group stage of the CAF Champions League - only the second club in the country's history (after KCCA FC) to achieve this milestone,

- The senior women's national team won CECAFA competitions and thus qualified for the Africa Women's Cup of Nations 2022 in Morocco (where the team went out in the group stages),
- The winner of the FWSL 2022, She Corporates, made it into the final at the CAF Women Champions League Zonal Qualifiers (where they lost to Simba Queens from Tanzania); Ugandan coach Charles Ayiekoh Lukula (who was in charge of She Corporate at that tournament) was hired as head coach by Simba Queens and led the club to the semi-final of the CAF Women's Champions League in Morocco, the first time a CECAFA team reached that stage and the first time a Ugandan coached a team at this tournament,
- In 2023, Uganda won the CECAFA U-18 Boys Tournament (with a win over Kenya in the final), and also the boys' and girls' categories at the CAF African Schools Football Championship CECAFA qualifiers (with wins over Tanzania and Kenya respectively in the finals).

These successes are arguably significantly linked to some of the positive changes discussed above. Uganda also experienced some sportive setbacks: for example, the UPL clubs went out early in the CAF Champions League competition 2023 and the Cranes did not qualify for AFCON 2024 (after the previous AFCON qualification campaign also failed) (Emanzi 2023; Saaka 2023). The veteran coach Milutin Sredojevic 'Micho' (Serbia) - who led Uganda to AFCON 2017 - was subsequently released. The hiring of the new coach, Paul Joseph Put (Belgium), was welcomed by sections of the press and pundits with a pinch of salt, given his reported significant history of sports-/finance-related problems in the past. This was reawakening memories of FUFA's past when it was known for financial woes, and this aspect of the hiring was a major aspect of some of the reporting and commentary (Daily Monitor 2023; AFP 2023; Madoi 2023; Kyazze 2023b; Independent 2023d). It is not clear why FUFA has taken on this risk on two fronts, image/reputation and commercial. Next is the analysis of the commercialization dynamics in Kenyan football.

## 6. The Case of Kenya

### 6.1. Overview

Kenyan football, including the Kenyan Premier League (KPL), was in many ways in a crisis of severe uncertainty, conflict and financial problems during the time of this research in late 2021-early 2022. This was due to government disbanding the of the Football Kenya Federation (FKF) on the ground of allegations of severe financial mismanagement. The government installed a caretaker committee, a move that was eventually sanctioned by FIFA with a ban on the country from participating in international football in 2022. The ban was lifted some months later.

By the end of 2021 when this research began in Nairobi, there was a period of ongoing investigations against the old federation management, interruptions to the KPL because of this turmoil, and reports of severe financial problems of various KPL clubs, including talk of looming bankruptcy and pleas to the government at the time to rescue struggling clubs. There was also the cancellation of a women national qualifier match against Uganda by CAF in early 2022 related to the government-FKF stalemate, a looming ban from FIFA due to government interference in the running of the sector, severe divisions between different camps in the sector, and talk of a coming election of a new FKF president in 2023 (The elections are now scheduled to take place in 2024.) These developments of crisis, conflict and stalemate were highly disruptive to football development and commercialization in the country; for example, sponsors pulled out of club engagements.

That said, the data collected from the respondents gives us instructive findings about the dynamics of football commercialisation in the country. I structure the discussion of the data as follows: I discuss some of the historical factors shaping commercialisation, especially its politics. I then take into focus a period of intensified commercialisation (and related advancements in football) from the 2000s to the 2010s, in order to discuss then the making of the crisis of commercialization that lasted up to 2023 and only gradually seems to ease. In that sense, it is in part an analysis of the rise and fall of commercialisation to-date, and the factors that have made football commercialisation in the country complicated and inhibited, up to now. I will then discuss some of the initiatives that actors have nevertheless tried to undertake to advance the sector.

First, Kenyan football (like its counterpart in Uganda) has several categories of clubs: clubs that are linked to or sponsored by government agencies/parastatals (clubs related to the Police or Army for example), community clubs (notably Gor Mahia FC, AFC Leopards SC, Mathare United),

corporate clubs (such as Tusker FC), and clubs owned by individuals (such as Kakamega Homeboyz FC). During the presidency of Daniel arap Moi (1978-2002), Kenyan football became politicised in a particular way. Moi came from an ethnic minority. Due to ethnic politics in the post-independence period, there was state action to restrain popular community-based clubs that had strong regional, ethnic groundings and thereby limit the potential for political mobilisation by oppositional forces. Government and parastatal clubs (namely state-related football clubs) were promoted instead. One decree in this respect was that no football club should carry a ‘tribal’ name. This is how, for example, AFC Leopards came to be. Its original name was Abaluhya Football Club. Abaluhya (commonly referred to as the Luhya) are a large and strong community in western Kenya, with a significant influence on the country’s politics.

The sector has remained highly politicised ever since, and this was emphasised by several respondents. For example, respondents argued that many politicians use football (and football clubs) as a platform for election purposes (to mobilise political support) but have little genuine sports or business interests/knowledge to develop the sector (also commercially), and regularly abandon it after securing their seat in parliament. The sector was perceived as being overly populated, influenced and shaped by opportunistic politicians. This was seen to be overall problematic - rather than productive - for the sectors’ development. Also, it was argued that some actors use football to get into politics in the first place.<sup>29</sup>

Second, Kenyan football has gone through multiple crises for a long period, for various reasons ranging from mismanagement (at federation, sector, and club level) to severe government-federation conflicts, resulting repeatedly in several protracted stalemates and dysfunctionalities. There were several caretaker committees over the years, and also a FIFA normalisation committee (2004). These crises impacted negatively on the sector, for example on the public image of and confidence in the sector – and this was cited as a reason for sponsors’ hesitation regarding football. There is also a historical deficit regarding football-relevant infrastructure, such as stadia and training grounds. Many KPL clubs rent stadia for match days; ‘home’ matches could be played in rented stadia far away from the training ground or (historical) home community/fan base. This is expensive and limits the match experience that they can offer their fans. Some clubs do not have their own training ground and/or do not train in their home community due to the shortage of facilities.

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<sup>29</sup> The current SportPesa CEO, Ronald Karauri, is an example here. He became a MP in the 2022 national election (Nation Media 2007). His father, Matthew Adams Karauri, was also in football and politics (MP).



Finally, the sector had significant incidences of fan violence. This has subsequently shaped the sector's image and discourse; football in Kenya is significantly linked to discourses and images of 'hooliganism', fan violence, insecurity and fan run-ins with police. It also affected stadia culture: there are very limited commercial activities in the stadia I visited in Nairobi - Kasarani Stadium, Kasarani Annex, Ruaraka Stadium, Nyayo National Stadium - there was no identifiable sale of alcohol or warm food (but nuts/ice-cream and sodas were on sale by mobile sellers in Nyayo for example). In Mombasa, in the stadium that KPL club Bandari FC uses, warm food (take aways), sodas and alcohol were on sale. That is arguably also due to matters of stadium ownership: the main sponsor of Bandari, Kenya Ports Authority (KPA), owns the ground, a permanent restaurant/bar exists there, and the premises are used throughout the week, where various social functions take place. This was a sports *and* recreational area.

That said, from the mid to late 2000s - after years of severe sector turmoil - there was eventually a sustained period of revival and growth of the sector, especially in commercial terms. This was closely linked to two things. Firstly, the KPL was formed in 2003 and owned, organised and managed by 16 clubs organised under a company - KPL Limited. Secondly, the KPL secured a deal in late 2007 with the multinational pay TV company SuperSport (South Africa based) to televise the KPL, from 2008 onwards. This contract was renewed and was supposed to last up to 2019. However, the collaboration ended prematurely in 2017.

It is vital here to delve into a deeper analysis in order to capture the changes that took place in the sector - including regarding its professionalisation – that came with commercialisation. It allows to track the achievements as well as challenges of commercialisation during that growth period that can be called the buzz or honeymoon period of commercialisation. The analysis is stylised and selective; focused on identifying some of the main features and trends of interest, as articulated by respondents.

## **6.2. The Buzz Period**

Kenya was one of the few African countries (including South Africa, Zambia) that had a broadcasting deal with SuperSport, and this boosted the prestige and image of KPL. The league was televised abroad, across the continent and beyond, on SuperSport, the leading sports channel in Africa. The period saw a number of improvements in terms of professionalisation of the KPL, including in the league organisation and promotion, club operations, teams, and communication (notably timely fixture announcements). These changes were in many ways in response to the conditions and requirements of the broadcaster. The company needed to produce attractive football

in a stable, predictable manner that could be marketed in a commercially profitable way, thus driving up Pay TV subscriptions.

Respondents noted that with the broadcaster and its requirements, various changes were made to meet them. Firstly, in terms of team outfits: the squad of a KPL team had similar jerseys and socks and players numbers on their jerseys. Secondly, contracts for players became more of a norm, and players' pay improved. Next, training became more regular. For example, it took place in the mornings (instead of the evening) because players were now paid by clubs and did not have to look for other paid work right away in the morning. There was also an ambulance vehicle and medical team required to be present in the stadium. Match-day fixtures (including the stadium to be used) were agreed on and communicated in advance to the public and the fans. Clubs also improved their technical teams. For example, over the years, more fitness coaches and physiotherapists were hired. They helped advance professional fitness training in clubs, conducted pre-match warm up sessions and guided players through injury recovery periods. According to interviewed fitness and physio professionals, this work advanced a cultural shift: towards clubs, coaches and players showing more patience after injuries and taking recovery period time more seriously instead of returning to the pitch too early. The latter was a practice previously due to coaches' demands to include a useful (yet not fully recovered) player in the squad and/or player's financial pressures to earn a match allowance before full recovery.

Though there were marked improvements in this era, this does not mean that changes were uniformly strong in all clubs, or that advancements were even over the years. But several respondents talked about significant positive changes that were achieved in the SuperSport era of the KPL. One commentator for instance noted the following: 'Over the 10 years that Supersport has been broadcasting the Kenya Premier League, much of the marketing had been done by them. KPL never invested behind their brand, neither did they compel teams to adhere to certain standards with regard to governance, strategic management, player welfare, and marketing' (Mumbo 2017). A media report from 2007 about the SuperSport-KPL deal noted the following about the expectations concerning clubs' practices: 'The clubs are expected to hold an account with signatories, have a database for all players and their contracts, be registered, have a physical address, and be able to produce audited accounts of their income and expenditure at the end of every year' (Balancing Act 2007). In other words, the KPL and its team were on a path of much needed and welcomed institutional change.

During the SuperSport period there was also a lot of national media coverage. Buzz and hype around KPL were created and sustained. This was done collectively (and at times in a coordinated

planned manner), including by a range of media houses, journalists, and pundits. Certain matches were hyped as versions of rivalries, for example, as a contest between traditional football super weights, a contest between regions, or between clubs from Nairobi neighbourhoods and so on. One captivating feature of this hype would be matches between AFC Leopards and Gor Mahia. These are clubs of neighbouring communities in western Kenya, with the interfaces of rivalry, mutual teasing and superiority complex, besides cross-cultural practices and intermarriages. The two clubs are colloquially referred as Mashemeji (in-laws), thanks to this closeness.

National newspapers had special pull-outs dedicated to the KPL and gave the league significant coverage, in line with their own commercial interests. There was a high level of information provision. A journalist remarked that the media boosted the public profiles of players and built-up league stars. Nicknames for particular players were invented/promoted by the press in the name of personalisation of the game and star profile development, and thereby KPL popularity boosting (see examples of George ‘Blackberry’ Odhiambo, or Joash ‘Berlin Wall’ Onyango) (Daily Nation 2009; Sang 2020a). There was a notable expansion of media staff and equipment as well as punditry during that period. Dozens of media professionals covered the match day weekends. Media houses invested in coverage quantity and quality, and journalists did their bit to offer quality coverage. SuperSport paid pundits on their shows good money for their work, and this motivated journalists to go the extra mile and do solid background research in preparation for a show. In short, there was a lot of buy-in, contribution and collective work of many actors from a range of professions and organisations towards strengthening and popularising the league. These created pillars of a product: namely, effective and sustainable commercialisation of sport in this concrete context (with its history, politics, political economy, economics, culture, demographics etc.) requires.

The profile and value of Kenyan football and KPL increased, thanks to being in the exclusive league of African countries that had a deal with the leading broadcaster (and dedicated KPL SuperSport channels) and thus global TV coverage. Players benefited from that: they now used video clip material in search of new clubs and better contracts. They could also be watched by their families, friends and neighbours from home. Their work was seen, followed, and recognised. Well-wishers gave appreciations during encounters in the city centre, or in the neighbourhood. Players managed to launch international careers including in major European top leagues and in top clubs. This gave Kenyan football a big boost among fans in the country. The exemplar of this key dynamic from that period is Victor Wanyama who played as the first Kenyan footballer in the EPL, for Southampton (2013-2016) and then Tottenham Hotspur (2016-2020). His move to the prime league in Europe was an achievement, in the context of east African players, who historically lagged behind their west

African counterparts in joining European clubs (Simiyu 2020; Ungruhe and Schmidt 2020; Simiyu 2022).<sup>30</sup>

The fan culture also intensified during this period. For example, new habits emerged: friends would spend a day together celebrating match day, fans would go to downtown Nairobi early on match day to celebrate match day and the forthcoming match, and fans would do road trips to away matches (and the host city became party town when a team with a large following had an away match there). Some interviewed fans explained that this later declined when authorities intervened due to ‘unruly’ behaviour of rugby fans on away matches (alcohol, etc.) that triggered a general clampdown on aspects of sports fan culture in the country some time back. This indicates that fan culture development is also a political matter, an issue of public order management. The Covid -19 pandemic and its lengthy lockdown periods in the early 2020s had hampered the fan culture further as fans were not allowed into the stadium. Fans participating in the league by visiting the stadium on match day was only recently and slowly re-emerging, sometime after stadia were reopened after the lockdown (for studies regarding football fandom in Kenya see Waliaula 2012, 2018, 2021, 2022; Waliaula and Okong’o 2014, 2020, 2021; Waliaula and Mbogo 2021; Odhiambo Ogone 2024).

Further, clubs got good money from the broadcast sponsor, and other sponsors also joined; for example, EABL as a title sponsor for several years. According to several respondents, KPL Limited, the company that was set up by the clubs to manage the league, did, a good job at managing not just the organisation of the league but also the tensions and conflicts, and the monetary aspects, including giving clubs their share and investing in aspects of league development. It had the money and subsequently also power at the time, and thus influence (and goodwill) from clubs, compared with the FKF in particular. The renewal of the contract with SuperSport indicates that KPL and clubs overall delivered what this big global broadcaster required. One respondent observed however that clubs got too complacent during this period in commercial terms. Accordingly, they came to rely too much on the sponsorship money that they received from KPL - especially SuperSport but also the title sponsor, Tusker - and did too little to develop innovatively their own sources of revenues: their own business lines, assets and products.

What was remarkable during this buzz period was that collective action and cohesion were relatively strong, to a level that allowed for a professional and commercial functioning and growth of the sector. According to respondents, clubs worked together reasonably well, there was interest in

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<sup>30</sup> See also the cases of Dennis ‘the Menace’ Oliech (a player for Nantes and AJ Auxerre in France amongst other; see Odongo 2020; Kinyanjui 2023b; Soccerway 2024), or McDonald Mariga (e.g. Inter Milan and Parma in Italy).

club, league and sector improvements, and SuperSport provided significant leadership in respect to what it took to broadcast in a stable, professional and exciting manner and investing in capacity building in the sector. This was against the historical background of severe problems in Kenyan football for years before ‘the buzz’ period. Prior to this, the FKF era was marred with league and club mismanagement, misuse of sector/league/sponsorship funds, wrangles, splitting of the major league into rivalry leagues, and so on.

The ‘honeymoon’ ended after nearly ten years. Respondents mentioned that the FKF wanted to regain some power and influence vis-à-vis clubs and KPL, and to have a larger share of the money that KPL was making, thus attempts to take back the running of the league from KPL. In other words, the FKF leadership, accordingly, could no longer tolerate the status quo concerning the organisation, decision making power and resources distribution of the KPL. The FKF wanted a shift away from the status quo where clubs and the KPL had significant power, money, and autonomy as well as influence over the day-to-day operation and trend of the league, and thus football in the country generally.

There was also an FKF election contest. One presidential candidate was Nick Mwendwa, a successful businessman and owner of KPL club Kariobangi Sharks. According to respondents, Mwendwa promised to increase the number of KPL teams from 16 to 18 so as to get the votes of clubs who would be benefitting from the enlargement. Mwendwa won the election, became President, the enlargement to 18 teams was rolled out and the powers of KPL were trimmed (by a court ruling and other administrative laws). SuperSport argued that this enlargement and the move away of the responsibility from KPL Ltd to FKF was a breach of contract, and subsequently pulled out. The company had experienced significant problems with ensuring stable broadcasting at that point and its subscribers had started complaining, according to a respondent who was involved in the KPL-SuperSport arrangement at the time. Several KPL matches could not be broadcast as advertised (mostly due to last minute changes of the match venue), or broadcasts ended prematurely due to fan violence ending the match. Accordingly, the management of the KPL by FKF was seen by then as too unreliable for a TV broadcaster to sell football consistently as a product to a demanding Pay-Tv audience, namely a discerning clientele that expected a service-as-advertised. Subscribers expected the game to be broadcast in good quality, at the expected day and time; according to schedule, and without interruption. The broadcaster’s advertisement in the run-up to matchdays and key matches in particular - the significant investment - also required a stable running of the league including top games, so as to sustain and develop the business as planned. The commercial risk of continuing the broadcasting operation became too severe for SuperSport. The respondent remarked that the FKF was

by that time too involved and distracted in their own dynamics (including the KPL enlargement issue) to organise the KPL in the required hands-on manner (see also Isaboke 2015).

The SuperSport pull-out was a shock to Kenyan football. The sector and the KPL have - according to press reports and interview data - never recovered since, particularly in terms of broadcasting and sponsorships (Nairobi Law Monthly 2017; Eshitemi 2019, 2022). Fans were hugely disappointed. The end of the relationship with this broadcaster was thus a set-back in the commercialisation of Kenyan football; it lost the broadcaster but moreover, a unifying, organisationally centripetal momentum, an institutional set up that seemed to have overcome some of the past challenges and apparently worked for many crucial actors in the system.

The crises and scandals that followed in the subsequent years were in various ways linked to a significant part to wrangles and conflicts at the FKF, and positioning and responses of various actors (clubs, fans, businesses) in this regard. There are strong forces inside (and outside) the sector that oppose the sitting FKF leadership under President Mwendwa and do influence the public accordingly: they contest the legitimacy and thus authority of the leadership in particular. According to respondents, the conflicts regarding matters of politics, finances, accountability, governance (sector/FKF) and sports have - after the SuperSport pull out - further infuriated and frustrated many fans, as well as players, coaches and pundits, and thus deepened and extended the crisis. Respondents criticised Mwendwa's management style of the FKF and sector, and that this has not helped in getting the sector out of crisis. Accordingly, there were issues around how the FKF handled sector stakeholders including commercial partners. There was extensive and prolonged criticism of Mwendwa and the FKF under his leadership in the press up throughout 2021-22, though somewhat less in 2023. It is noteworthy that as recent as January 2024, during the process of preparations for the FKF election (scheduled for October 2024), the government made new critical remarks: that it was considering deregistering the federation for noncompliance with the Sports Act 2012 (this became a debate issue subsequently and government was criticized for interfering in the election process) (Daily Nation 2024; Odongo 2024b). Overall, the sport and sponsorship crisis of the KPL (and the football sector in general) was seen in major ways to be the responsibility of the FKF president and his team. Significantly however, a number of respondents also noticed that some aspects of the Kenyan football improved under the leadership of Mwendwa, and that he tried in several ways to reform the sector for the better, also against the interests of very powerful clubs. In short, some respondents gave Mwendwa and his team credit, for example for boosting women football under his leadership.

### **6.3. The post-buzz period: football and commercialisation crisis**

#### **6.3.1. Financial crisis**

By the time of this research in Nairobi in late 2021/early 2022, the KPL had struggled for several years, riddled with: allegations of misuse of funds at the FKF, conflicts between FKF and the government, match-fixing, delay or non-payment of players' salaries, poor players' welfare, and the exit of strong players to other leagues in search for more stable pay and better career opportunities (to leagues in Tanzania, southern Africa, and Europe, for example). There was no full-live TV coverage of KPL games. Only short summaries were shown in evening news. A very few clubs offered some sort of live coverage of some games on their social media channels (mainly Facebook). This TV 'blackout' was also a problem for players who could not use TV clips as well as during the time of SuperSport to promote themselves when in search for a new club.

There was talk of financial bankruptcy and the collapse of some clubs (especially community clubs) and players going without pay for more than two months at several clubs (for an analysis on financial stability issue of clubs in Kenyan football see Kinyariro, Gesami, and Kirimi 2017). A briefing was compiled by Bob Mundro, chairman of Mathare United, and shared with actors close to government so as to appeal for an intervention to rescue the struggling clubs (Sang 2022; Mballa 2022a). It was argued that players could soon be boycotting matches because of the non-payment situation. Concerns were also raised about the impact of the financial imbalances in the league on competition fairness, since only financially stable clubs could manage to keep strong players and thus strong squads. In recent seasons some (major) clubs had to let go of a number of key players, for financial reasons. Losing their experienced best players meant that they now relied on younger, inexperienced and cheaper players instead. Thus, the financial crisis in the KPL negatively affected players' careers and talent development, to the detriment of the long-term prospects of the sector. How did it get to this state of affairs, five years after the exit of SuperSport?

#### **6.3.2. Sponsors' walk-out on KPL – sponsors' movement to youth football**

First, in the years after the SuperSport exit, betting companies became the main sponsors of the league. There was an over-reliance on this one sector of the economy, and eventually that model ran into trouble. The government argued that betting is harmful to the country (the youth in particular) and took actions against some betting companies. There were also accusations of tax evasion and money laundering against some betting companies and SportPesa, a KPL title sponsor, lost its license as a consequence, and the KPL therefore lost its principal sponsor. Also, it was noted by respondents that non-betting companies - given these public discourses and policy stands by the government and the bad image of betting among sections of the population - did not want to be associated as sponsors

with betting firms: neither appear on the same jerseys nor be associated with a league where the main sponsor is a betting company.

Some interview data suggested various deeper politics were at play here. The FKF president was seen as an ally of then Deputy President, and now President, William Ruto. In press reports Mwendwa was referred to as a 'close friend' and 'close ally' of Ruto (Kinyua 2022; Mballa 2022b). It was argued that as the country moved closer to presidential elections in August 2022, the rival camp - linked to then President Uhuru Kenyatta and Presidential candidate Raila Odinga - wanted to harm Ruto's election prospect by blaming the problems of Kenyan football (especially the alleged financial mismanagement) on FKF President (and Ruto ally) Mwendwa. It was also argued that Mwendwa organised business deals with a betting company (from Nigeria) that competed with established betting companies linked to specific sections of the Kenyan elite. The argument here was that the government move against Mwendwa, the FKF, and certain betting companies was a case of intra-elite rivalries: in the betting sector and the economy generally, as well as in politics.

It was further suggested by one sports business expert that the betting companies - as they became very powerful over the years and households spent significant money on betting - had become a concern for the established corporate powerhouses of the economy (beer companies, for example). These companies worried about a loss of customers and markets given the high spending on betting. Accordingly, they also used their influence in the political realm to trim betting companies' power as a perceived rival to their own business lines and profits.

The crucial point to note here is that major business and political rivalries and conflicting interests and agendas - and a shift in actual/perceived power capabilities of actors and relevant power structures and relations - can shape commercialisation dynamics. They can, for example, trigger counter measures of business/political entities that feel under threat. They can lead to severe direct or indirect political, administrative and business attacks by particular actors on other actors in the sector in order to achieve a new status quo, thus distribution of power, influence, market shares, and resources. Inter-business rivalries and tensions are key to watch in such analyses of trajectories of commercialisation, and the politics and political economy thereof. More generally, dynamics at the level of high-level national politics can shape commercialisation dynamics, and, in this reported case, hamper them, at least temporarily. The political conflict and contestation between national factions of the political elite played out at and spilled over into the contestations concerning FKF, KPL, and sponsorships.



It can also be argued that the composition of the FKF management pre the 2022 national/presidential election was misaligned with the politics of the Uhuru Kenyatta presidency and government at the time. With the election of Ruto as the new President, and the subsequent reinstatement of Mwendwa into FKF office, the FKF is now arguably more aligned with the major constellation of power and interests in national politics in general and the presidency in particular (along the lines of the FUFA-Government constellation in Uganda). Ruto and his government – like his counterpart in Uganda - also supported the east African AFCON 2027 bid (Kinyua 2022; Mozzart Sport 2023).

Second, there was a severe problem of finding and keeping sponsors for KPL, both for the league and clubs. In the 2010s, multinational EABL - via its brand Tusker - was KPL title sponsor for some years (Tusker Premier League), and Puma was also engaged as a KPL ball sponsor (Swila 2015). Later, betting companies became KPL title sponsors (SportPesa Premier League, Betking Premier League). There was however no KPL sponsor in the 2021/22 season: no broadcast sponsor, no league sponsor, no title sponsor. In the 2023/24 season however, the KPL had a broadcast sponsor again, Tanzanian pay TV Azam (the media subsidiary of the giant business conglomerate Azam). Title sponsors are Azam and the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) (below). Azam also had separate sponsorship deals with the two iconic KPL clubs Gor and Leopards (Kinyanjui 2023e; Odongo 2023b).

Some of the country/region's corporate giants were not active in the KPL. Safaricom's absence for example was symbolically significant given how visible, active, influential and close to the state the company is in Kenya (Tuwei and Tully 2017; Tyce 2020; Park 2021), including as a sponsor of sports (notably: rally, golf, athletics). According to respondents, there were various reasons for this absence: by the early 2020s, big brands largely regarded the KPL as too political, too mismanaged, and to be too much in turmoil. They did not see the KPL as appealing to broad segments of the population. It was seen to be too unpopular to achieve high followers' numbers and generating broad-based appeal. This rendered it a risky and potentially unprofitable venture for sponsorship investment. Those brands that wanted to target the middle and upper classes, it was said, opted for sponsorship of golf tournaments or rugby events, for example. Some brands, as mentioned, also did not want to be associated with betting firms, at KPL or club level. Respondents also remarked that the sector had lost some big sponsors in recent years. This serial walk-out of sponsors was discussed in the media as well. There was too wide a public knowledge and debate about the problems of KPL and the FKF to retain significant sponsors in recent years.

For example, as already highlighted, KPL broadcasting companies had in recent years walked out of running contracts referring to problems with how the KPL was run, and the role of FKF in that. SuperSport walked out in 2017. Chinese multinational StarTimes walked out in 2021, after being just over a year into a seven years-contract that was signed in 2020. In a press report, a StarTimes manager was quoted saying that the company decided to pull out ‘after a careful review of the contract performance’ (Sang 2021). Respondents that had insight into both walkouts mentioned that from the broadcaster’s point of view contractual obligations were not met from the FKF/KPL side. Thus, commercial expectations were not fulfilled at some point. The problems and shortcomings in running KPL had made it difficult for the TV companies to run their broadcasting in a commercially successful way, and to gain and retain paying TV viewers in significant numbers.

KPL title sponsors from the betting sector - SportPesa and Betking - also ended their engagement prematurely in the late 2010s/early 2020s. This had left the KPL repeatedly in disarray, and the league had no sponsor in the season 2019/20 for example (Wadegu 2019; Fletcher 2021). In the press it was noted that there was no ‘replacement for SportPesa who exited the Kenyan market following a protracted tax battle with the government’ (Sang 2020b). The betting firm’s license was revoked in 2019 with reference to severe tax payment problems. The firm took years to restart business in the country, up to 2022 (Sang 2020d; Kurgat 2022). SportPesa was very active as a sponsor in Tanzanian football - sponsoring three clubs for example - while its Kenyan business was in trouble, and it withdrew club sponsorship there. A 2018 Tanzanian news report indicates differences in firm-government relations in the two countries:

SportPesa Tanzania has said they will not terminate sponsorship deals with Young Africans, Simba and Singida United unlike Kenya’s side that has cancelled the deal with AFC Leopards and Gor Mahia after the government raised gambling tax rates from 7.5 to 35 per cent. (...) Director of Administration and Compliance of SportPesa Tanzania, Tarimba Abbas, said there is no reason for the three clubs to worry following what has happened in Kenya because the circumstances are different. Tarimba said their firm is enjoying good cooperation with the government and enabled them to increase their income for 40 per cent since their establishment in May last year. (Citizen 2018)

Further, Betking walked out - one year into a four-year deal - reportedly referring to a ‘breach of contract by the federation’ (Ashihundu 2021). The press discussed the BetKing 2021 walk-out in the context of this sequence of walkouts, ‘Memories are still fresh in the minds of stakeholders four years ago when SuperSport ended its stay in Kenya in 2017’ (ibid; see further Sang 2021a; Willis 2021).

In the eyes of sections of the public, there was a severe problem with how the sector, and the FKF in particular, handled sponsors. Significantly, the walkouts and the seasons without significant/uninterrupted corporate sponsorships meant that by 2022, KPL clubs were generally in a period of years of severe underfunding as they had lost their income share from KPL broadcasting or title sponsorship revenues. Note also that some betting firms have walked out of club sponsorships prematurely partly due to licensing troubles, indicating, again, that protracted conflicts, disputes and controversies in a contested sector that is active in sports sponsorship, such as betting, can affect sponsorship commitment and performance subsequently of companies from this sector. As the press reports:

betting firms are required to renew their licenses annually, a move that has always been mired in long-standing push and pull over the conditions for licensing. As the betting firms which are large investors in sports sought licenses, some football clubs were adversely affected when sponsorships were prematurely ended. AFC Leopards and Gor Mahia who were sponsored by Betsafe at the start of the 2021/2022 KPL season had to look for new sponsors mid-season. The two popular clubs are now sponsored by Betika and BetArique [Betafriq] respectively. (Kurgat 2022)

As mentioned, the two clubs named above had some years earlier already lost their sponsor SportPesa when that firm had licensing troubles as mentioned earlier (Sang 2019). FKF and KPL meanwhile continued to run into conflict and there were legal contestations (notably at the Sports Disputes Tribunal) concerning league matters in 2020 for example (Kisenge 2020). The Ugandan government also had its governance issues with the betting sector, but the regulatory adjustments (a tightening of rules at some point in 2019) were seen through with less open conflict. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have in the past years undertaken measures (including increasing taxes) in the name of countering betting addiction (Kahura 2018; Daily Monitor 2019; Muchira 2019; Faull 2019; Muthama 2022).

Third, one trend was for certain big corporates that wanted to remain with a significant foot in the football sector to migrate to the school or youth section and do their marketing from there. Coke, Pepsi, dairy company Brookside, Safaricom and Airtel were all active in that section of the sector, currently or at some point in the last 10 years (Eshitemi and Mosesti 2013; Airtel 2017). Reportedly, at the start of one of these corporate competitions in 2016 the CEO Kenya of the multinational Airtel articulated a vision that sounded similar to that of the Plascon manager during the Arua Hills deal signing (cited above): develop talent for the global level, sports and business wise; and develop the nation via sports: 'Airtel Kenya CEO Adil El Youssefi said, 'the Youth are important to us and we

believe in providing them with tools that will not only empower them, but give them a platform to contribute positively to the development of this Country. Our biggest dream for the Airtel Rising Stars is *not only to raise players who will be marketable locally but also internationally.*' (emphasis added, Airtel 2016). The Kenya Marketing Manager of the multinational Coca-Cola reportedly expressed an ambition to develop 'soccer stars' via the firm's sponsorship of the second edition of its U-16 Pan-African tournament that Kenya hosted in late 2019. He was quoted saying: 'The COPA Africa Cup is a platform that will go a long way in ensuring the students are the *next generation of soccer stars*' (Elayne 2019, emphasis added).

Significantly, Brookside, via its Tuzo brand, was at some point a sponsor of KPL club giant Gor Mahia. It did not renew the three-year partnership with the club, reportedly due to an adjustment of its marketing strategy given market dynamics, but also due to repeated match violence of the club's fans (Wadegu 2012; Olilo 2014). A company manager had earlier condemned the violence and emphasised that these incidents have pushed the association of its brand with the club 'to near jeopardy' and made it reconsider the sponsorship deal, given that Brookside is a 'responsible corporate citizen' and that sports is supposed to 'promote social integration'. Further:

He said if indeed the said individuals are isolated as their fans, Gor Mahia should not only issue a public apology to those wronged by the incident including Brookside Dairy Limited but also offer a plausible commitment that such acts would not be repeated in the foreseeable future (...) 'the incident is against our original philosophy of sponsoring sports in the country where there must be a winner and a loser.' (Daily Nation 2012)

Evidently, corporates and consumer brands such as Brookside that sold to large segments of society wanted their brand to be associated with social harmony such as fairness and meritocratic, non-violent (win-win) social relations, not inter-group/societal conflicts. By the late 2010s, the Kenyan multinational, linked to the business conglomerate of the Kenyatta family, was working with secondary schools in the organisation of sports including football at that level. It was invested in youth football, and talent development. For example, it supported the Wanyama Roya Charity Cup (U-16 football tournament) (Yonga 2020).<sup>31</sup> Significantly, Safaricom had been active in youth football previously. The leading multinational telecom organised a competition that was played in all regions of the country, over a period of several months and well marketed: Chapa Dimba Na Safaricom. The 2019/2020 competition was organised under the motto 'Every Game is an

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<sup>31</sup> See also: <https://twitter.com/brooksideld/status/1152188760534192128?lang=en-GB>.

Opportunity’. Accordingly, this competition was about showcasing talent and transforming lives: ‘Chapa Dimba Na Safaricom is a national football tournament for male and female youth aged between 16-20 years. The aims of the tournament are to transform the lives of young people by giving them a platform to showcase their talent and an opportunity to earn from their passion.’<sup>32</sup>

The prize money was KES 1m for the winning team (girls and boys respectively), and the competition promised that ‘32 players will be selected to train in Spain’ (ibid). A respondent noted that the company discontinued the engagement due to significantly hiked fee demands from the FKF. By 2022, there was talk of a future revival of that sponsorship and tournament. By mid-2023, the competition was indeed back on the scene, as the largest youth football tournament in Eastern Africa in terms of sponsorship investment (KES 400m for this fourth edition of the competition) (Odongo 2023a; Safaricom 2023a, 2023c, 2023d).<sup>33</sup> Note that this tournament – just as other school level football competitions - was very well attended by spectators, especially compared to most KPL games: on a match day in the Coast region in January 2024 there were almost 3,000 spectators (about 600 of whom were women and girls). The finals in March 2024 are expected to be watched by up to 8,000 spectators. The average spectator number at a UPL game is 300 spectators. De-facto only the UPL blockbuster games have spectator numbers in the thousands are comparable to well-attended Chapa Dimba and similar youth football tournaments/events in the regard: Gor vs Leopards has typically about 6,000, and Leopards vs. Shabana about 4,000 spectators, according to a respondent. Notably, a KPL popularity boosting link between such youth/school competitions to the top league was apparently not in place (this is similar to the Ugandan situation).

Sponsors arguably assessed engagement in youth and school football to be profitable, beyond the CSR function of sports sponsorship. Focusing on that segment, football had been disassociated from its largely KPL-associated stigma of ‘ghetto’, ‘hooliganism’, politicking and mismanagement. How was this achieved? One respondent noted that the likes of Coca Cola and Safaricom are running their own controlled tournaments; they are making football events safe, fun and enjoyable for the youth, as they activate their products. At tournament events on the Kenyan Coast in early 2024 for example, security levels were high, Safaricom activated youth to join their network (a platform called Safaricom Hook, designed for young people/GenZ and their data bundle needs for social media consumption – TikTok, amongst others), and other brands such as Coke, Britam and Rexona tagged

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<sup>32</sup> <https://chapadimba.safaricom.co.ke/>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://nation.africa/kenya/sports/football/chapa-dimba-set-for-june-kick-off-4217614>;

<https://www.safaricom.co.ke/media-center-landing/press-releases/all-set-for-chapa-dimba-eastern-regional-finals-at-kinoru-in-meru>; <https://www.safaricom.co.ke/media-center-landing/press-releases/safaricom-chapa-dimba-ebwali-brenda-girls-crowned-2023-western-region-champions>.

along, a respondent observed (accordingly, Safaricom was seen to be the more expensive data package provider, compared to competitors such as Airtel - such promotions were run in that commercial context; see also Safaricom 2023b). We can note here significant cooperation between big consumer brands that target the same youth segment (under 24 years of age), and yet do not compete with each other for market share.<sup>34</sup>

An interview with a marketing staff of a multinational brand that is active in football outside the KPL – in a competition event series that the company manages on its own - made clear it that for a brand it is key to find a format that allows to link the features of the competition and its participating teams/players (format, vibe, age group.) to the core properties of the brand product/image. In that way the event and the football play can be run/seen as an expression of the brand properties and the brand gets associated with the event. The competition that this company organises also allows winning teams to play at global levels of the competition; this connecting with, networking and competing at global level (and players interactions with stars that are brand ambassadors in Kenya and abroad) are thus part of the marketing, and expressions of the brand image/slogans.

Arguably then, the big brands tried to go to and invest in sections of the football sector that were less or differently shaped by national politics and the respective political and business rivalries. There, their brand was more protected from the stalemates and scandals that rocked the KPL regularly and brought it to a standstill, triggered renewed rounds of crisis, dysfunctionality, and uncertainty, thus resulted in value loss (lower popularity, following, positive visibility, loyalty) and renewed brand damage from a sponsor's side of view. The ability to have greater control regarding the organisation of the sports and marketing activities in these competitions, as the Ugandan marketing manager noted for the engagement of multinational companies in school/university football there, thus arguable played a role here in the Kenyan context too. Finally, the comparison with the sponsors engagement in Uganda raises various questions including: what explains that Plascon, a company that also operates in Kenya, is a super sponsor in football (UPL and others) and sports generally in Uganda, yet not active in the KPL?

### **6.3.3. Image problems**

The image problem of football, according to several respondents goes beyond matters of FKF wrangles, politics, and alleged misuse of funds, and respective spillovers into KPL affairs. It also

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<sup>34</sup> See for further analysis Origi and Deya (2019) on strategic drivers of commercialization in Kenyan football and Mboya, Mwisukha, and Gitonga (2022) on determinants of corporate sponsorship for KPL clubs.

goes beyond the image and governance problem of certain KPL clubs that several respondents highlighted: namely a one-man show of the club CEO/President, significant misuse of funds and similar malpractices. Some suggested that football has a public image problem more generally and that this affected the realm of commercialisation, thus making it difficult to attract more and better sponsors. Accordingly, football in Kenya at competitive levels is, at least historically, widely regarded as a ‘ghetto sports’, played by people from poor backgrounds, with low/no education success. There are public stereotypes and perceptions that players have a past linked to the ghetto, poverty, problem families, and criminality. Kibera and Mathare, the two largest ‘slums’ in Kenya (Kibera reportedly the largest globally), or Kariobangi ‘slum’, have successful football clubs, as seen hereinafter. Added to that is the image/perception that the sector is prone to fans violence, that fans are likely to be hostile, fight, and destroy and steal vendors’ merchandise at the stadium, as has happened several times in the past.

Thus, some brands and companies, respondents noted, don’t want to associate with football. Football was potentially a risk to a brand’s reputation or did not add enough to one’s brand value. Clubs were also widely perceived to be mismanaged, and not accountable for their finances (i.e. had governance problems). Respondents remarked that it is brand damaging for sponsors if a club that a company supports is covered negatively in the press due to delayed pay of players’ wages, funds mismanagement, or fans’ violence. This is especially true if the bad press persists repeatedly and over an extended period of time. Respondents noted that an investor wants to see returns on their investment and that required visibility (media coverage) and numbers, in terms of fans and viewers. Visibility and numbers were difficult however to offer at significant levels by 2022 given that KPL football was not being broadcast live on TV, Kenyan male football was not regarded as competitive, the KPL was seen as unpopular, and the sector was seen as mismanaged. Some of these conditions had eased by early 2024 (for example, the broadcasting aspect).

Notably, one sports marketing expert argued that a significant section of the marketing staff and managers in big companies have a middle/upper class background – for example, that they have gone to private, expensive elite schools. Accordingly, that is why they do not understand (also culturally and emotionally) a sport like Kenyan football and how to exploit its commercial potential, and rather stay away from the sector. This has embodied and reproduced the stigma against football. It explains partly the popularity of golf or rugby among corporate giants: they cater their sponsoring to the clientele that watches and plays these sports.

Another dimension of the puzzle to explain the low level of sponsorships/investments in KPL clubs: Two interviewed managers of KPL clubs noted that the board, owners and (political) patrons are at times reluctant/sceptical (for a range of reasons including political, professional, regional/tribal,.) when it comes to endorsing innovations that could boost the financial situation of the club. For example, letting new investors in from outside the club was near impossible currently in one club, a respondent noted; the patrons would fear to lose the grip on the club and its follower base (which in turn was their political and voter base in national elections).

It is equally worth noting that, historically, sport - as observed by several respondents - was seen to be about 'hanging out' (leisure) and for those who cannot excel academically; it was for losers who are not serious. Doing sports as a child and youth was regarded far lower than reading for school success. In addition, there was a historical gender bias. Girls were not supposed to play football, let alone play the sports with boys (that was seen as tomboy-ish). As mentioned, the KPL also has an image and popularity problem due to the history of the sport in the country, especially since the suppression of community football clubs under Moi, as evidenced in the changing the name of Abaluhya FC into AFC Leopards. Finally, the popularity of certain KPL clubs is hampered by internal management problems (financial wrangles, issues with players welfare and development,.) and having no ownership of training grounds or stadia (thus little to no effective control regarding executing their football matches). The lack of an own stadium for several clubs is a severe hindrance in putting up a proper match day experience for fans and attracting a larger, consistent fan base; match grounds get hired at different venues, at times far away from one's home area. This also partly explains the limited commercialisation terms of provision of food and drinks at KPL games on match day. The hired stadium is often government run with government rules for how to use the stadium and what not to do. Clubs had limited control regarding their match day events. As mentioned, there were no or hardly any sales stalls operational during visited KPL matches to different match grounds in Nairobi during the time of research in 2021/22.

Against this background, questions arise: how does one build an image that is attractive to current and potential players, coaches/technical team members, fans (potential fans/fence sitters) and sponsors? What are the different strategies that have been tried in recent years to alter aspects of public image and perception? How have clubs, players, companies, marketing campaigns set up the image of Kenyan football, the KPL? What is being done (and by who) to try and revive football? How have other sports and leagues in Kenya (basketball, volleyball, rugby, golf, athletics, tennis, , fared? What lessons can be picked and applied to football in Kenya? Regionally, what lessons can Kenyan football stakeholders learn from Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania for example?



#### **6.4. Revitalising football - Tackling some of the challenges**

According to respondents, Kenya - like Uganda - had a vibrant school football sector. School football was popular with male and female pupils. Reportedly it was the most popular sport with the youth. High school tournaments were popular with fans, generally well organised, and prestigious to win. Schools offer scholarships for good footballers. There was also the motivation to play in competitive regional competitions, for example against Ugandan high schools (CAF 2023). Schools and universities games (football inclusive) are becoming a key feature and pillar of the East African Community integration; one major example here is the popular Federation of East Africa Secondary Schools Sports Associations (FEASSSA) games that brought together around 3,000 students from primary and secondary schools from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Uganda has been particularly successful in football there in recent years and there was a notable Uganda-Kenya sport rivalry in girls football for example (i.e. who is best in the region), a respondent noted. Companies and other organisations are keen to sponsor and be associated with these regional games. Pupils and students relish the travel and adventure associated with this, besides the playing and winning trophies and medals. This section of the football sector, as mentioned earlier, seems to be well supported by sponsors too, especially firms which sell into the youth/children and/or parents' market (dairy products, soft drinks, personal hygiene products). Several young footballers were said to gain scholarships in universities abroad, in the US for example. University football in Kenya was dynamic too.

Another dynamic area are football academies. They have sprung up over the years and were popular with parents who could afford their fees. Respondents noted though that academies do rather cater for the well-off section of the population: for children of middle-class families in well-off areas of Nairobi for example. The training here was said to be more about fun and keeping the children occupied and fit – for example, one to two times a week (usually on weekends) - rather than identifying and developing top talents for professional/competitive football. Well-off academy teams were said to lose against kids' teams from income poor areas who play/train more. Some football coaches, veterans and former professional players who are/were active in the KPL (or in women football) also earned some of their income from academies. Yet, a respondent noted that academies are generally disconnected from the rest of the sector and not actively integrated (say by FKF) into the conversation about the future of Kenyan football (in terms of playing philosophy and related focus).

However, there were also academies that had components tailored to the development of future professional footballers. One academy for example has complemented the provision of training to

well off schools with other products: such as a programme that prepares a youth player comprehensively (also in terms of nutrition, diet, sports psychology, character development etc.) in the course of several months for a move into a football-scholarship based further education path abroad (e.g. in the US) or to academies/football development placements in Europe (Spain). The academy, Green Sports Academy, has built strong ties to its partners in the respective countries in order to offer this structured move-abroad path, an interviewed manager of the academy noted. The website showcases success example of its former players who made it to university placements across the US.<sup>35</sup> One of their players was signed by Gor Mahia (Sang 2020c). The academy's website explains that the motivation of setting up the academy was 'to *bridge the gap* between talent and opportunity in Kenya and Africa as a whole. .... Our goal is to develop, prepare and *grant our players the opportunities* they need to play at the highest level they can' (emphasis added; notice the emphasis on structured progress towards realisation/capturing of opportunities). This motivation rose from the experience of its founders, who as youth faced challenges - lack of clear structures and opportunities - to grow their talent and progress into a career in elite professional football: '...there were too many 'ifs', too many 'maybes', and just too much left out of our control'.<sup>36</sup>

Notably, the academy also uses technology (like other exemplars in the sector, as outlined above): PlayerTek, a player-tracking and GPS system to measure 'metrics such as speed, impact, power, fitness, endurance as well as track players' performances during games. This enables an extremely high level of accuracy when setting personal benchmarks and performance goals'.<sup>37</sup> The outfit also runs a football club (African Warriors) and organises amateur football tournaments in Kenya and other African countries. This has broadened the revenue base of its business and allowed the team to develop a distinct set of skills (beyond football training) - as well as a broad image/brand base- that it uses to open/sustain its business lines. It can now offer its coaches regular, full-time employment.

There was equally a vibrancy in community football, many respondents noted. They observed significant positives - in terms of fan culture, club-fan relationship - in some Nairobi community-based clubs (notably residential estate clubs in lower income neighbourhoods) which are not in the KPL but in lower leagues. There are reports of success stories these clubs have built a loyal and growing fan base and are very popular in their constituencies. Management (especially by young professionals from the community) seems effective in some exemplary clubs. Noteworthy here is the fact that fans can communicate with management and hold it accountable more directly than in the

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.greensportsafrica.com/green-sports-academy/>.

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.greensportsafrica.com/green-sports-academy/>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

KPL, also because fans and management come from the same community, thus know each other and meet and interact outside the pitch, in the neighbourhood social life. Fans were thus reportedly more ready to provide funds to build and strengthen their club. There is a significant bond, sense of ownership, loyalty and pride in the community towards the clubs. They are a reflection of collective achievement and opportunities for individual career and life achievements for the players. Misuse of funds by management seems to be less of an issue in the well-managed community clubs given the thicker relations to the constituency/fans, respondents noted. Such community clubs (and tournaments) thus seemed to be in some ways remarkably different to and with advantages over some UPL club who were said to be more disconnected from the larger population/fan bases and less accountable. Community clubs reportedly also have young people in media/communication roles.

Some managers/CEOs of these clubs are role models in their community since they came from the same humble backgrounds and made it in their careers. One example of such a role model was a high-achieving medical doctor and entrepreneur who was now in club leadership: Dr. Ahmed Kalebi (59.6k X-followers). Born in Kibera, Nairobi, he is regarded as an instrumental part of the rise and popularity of community grassroots' team Kibera's Darajani Gogo FC (or Gogo Boys). The club's motto is '*playing for change*'; contributing to community development (including combating gang violence, crime & drugs) is part of the main objectives of the club (Amimo n.d.).<sup>38</sup> according to interview data, the motivation of these professionals was also about giving back to and improving lives in their community and players and fans appreciated that. Arguably then, these clubs and their leadership had significant credibility. Relatedly, very popular are community tournaments; they are organised by different entities, including NGOs and politicians. One respondent referred to a popular tournament - regarding bringing together the community and showcasing talent - that built bridges to the music scene too and handled the security issue (while alcohol was on sale) in an effective manner: the Fyah Mummah Jahmby Super Cup. Accordingly, the key to a successful event (also in terms of security matters) is to work with community members in the organisation of the tournament.<sup>39</sup>

Some sponsors were interested in collaborating with such clubs and community tournaments. According to interviewees, companies that were active here as sponsors were firms that sell micro products to income poor areas: insurance, savings, and food brands (crisps). Gogo boys had an airline

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<sup>38</sup> See <https://twitter.com/drahmedkalebi/status/1440977135754227712>; <https://twitter.com/DrAhmedKalebi>; [https://twitter.com/Gogo\\_Boys\\_FC](https://twitter.com/Gogo_Boys_FC).

<sup>39</sup> See further: <https://www.facebook.com/JahmbyKoikai/videos/a-recap-of-the-fyah-mummah-supercup-2021-first-edition-in-my-hood-dagoretti-givi/3015034022093340/>; <https://www.facebook.com/JahmbyKoikai>; Betsafe (2021).

(Freedom Airline) as one of its sponsors.<sup>40</sup> But finding sponsors remained generally very difficult. It will be interesting to observe what sort of companies – other than betting firms - will become more active in this part of the sector over the years, and how the FKF and other major actors in Kenyan football will link with this section of the sector in the ongoing revival period. Household appliances was seen as good fit by one interviewee as a tournament sponsor.

One other key aspect of concern in Kenyan football – as in Uganda - was players' welfare and how to improve the finances and other support players get, how to strengthen their bargaining power, and other considerations. The poor welfare situation was cited as a reason for the exodus of strong footballers, and their search for better conditions in other countries in the region (such as in Tanzania, the country that has clubs regarded as the best paying in the eastern African region) or further afield (including Zambia).<sup>41</sup> This was said to in turn weaken the attractiveness of the KPL and affected KPL clubs, thus impacting the ability to attract and retain fans (and thus sponsors).<sup>42</sup> Respondents noted some positive dynamics thanks to the existence and work of the Kenya Footballers Welfare Association, and other initiatives that try to address some of the players' concerns. A related matter: several respondents noted that clubs have problems in receiving their development fee for talents they have identified and nurtured in their childhood/youth, once they become valuable and get sold for good money during their professional careers. There were various problems in this regard (registration, FKF, agents and other factors.) and this seemed to have been negatively affecting sector growth, clubs' finances and commercialisation generally for a long period of time. Like in Uganda, there were debates in Kenya about the struggles of some Kenyan players in foreign clubs, about the difficult financial situation retired former sport stars (including footballers) find themselves in after their active professional careers (notably income poverty). There were several proposals discussed regarding amelioration of this situation including establishing a pension scheme for the players. Equally debated were the current low level of competitiveness of the national men team, Harambee Stars (58.9k X-followers) (Kinyanjui 2023b; Chuma 2023c; Onyatta 2023; Makori 2023).<sup>43</sup>

One argument advanced by several respondents was that KPL footballers are currently not well known among the general public. The task that many actors thus took on in recent years was to make Kenyan football/footballers better known, more visible and more popular. Journalists, broadcasting

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<sup>40</sup> <https://m.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=856198239238063&set=a.530924811765409&type=3;>  
[https://twitter.com/Gogo\\_Boys\\_FC/status/1729818420361797956/photo/1;](https://twitter.com/Gogo_Boys_FC/status/1729818420361797956/photo/1)  
[https://twitter.com/Gogo\\_Boys\\_FC/status/1727663348257280417.](https://twitter.com/Gogo_Boys_FC/status/1727663348257280417)

<sup>41</sup> See for an example the club stations of Harambee Stars winger Ayub Timbe who joined Azerbaijan top-flight side Sabail FK in early 2024 after a successful stint in China (Chuma 2024).

<sup>42</sup> See for recent cases Kinyanjui (2024a); Gor News (2022); Chuma (2023a).

<sup>43</sup> [https://twitter.com/harambee\\_\\_stars.](https://twitter.com/harambee__stars)

TV staff and others argued that to make football more popular what was needed is that people know more about Kenyan football: the KPL, teams, players - including their private and sports background, strengths, career moves, and personal lives - and tactics of various teams. One respondent observed that people know a lot about the EPL and do/can talk about it for hours but are far less knowledgeable about football in their own country, including the KPL. There was apparently no well-known currently active Kenyan outstanding football star/role model. This had hampered the KPL promotion of broadcaster StarTimes, a respondent observed: it had difficulty in putting together the components of narrative, stardom, drama, personality, and sport rivalries as ingredients of an appealing broadcast, that captivates and draws in viewers in big numbers. To build up this, takes time, several seasons. And yet the process of building the soap opera-type framing/branding of the KPL (with well-known and liked/disliked signature characters) was undermined and eventually disrupted during the StarTimes broadcasting period by the rise in league management problems and conflicts between actors, and the eventual ending of contractual relations and broadcaster pull out (see also below). The national senior male team had not performed well either in recent times. This seems to contribute to the limited knowledge and interest of the public regarding competitive football. Several media and other outlets wanted to help nurture a kind of new information and knowledge enthusiasm for matters of local football.

One initiative that was remarkable in this regard was a team of journalists and enthusiasts that run the football analysis website and data analysis company Tisini. Its reporting about football is intensively based on statistics and tactics analysis of matches such as KPL ones. The team tried to engage users also with activities such as football quizzes that are predominantly about Kenyan and African football. And they sought to engage readers with special reports about matters of football and finance, and health, and so on; sections on the website (by the time of 2022 research) were called 'Wellness Wednesday' and 'Money Monday'. Tisini also runs competitions for clubs, for example related to finance matters such as good accounting practices. Clubs can get their financial accounts checked and in order, thanks to pro-bono accountants that are involved in the competition activity. There are prizes for best clubs in accounting, and so on.<sup>44</sup> Finally, Tisini's flagship product was to capture match-day data for improving team and player performances of clubs (Iregi 2023). Tisini is Kiswahili for 'Ninety', the normal playing time of a football match.

This project is exemplary in many ways and yet it struggles to become financially sustainable. Regular, sustained and significant sponsorship seems hard to find, though some stakeholders have

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<sup>44</sup>See <https://tisini.co.ke>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUKxKVTsvL2/>.

been supportive, especially since 2023. Funding from users of the site seems low to-date, however. The team behind the website have tried to partner with clubs to implement various data collection and analysis models. For a long time, clubs seemed reluctant to engage, invest and pay for such a data service. But this situation has changed since 2023; several clubs and sports federations (rugby, and others) as well as media houses have started working with Tisini and reportedly benefit from the data provision and analysis. For clubs, this data carries not only sports value but also commercial value (especially when it comes to player sales). Tisini reports that users of its data analysis have managed to achieve better competition results (notable success case here is the KPL club Nairobi Stars that has surged in the league table in recent weeks started to work with Tisini not long ago, apparently using the data effectively). Fans, once they got to know and used to this data analysis, have requested their club/associations to work with the company to ensure that this data is provided to fans continuously. The team also innovates services and products that can be purchased by players, such as statistics of a player's game performance. An insurance product is sold too. These ideas have yet to get more buy-in from users. The team has reportedly had success in collaborating with a school to use football statistics for teaching of mathematics (applied learning) and collaborates with a university too (sports management teaching). Tisini's case is thus also an example of the formation and operation of new actors' alliances in the sector that are innovative and impactful. The proliferation of such new alliances (and the changes they can bring) is significant in both studied countries regarding football there, but arguably in the wider African sports economy too (Wiegratz and Rofe 2023). The difficult financial state of professional football - given the FKF crisis and the FIFA ban throughout 2022 - might explain the challenges that Tisini faced in the 2020-22 period. Significantly, despite its highly innovative and useful work Tisini was not known by various key respondents in Uganda that I engaged with in 2022. This might be an indication that the cross-border cooperation (information, communication, services etc.) potential between football sector actors in Uganda and Kenya is yet to be realized more fully.

That said, another example of alliance creation is the Africa Football Business summit organised by the Football Foundation for Africa (based in Nairobi). The summit's third edition takes place in October 2024. The event brings together key national, regional and global actors to dialogue, exchange ideas and share experiences, explore collaboration and synergies and thus understand better and advance the football ecosystem collectively. See furthermore the example of the Shabik Halisi Project to start later in 2024: here, entities (e.g. local companies especially SMEs) that support local sports clubs get listed on a marketplace directory thus can benefit from larger exposure, i.e. get known by and advertise to a national audience and beyond. The idea here is to set up a 'marketplace

ecosystem' that has local sports clubs at the heart of it.<sup>45</sup> The actors advancing such sector-wide and -enhancing initiatives, projects, and alliances are crucial gardeners of the football ecosystem. They will be crucial to further interlink and integrate the various sectors across the East African region.

Further, another set of actors that has made efforts to raise public knowledge about football is print/TV media. A respondent who had insight into the dynamics when StarTimes was the KPL broadcaster noted that it takes a lot of time to raise the public profile and popularity of Kenyan football. The broadcaster had envisaged achieving this over several seasons during its seven-year contract period, through a gradual build-up of players' images and profiles that the public can engage in. The method was said to be comparable to introducing characters in a soap opera and increasing their following and popularity over time. A key component was also to advance the notion of 'this is ours' i.e. 'this is our league - let's go', similar to the 'this is ours' notion linked to Kenyan top athlete Eliud Kipchoge (and similar to the earlier reported FUFA motto in Uganda: 'this is our game...'). A part of the strategy was further to give the fans/public a lot of information about the league, teams, players and fixtures to build up anticipation, and an exhilarating emotional connection. The company professionals expected that this effort, and the investment to move the KPL popularity from low to high, would pay off in three to four years, a medium-term rather than a short-term strategy. However, the partnership with KPL ended prematurely after about a year, as mentioned earlier.

This example shows the importance of timelines, medium- to long-term horizons and of partnership stabilities and continuities so that public knowledge, engagement and popularity can build up and mature over a period of several years, especially in a case where the public popularity, confidence and engagement with the sports is low at the starting point (for reasons explained earlier in the Kenyan case); the comparison between Uganda and Kenya, UPL versus KPL, in the last few years is instructive in this regard. Severe interruptions to this process – as they were experienced due to the recent turmoil in the Kenyan football sector - are arguably a major stumbling block and hindrance in this regard. Such setbacks are likely difficult, though not impossible, to recover from in terms of countering their impact on public (and sponsors') interest and trust in the sector - and KPL's public image - later in the process. It will be analytically relevant to track how the new broadcasting alliance of Azam and KBC – and the wider set of relevant actors in the media, amongst others - will boost the popularity of the league along the parameters mentioned above during the current contract period.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://afbs.footballfoundation.africa/2024/>; <https://shabikhalisi.co.ke/>.

Notably, given interview data there was seemingly also some hesitation rather than seamless wholesome cooperation and enthusiasm in some instances during the StarTimes period when it comes to players and teams doing activation activities with the broadcaster. Accordingly, reasons for this included the conflicts and frictions between key actors - certain clubs and FKF for example - and problems with the buy-in of crucial influential stakeholders in terms of supporting the arrangement with the broadcaster. The latter, it was noted, was also due to the way in which the broadcasting arrangement was formed and communicated, and key deal aspects (such as resources distribution) perceived by clubs. There were grudges, dissatisfaction, low convictions, and therefore hesitation among some actors. The problems faced by the broadcaster in mobilising the support and buy-in of key actors were thus arguably to a significant extent due to the overall problems during that time of the FKF. Accordingly, the FKF made insufficient effort at cementing an alliance and cooperation with the broadcaster, popularise the KPL, together with the media, clubs, and other key partners. Instead, according to respondents, FKF triggered conflict and behaved problematic towards the lead sponsor, Star Times. Some football actors seemed not to appreciate what the broadcasting partner brings to the table, beyond finances: visibility, promotion activities, boosting clubs and players, global exposure, etc. This same respondent added that activities by the broadcaster to popularise and hype specific fixtures were undermined when fixture dates were changed at the last minute.

This exposes the broadcaster in a negative manner (...) It was an embarrassment'. The aim to achieve growing subscriptions was thus jeopardised due to repeated problems of this kind. Instead of brand boosting and protection, there was brand damage. '[If]people do not know what they will be watching... they don't subscribe then. We are unable to monetise (...) The level of inconsistency was the problem.

Accordingly, there were issues at the FKF with focus and attention to detail in organising and managing the KPL, and problems with relationship management of the federation vis-à-vis clubs. This effect of fixture problems and abrupt rescheduling on the broadcaster's operations and subscription business was a point already noted by another respondent about the SuperSport experience with the league towards the end of its engagement (the end of the 'buzz period'); that respondent equally highlighted problems with FKF's league management due to, among others, significant attention of FKF being given to federation politics and other priorities of the leadership.

Notably, StarTimes reportedly invested in the visibility, publicity and popularity of the league, such as via advertisement of major fixtures across media platforms: TV, print, radio, and digital. There was cooperation with media partners in the promotion work, especially *The Standard* in the



print media. Influencers were mobilised and the task was, says this same respondent, 'to 'bombard the fans with local content, with a lot of info prior to, during and after a match, so that people look forward to the next match'. Some promotions for matches lasted one to two weeks, and then eventually could not be aired due to hick-ups as announced. 'It was wasted airtime' in such cases. One such cited incident that was problematic for the broadcaster was when Betway Cup derby between club giants Gor Mahia and AFC Leopards that was supposed to be broadcast live was boycotted by the two teams due to controversies with the FKF about prize money (Odongo 2021; Aggrey 2021). All this 'exposed the disorganisation of the league, and the disorganisation in clubs. This brought the appeal [of the league for viewers] down'. The respondent was optimistic nevertheless, that Kenyan football can in principle - if matters are handled better - be premium content and strategic property for a broadcaster.<sup>46</sup>

Arguably then, significant inconsistencies, disorganisation, rivalries, conflicts (concerning resources, power, league details.) affect large-scale, multi-actor, sensitive and complex commercialisation undertakings that try to collectively build up appeal and popularity i.e. positive emotional connection with – of a sport that had severe problems in the past. Another point: there is analytical value in FKF and other actors revisiting the different strategies to popularise football in Kenya in the last 10 years and get an overview of their dynamics, achievements, and shortcomings, e.g. talking to the involved actors about insights, achievements and problems in this regard. It is crucial to learn from the past experiences and key protagonists to inform the next round of efforts do it all over again: trying to bring up the popularity of the top league to the golden era of SuperSport (i.e. the buzz period in the 2020s).

In the same vein, a journalist observed, the news about alleged severe match fixing (including match manipulation by referees) and misuse of funds are a hindrance too to the build-up of widespread popularity and positive emotional energy linked to KPL (Opiyo 2020; Kwalimwa 2021; Anyama 2023; Al Jazeera 2023). These negative incidences also put journalists in a dilemma, the respondent noted: one feels committed and wants to contribute to the sector's growth through good reporting about good football, but also wants to inform audiences about the problems in the sector (e.g. match-fixing, governance hick-ups) well knowing that the latter can undermine the popularity of the league, lead to sponsors leaving the sector and so on. Significantly, during the crisis period, some journalists were reportedly blacklisted by FKF and banned from stadia and other football events for their reporting that was seen to be too negative and damaging. A journalist felt treated like an

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<sup>46</sup> As the media officer of the Kampala based club noted: people/fans don't want to associate with failure (especially the persistent/chronic type); they want to be part of a winning/successful/positively moving machinery.

enemy by officials during that time. Such conflicts and open hostilities – here between media and football administration but also those implicated in and benefiting from alleged practices (match fixing) - have arguably detrimental impacts on the agenda of revitalising the sector (Olilo 2020). When the KPL crisis intensified - and match fixing and accountability issues were in the news regularly - KPL reportedly also received less space in the papers: the buzz and boom period had ended.

A key aspect of the current revival efforts regarding Kenyan football was to re-mobilise and grow fan bases for the clubs in the top leagues – in today’s context where football enthusiasts can follow on their phone the updates of matches in multiple foreign leagues in the comfort of home during the weekend, the very time when the Kenyan clubs play in the stadium, as one respondent noted. One marketing expert of a woman club observed that the club is going about this in a sequence: first connect the club better to the surrounding community, build up and engage the fan base (also via sponsors), have a clear vision, then approach sponsors. This was similar to how clubs in Uganda reportedly sequenced their trajectory towards securing sponsorship.

### **6.5. Women Football**

Like in Uganda as well, women football struggled to get sponsorships. Companies were reportedly generally hesitant to partner with this section of the sector. An official from a club of the women top league, the FKF Women Premier League (FKF-WPL), mentioned that male managers of companies could be ignorant or dismissive of women football during boardroom talks about possibilities of sponsorships. There were reportedly also certain public perceptions about football - beyond the gender dimension - that were a hindrance, as mentioned above. However, being successful in the sport and organised was seen as key to be confident in talks of women football teams with sponsors: ‘we are professionals, we have something to put on the table, we are not begging here’, the respondent described the attitude the team displays in talks with potential sponsors. Moreover, changes such as academies bringing the middle class into and closer to football - and some players securing football-based scholarship for high-school/university education abroad - were seen to help changing the image of women football over time, observed the respondent.

It will be interesting to see when and how in particular the top club in Kenyan women football can secure a major sponsorship: The Vihiga Queens FC. The club has had very strong national and international successes in recent years. It is the 2021 CAF Women Champions League Qualifiers-CECAFA Region Champion, and the record champion nationally with four wins of the FKF-WPL

since 2017. Fittingly, the club motto is ‘legacy makers’. It gets some funding support from the Vihiga County Government as part of the county’s investment into sports development, thus political support (some other teams are also supported by the respective local authorities: e.g., Bunyore Starlets FC).<sup>47</sup>

The club attracts strong players from Uganda, for example, because it can offer conducive conditions for its players. The club is strong in the scouting and recruitment of talent, a crucial factor, because every season it loses strong players to other teams. Several of its best players have moved to other clubs in strong leagues abroad (though such movements bring the club only very limited financial returns). The team has over 5,400 followers on X-and 33,000 followers on Facebook – nearly ten times as many followers as Facebook page of the WPL itself with 5,500 followers (January 2024).<sup>48</sup> It is doing fan/supporter registration and in talks with interested partners for sponsorship. Vihiga partners with a bread company for their fans and supporters’ onboarding campaign, which saw the fan numbers grow by over 2,000% over 10 weeks. This partnership is a remarkable achievement given the difficulty of finding companies to sponsor women’s club football in the country. Vihiga has also partnered with Tisini (the data analysis provider mentioned earlier) to capture their match-day data for improving team and player performances. Such partnerships - with commercial and technology partners - are strengthening the club in various major ways.

Significantly, in the FKF-WPL season 2023/24 the new women team of Police FC, Kenya Police Bullets FC was a title contender by late January 2024. The team reportedly benefitted from resources injection that also allowed for new crucial hirings (including of the technical bench; players have the prospect to get integrated into the Police force if they meet the job requirements - an attractive option according to interviewed WPL players:... it provides job stability until retirement at 55 in a context of widespread job scarcity in Kenya. The Police FC did a fundraising event ahead of the new 2023/24 season that yielded revenues of KES 13m. Funds were reportedly provided by Kenya Police Service (KPS) members, corporates, and well-wishers, to be used for men and women teams (Kinyanjui 2023d; Gichanga 2023). The example shows that institutional clubs that are funded by state institutions can launch new financial boost initiatives to better fund and revive their top team or fund a new team, also in times of public funding crisis (but also crisis across large parts of the private sector). Given that Police FC in Uganda also secured a notable deal recently, the particular deal striking and fundraising (and advertising) powers of institutional clubs such as the ones linked to the

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<sup>47</sup> Such support can vary from season to season, because of competition for funds from other sports, local revenue dynamics, fall outs in the relationship, and so on; see e.g. the case of Tanszoia Falcons; the team is in sport-trouble following financial troubles (Omotto 2023c).

<sup>48</sup> <https://mobile.twitter.com/Vihigaqueensfc/status/1572670843918098433>, <https://mobile.twitter.com/vihigaqueensfc>; <https://www.facebook.com/Vihigaqueensfc/>; <https://www.facebook.com/FKFWPL>.

police needs further analysis in future. Note that the Police' men team was 7<sup>th</sup> in the KPL table by late January 2024. Notably, Ulinzi Starlets, the Kenya Defence Forces Ladies Football Club (and thus also institutionally funded and provider of an army job option for its players), was in 3<sup>rd</sup> position in the FK-WPL.

Running a women team in the top league was very resource intensive. Appendix 3 has a template used by an FKF-WPL Club to develop their actual budget. The figures give insight into how costly and complex it is to fund a season of women club football in Kenya. Note a women team in Uganda that was financed by substantial inputs of the founder and well-wishers/patrons reported as well that it is very costly to run a team in the top league, and that the team generates no profits.

#### **6.6. Regional dynamics – revival and growth drives in Mombasa**

I now look at exemplars of football revival in Mombasa. This provides insight into important changes (including growth and professionalisation dynamics) outside the capital Nairobi, the country's political, commercial and social hub. First, Bandari FC: this is a case of an institutional/state-sponsored club that undertook a revival from 2023. The club is linked to the Kenyan Ports Authority (KPA), a large, prestigious and well-paying state institution in Mombasa and the coastal region at large, with over 6,000 staff (80% of them males, Kisia 2023) and a significant budget, also for its CSR work: sports promotion (football, basketball, and other sports).<sup>49</sup> Bandari means port; in press reports Bandari is also called: the Dockers. Bandari is currently the only coastal KPL club, thus the club also sees itself as flying the flag of the coast (Mballa 2024).

With the incoming of a new board - that, importantly, is very good terms with KPA leadership - during the 2022/23 season a number of improvements were implemented to address the club's problems regarding competitiveness, local reach-out/image, popularity and kick-start crucial improvements and a larger revival. Changes were made under the new club leadership in terms of:

- players' fitness, health (gym, physio) and welfare (notably payment of outstanding areas, support to buy shoes),
- incentives (like KES 10,000 for a win),
- recruitment of strong players and coaching team,
- fan relations, engagement and experience (see below),
- communication/media,

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<sup>49</sup> Notably, the KPA' women basketball team became second at the Africa Women's Basketball League (AWBL) in Egypt in late 2023 (East African 2023c).

- professionalisation of the board,
- localising the club: including via the opening of new fan branches (the club has now over 10 fan clubs in Mombasa and over 40 coast-wide), and the recruitment of more players from Mombasa/the wider region so that fans can watch and enjoy one of ‘their own’ (local players increased from 6 to 14).

Further, under the new leadership at Bandari has also undertaken the following initiatives:

- bench-marking trips to top clubs abroad (in Tanzania), where it builds relations and plays friendlies with teams abroad (Tanzania, South Africa),
- implemented a significant renovation of the stadium,
- attracts more children, youth, women and families to matches, provides free entry to several games (the entry fee is KES 200),
- registers the fan base (and offers online membership/payment),
- invests in quality replica shirts (in a partnership with a brand) (Heywood 2023), and generally markets the club better,
- has started a women team, for the first time in its history,
- conducts meetings with branches of fans, and helps fans to travel to away games,
- supports fans band activities (for example, to produce Simba Ropa tunes during matches which uplifts players and creates a sense of euphoria; the music is widely played at wedding and social/political gatherings; Chuma 2023b),
- reaches out more to Mombasa (high-/low-income areas, white collar/working classes), the coastal region, and the political class (senators, politicians, county officials).

These actions are informed by the aim to (i) take the club closer to local people (motto: ‘Bandari is ours’), (ii) move away from the times when the club was seen and felt largely as a mere company club, and (iii) associate Bandari with success (also long term, hence more future focus on players development, an academy etc.; Kinyanjui 2023c). The club is currently in the leading group in the KPL. One key asset of the club is the stadium: it is owned by KPA, embedded in the community, has social activity areas (such as gardens,) and a club house (with bar and canteen); this creates a match day experience that significantly differs from Nairobi comparators.

Bandari now has a strong social media presence: 14.5k X and nearly 98k Facebook followers, live feeds on the internet, talk-show formats (Sheikh show) that involve stakeholders, such as coaches, players, and fans. It has a strong provision of pictures, videos and, especially, banter (team-

opponent, team- fans, who is player of match.).<sup>50</sup> The social media tweeting is almost entirely in Swahili, the language of the region. The media team had backgrounds in computer science, journalism and media and consisted of two graphic designers, two videographers, and two photographers (all content creators), as well as one spokesperson. The media team appreciated that they could showcase their work to a large audience, regionally, nationally and globally ('it is a dream come true', one member noted). Accordingly, fans like to see the pictures and videos of their team - especially, the extraordinary and the new (new ways of handling the ball, new skills) - but also like to see themselves in club pictures and videos and like to be represented well. Accordingly, for many fans it was about being recognised, being loved by the team: 'my mother has seen me, my uncle has seen me'. Fans like it when 'player and fans are on one level; I know the player, he is my friend'. Notably, fans could post questions in live stream, were interviewed by the media team, were asked for their opinion (who is the best player?) and invited to online talk shows. Accordingly, fans also wanted to showcase their skills: as a trumpeter, drummer or singer in the fans band. And the media team sought to facilitate that. This showcasing of fans (pictures on the pitch, with the team, being in online talk-shows) and facilitating of desired states of emotions of fans by the media team contributes to emotions-driven repeat match attendance of a fan.

The extensive use of Swahili in social media communication was a vital niche in national comparison; much of the social media in the KPL is in English. Accordingly, fans like the use of Swahili in communications, such as banter tweets, and the team was proud of delivering (grammatically) 'correct' Swahili to the fanbase. One interviewed fan wondered though if the Swahili use will not hinder the club's effort to build up a national/global fan base, given that many do not understand the language. Notably though, there is a wide reach and use of Kiswahili across eastern, and southern Africa. The gramma bit is an added bonus given Mombasa's Kiswahili which is taken as the standard/yardstick, in relation to mainland Kenya Kiswahili and regions far afield such as Uganda and DR Congo (eastern). That said, in terms of banter, the team developed a reputation for highly creative – and culturally, historically and politically informed - graphics and phrases. 'Banter has to connect with trending themes, and be relevant', a media officer remarked. Notably, the media work is largely voluntary work to-date.

Interviewed fans appreciated the revival of the club: its improved form on the pitch, the network and personal development opportunities (the club's offering of educational, job-oriented knowledge

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<sup>50</sup> <https://twitter.com/BandariOfficial>; <https://m.facebook.com/BandariFootballClub/photos/hello-and-welcome-to-the-sheikh-showyes-yeswe-know-you-have-been-waiting-for-thi/862660564173018/>. The KPA had 41.5k followers ([https://twitter.com/kenya\\_ports?lang=en](https://twitter.com/kenya_ports?lang=en)) and the Governor of Mombasa, Abdullswamad Sherrif Nassir, 96.3k ([https://twitter.com/A\\_S\\_Nassir?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/A_S_Nassir?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)).

session/course), the encounters and ties with club officials and players and better communication from the club, the free match entry from time to time. According to a fan, this works magic since he can tag someone along to watch a match without bearing the cost of paying for the ticket. The free access to the club venue/house and public speaking system for social gatherings not necessarily linked to the club, and the chance to develop and enjoy a fan identity, are all initiatives and incentives that reinforce a sense of belonging among the fans and the community, this fan noted. As reported in section about Ugandan football, for fans this was in significant ways about being seen, engaged, and valued by the club. This was further strengthened by wearing the club jersey, which equally creates identity, fellowship and camaraderie among the Bandari fans: it triggered recognition, trust, and opening up from the club side, the fan noted. ‘I can be spotted as a fan, someone sees shirt, someone is interested, oh, this is a fan... They [club team] try to know you more, engage you, open up to you, give you information [away matches, opportunities the club offers]. I feel valued as a fan’. He further highlighted that the club’s good professionalism, management and social media communication such as the club’s announcements create a sense of transparency and trust. Equally valuable is its effort to cater for players’ welfare – in addition to the club’s association with the KPA (which stood for region, history, jobs across generations, money, opportunity, reputation, Mombasa, the coast, the collective). This was all vital to feel a strong and stable sense of fan pride (‘I am proud to be associated with such a club’). Some interviewed fans questioned whether the club gets the balancing of local vs. non-local players’ right in the localising the team agenda: Does it rely too much on local (yet not fully competitive) players? Does it treat non-local players properly?

In terms of sponsorship, there were some interesting points: KPA invested substantial sums of money into the club (about KES 100m annually) - and other sports in Mombasa - but the institution managed and had this in its books as CSR, not as a business line. KPA clearly was interested in advancing the Bandari revival, interviews revealed. This was about giving back to the community in a vital way, against the context of a long-standing public debate that the port/KPA was not benefiting the local population and local development enough. According to critics (who included political leaders): too much of KPA’s revenues went to the central government in Nairobi; too many (top) jobs were given to non-locals; (transnational, domestic mainland elite) business and state revenue interests (privatisation of port services) - rather than local economic interests - were overly prioritised; the port was undermining other traditional local livelihoods (notably fishing). In short, there was a significant debate about the local benefits of the port and KPA and about marginalising and harming versus protecting and catering for local interests.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See for context also Chepkemei (n.d.); Mutua (2021); Parliament (2021); Beja (n.d.); Mburu (2023); Ochieng (2023); Nairobi Law Monthly (2023); Njoroge (2023); Kiyaga (2023b).

Against this political-economic background of a contested port/KPA, Bandari is a vital asset for KPA: to counter critics, to ‘give back’ to the local community, and to have a locally and nationally recognised exemplary/success case of its sports CSR. But could KPA welcome (i.e. tolerate) another major sponsor/investor - or several of them - coming in and getting involved in the club? The answer by September 2023 seemed rather no-ish: such a move would reduce the monopoly position of KPA regarding Bandari, and also have other implications that would be rather complex to manage for the institution. Notably, during match day there were only KPA/Bandari banners in the stadium. Since KPA is managing this as CSR, it may not be easy to have convergence of interests from another sponsor, who may have a commercial orientation. The entire larger (and very mighty and financially strong) logistics, airline and tourism industry was absent (and seemed also not considered as a pool of potential sponsors by the time of this research in September 2023). And yet, Mombasa was a major business hub for (and home to) numerous successful multinationals: the likes of Maersk et al. These corporate giants that arguably made substantial profits in and thanks to Mombasa, for years, were not visible in any significant way in terms of sports and other CSR/sponsorship engagement in the city. This was a peculiar state of affairs. By late 2023 however, the KPA leadership had given green light to Bandari management to approach relevant companies for sponsorship and develop respective proposals. Notably, Bandari Vice Chairman, football veteran administrator Twaha Mubarak contests for FKF presidency later in 2024 (Mballa 2024b; Odongo 2024a).

There are several points one can draw from this case regarding what it takes to instigate a significant revival:

- the relevance of leadership and an initial moment of change (here in club leadership),
- the alignment between leadership of the club and of the funder/funding institution (and beyond: e.g., with the leadership at city/regional level),
- a revival narrative and vision that can create buy-in, synergies, capacity pooling from a larger set of actors (including ones that are newly joining the revival: new fans, players, club team members, and sponsors),
- addressing not just one to two but a larger set of (long) existing challenges and thus create change at multiple major fronts, and
- (personnel in various key sites (club, funder, fan groups) that can carry the revival forward, over a long period of time, including its bottleneck and crisis moments.

In sum, the relevance that various actors across social realms (sports, economy, politics, society) - for various reasons – (i) feel and see that a significant, game-changing revival is overdue, has to happen, is possible, welcome and beneficial, and (ii) want to be involved in, be part of, and advance it.



Next, there was another case of revival, innovation, and boom: the Mombasa County Premier League (that runs outside FKF structures given strained relations with the FKF leadership) and its multiple champion Mvita Youngstars FC (KBC 2021; Al Shifaa 2023; Karama 2023).<sup>52</sup> The boom is to a significant degree due to the advice, input and work of Mombasa businessman Taufiq Balala, the patron of Mvita Youngstars FC, and also aspirant for the FKF presidency elections 2024 (Chuma 2023d; Mabuka 2023).<sup>53</sup> Balala helped to strengthen the organisation, communication (for example club managers are in one WhatsApp group) and popularity of the league. His approach for developing Mvita was informed by a conviction that the fan problem in Kenyan football can be overcome if a club is firmly rooted in a community – and its history, culture, and economy - and is (re)built with a strong focus on (i) community contribution and revitalisation, and (ii) on the young generation of players and fans (given that the crisis of and politics in Kenyan football in the last decades has largely broken the ties of the current adult generation with local football and clubs, also because of the suppression of community/region-based clubs that started decades ago). Some years ago, Balala thus agreed to work with Mvita. Subsequently, he and his team (including the son, a former golf professional, who played at world level) invested not just into training, fitness and the like but also did a (re)branding: the logo, the replica, the playing/team philosophy, all were developed with an eye to come up with a team, a culture, an image that would boost and sustain popularity.

The measures include: supporting children to attend as fans (helping them to get to/from the stadium, a school's ground), putting the names of players on the jersey (so that spectators could recognise themselves also in the names), and selecting a logo that is linked to the history of Mombasa: a canon (Mvita - war; Mombasa in Swahili is 'Kisiwa Cha Mvita' - 'Island of War', a reference to the frequent changes of ownership and wars fought regarding control of the city)<sup>54</sup>. Additionally, creating strong social media and especially banter concerning the team and their matches (by working with a well-known comedian and social media celebrity and an actor from the community, supporting a popular fan to do fandom promotion), and creating a playing style that is hugely popular (lots of goals). Mvita is now well known across the coast and gets support also from famous Tanzanian artists among others. Spectator numbers are regularly in the thousands (4,000 to 5,000). The team had a friendly with a Bandari team and lost with only a small goal difference; one player had a trial abroad. Balala and his son are doing cutting edge football club development and promotion and are able to demonstrate that their approach is effective on various fronts. Notably, neither the league nor its multiple champion, Mvita, have a sponsor yet (other than Balala in the case of Mvita).

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<sup>52</sup> See also <https://www.facebook.com/MvitaYoungStars/>.

<sup>53</sup> <https://twitter.com/taufiqbalala?lang=en>; <https://www.tiktok.com/@taufiqbalala/video/726931233430310426>.

<sup>54</sup> [https://www.mombasa-city.com/brief\\_history\\_of\\_Mombasa.htm](https://www.mombasa-city.com/brief_history_of_Mombasa.htm); <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Mvita>.

## 6.7. Recent dynamics

It is instructive to note that in neighbouring Tanzania, SportPesa signed a major three-year deal with Yanga SC in July 2022, at a reported sum of TZS 12.3bn (\$5.2m) which is a significant increase from the previous deal (indicating an increase in commercial value of being the sponsor) (Ducosports 2022). At about TZS 4.1bn p.a. this annual sum is about four times that of the previous deal (TZS 5.2b over five years) (Citizen 2022). A Kenyan news site asked its readers: ‘Why do you think Kenyan clubs are not getting this kind of multimillion worth sponsorship deals?’ (Opera News Kenya n.d.). In a significant development, a few months later, in September 2022, SportPesa signed a new one-year deal (renewable for two more years) with Gor Mahia in Kenya amidst sponsor’ talk of sector revitalisation. The company’s CEO Karauri reportedly said: ‘today is the beginning of bringing back football to the standards it should be at’ (Olobulu 2022). There was sponsor support and incentive for the club to win the national trophy and play at continental level. This is in line with the trend of backing the (next) champion that was identified in the section on Ugandan football, supra, in this report: ‘Within the sponsorship, the betting firm has promised the club an additional Sh6mn for travel logistics if they win the league and qualify for the CAF Champions League. ‘We have struggled to get air tickets and accommodation for international matches. This is the first time that we have this kind of a clause in the sponsorship,’ Rachier [the club chairman] noted’ (ibid). Rachier is further quoted with this statement about the past:

I want to thank SportPesa because they never walked out on us. They left because of a force majeure; circumstances that ...[were] beyond them. But I also want to thank them for coming to our help at this time. There has been so much negativity across the media on the struggles we have had... We have had financial difficulties aggravated by COVID-19. It was never our intention not to pay full salaries. (ibid)

The Gor deal is, compared to the Yanga deal, at a lower annual fee (around \$650,000 p.a.), i.e., currently fetches a lower payment from the same company (which might be related to the recent overall crisis and uncertainty in the sector that affects the value of the deal). It will be interesting to see which club is able to sign a deal in the future with a major sponsor that is not from the betting sector, and what the respective financial sums, deal rhetoric and marketing slogans will be.

Notably, the new Kenyan government under President Ruto reinstated the previously banned FKF executive, the team returned to office in September 2022, FIFA lifted the ban in late November 2022. Kenya’s Cabinet secretary for Youth Affairs, Sports and the Arts, Ababu Namwamba, reportedly said after meeting FIFA officials at the end of November in Qatar: ‘I am happy that FIFA has made it

clear that certain issues of integrity, accountability, and good governance in football will be sorted out' (Al Mayadeen. 2022). The FKF annulled the last KPL season 2021/22. There were court battles (with the Constitutional Court of Kenya confirming the nullification in the end), and protests from some clubs and cheers from others (depending on who won and lost in terms of staying/not moving up to the KPL due to this decision) (e.g. Mballa 2022c). Mathare United which was relegated was now back in the KPL. The club's chairman Munro was quoted as follows: 'After seven long and difficult months of legal and institutional uncertainty which sadly undermined and hindered all MUFC negotiations with potential sponsors, the FKF officially confirmed our participation in the 2022-23 FKF Premier League...' (ibid).

President Mwendwa stayed out of FKF offices throughout this period as his case was ongoing. The case concerning allegations of financial impropriety of FKF President Mwendwa was eventually concluded in March 2023: the court dismissed the KES 38m misappropriation case and Mwendwa was cleared. The FKF jolted the KPL up and running again and attracted a TV broadcasting sponsor (see above). New FKF elections were planned for 2024. Notably, there were debates about the way forward regarding the management of the top league (KPL vs. FKF) (Eshitemi 2022).

Crucially, President Ruto declared the Kenyan government's support for the East African bid to host AFCON 2027, its aim to help the country qualify for FIFA World Cup 2030 and to launch grassroots initiatives to help strengthen football with view to achieving that. The press reported in December 2022 that Cabinet declared:

In a bid to revive the prospects of Kenyan football, Cabinet sanctioned the *revitalisation of football as a key cog of our nation's social fabric*. The national effort will encompass the rebuilding of the national men's team, Harambee Stars, and the rebuilding of the women's national team, the Harambee Starlets... Cabinet noted that the joint bid would deploy the power of sports in *furthering regional integration* (emphasis added) (Otieno 2022).

Note the political linking of the football revival project to matters of national (unity, strength, development) and regional integration. These are notable statements from government. It suggests that a quite comprehensive revival and strengthening of football – and sports generally - is high on the agenda and has political backing. There are some similarities here regarding the Ugandan case: the combination of political, sports and commercial interests.

In 2023, after winning the joined AFCON 2027 bid the Kenyan government announced further high-profile collaborations to revitalise the sports sector: with the National Basketball Association (NBA) of the United States. The NBA will open an office in Nairobi and promote the development of the sports in Kenya (notably at school level). Ruto reportedly ‘described the initiative as a turning point in the development of the sport in the country. He said the move will give Kenyan youth the opportunity to pursue professional basketball. ‘Professional basketball promises to enhance talent commercialisation and transform the lives of our youth...’ (Otieno 2023). The government’s rhetoric here brings together sports, professionalisation, business and youth/personal development (talent, opportunity, job, income). This promotion of sports, including in football, can also be seen in the context of a government seeking legitimacy and popularity (and trying to turn around an economy in deep, protracted crisis), also with view to the next general elections in 2027; securing the youth vote amongst others will be relevant then.

Furthermore noteworthy: sports – and how different governments oversee the decline or revival of sports is now big politics and makes strong political rhetoric. Sports Minister Namwamba for example paints a picture of the previous government implicated in a steep decline of sports, of overseeing (and doing little to revitalise) a sports sector ‘in limbo’:

We inherited football that was in limbo, suspended by the international football federation, Fifa; we inherited rugby that was on a free-fall, ultimately culminating in Kenya falling out of the HSBC World Series; we inherited a swimming federation that had been in limbo and banned by World Aquatics for seven years; Kenya’s premier sporting discipline, athletics, was on the verge of being banned by World Athletics because of doping...The ministry has performed what I consider to be a miracle, to turn around the scenario to the scenario we have today where our sports trajectory is rising to a level never seen before. (Makori 2024)

Government further advanced Talanta Hela, an initiative that, according to government (Ministry of Youth Affairs, the Arts and Sports), ‘seeks to *Monetize Talent* and Revolutionize The Sports and Creative Space into a *Mega Industry*’ (emphasis added).<sup>55</sup> The government thus is in a drive to strengthen grassroots sports including football, identify and support talent and help them to become professionals (‘elite players’) that can compete at international level and make a good income, revitalise and monetise sports (also via sports infrastructure projects such as stadia construction) thus boost the economy, and help the country to enhanced recognition in sports that have struggled to

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<sup>55</sup> [https://twitter.com/talantahela\\_ke?lang=en](https://twitter.com/talantahela_ke?lang=en)

excel and win accolades in recent years (Omotto 2023a; Kanyi 2023; Omotto 2023b; Nyende 2024). ‘We must *monetise sports* so that this sector can exert its full potential to *drive the growth of our economy*’ (emphasis added) Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua was quoted saying.<sup>56</sup> There are criticisms and challenges regarding the initiative (Daily Nation 2023; Omotto 2023b; Olilo 2024).

However, the government is likely to put substantial resources (including political capital and finances) into this ambitious rebuilding sports and creative industries agenda; this should benefit football significantly, especially in comparison to the past near-decade long crisis. One early example here is the money government put into KPL broadcasting (KES 240m) via the engagement of KBC in the partnership with Azam, ‘a sign of commitment to the development of sport in the country’, as Namwamba reportedly put it: currently, Azam broadcasts two games, KBC one game (highlights are also available on the FKF website); each club now gets a guaranteed KES 10m per season, the winner gets an additional KES 5m. Namwamba reportedly announced that government is ‘also considering a package for the Women’s Premier League, National Super League and grassroots leagues’ (Makori 2024).<sup>57</sup> In the run up to the deal Ruto declared: ‘I am going to talk to KBC, CA (Communication Authority) and various sponsors so that we bring back the televising of all our sports, tournaments and leagues and provide additional resources so that we create the unity’ (Omotto 2023a). Stadia will be another priority given that the country does currently not have CAF approved stadia and facilities... ‘[and those] in counties also remain in dilapidated states despite a huge outlay of funds over the years’ (ibid). Government stated that tax incentives for corporate’ sports sponsors are being considered; and at a related recent event there were major corporations present. Government wants them to support key sports campaigns that run in the near future (Makori 2024):

East African Breweries Limited, whose Tusker branch has already jumped onto sponsorship for Team Kenya’s road to the Paris Olympics, Safaricom, KCB Bank Kenya, Toyota by CFAO Motors, Mozartbet, SportPesa, Visa and Absa Bank Kenya were some of the corporates at Tuesday’s partners’ breakfast meeting that was also attended by heads of various sports federations and organisations. They listened to presentations around four major upcoming events, namely the Magical Kenya Ladies Open..., the Magical Kenya Open..., the World Rally Championship Safari Rally ... and the Paris Olympics. (ibid)

Government here adopts a more directed approach to sports-sponsorship (arguably resembling what is also called a developmental state approach, Mkandawire 2001). In that vein, remarks from

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<sup>56</sup> [https://twitter.com/moyasa\\_ke/status/1668586115916353537](https://twitter.com/moyasa_ke/status/1668586115916353537).

<sup>57</sup> See also: <https://www.youtube.com/@officialfkfpremierleague/videos>.

Namwamba also suggest that the government wants to see long-standing bottlenecks and challenges of corporate engagement in sports to be addressed and overcome. ‘Namwamba nudged top corporates in Kenya – especially EABL and KCB – to invest more in community football clubs, assuring them of better returns than bankrolling in-house outfits like Tusker FC and KCB FC, respectively, which are serial Kenyan Premier League campaigners but with a paltry following’ (ibid).

Finally, a respondent from FKF highlighted the various ongoing FKF activities, since the office was reopened and the administration under President Mwendwa returned: In order to prepare for AFCON 2027 and qualify for the World Cup 2030, the federation embarked on strengthening grassroots football and training/coaching capacity, among others: via setting up community youth leagues (1 in each of the 8 regions of country), training grassroots coaches and school teachers, working towards putting sports more strongly into the school curriculum, or taking several hundred coaches through CAF training programmes. Boosting the football infrastructure (such as building a technical centre) and strengthening commercialisation and marketing capacities (also at FKF) were also in focus. The federation managed to attract and collaborate with sponsors (Azam for the KPL broadcasting, Mozart Bet for the FKF cup, Safaricom for the youth tournament) and was in talks with others (Kinyanjui 2023a; Telecompaper 2023; East African 2023a; KBC 2024). For now, Chinese companies seem not to be among potential partners; within the wider context of the Ruto government recently partnering rather with major Western actors, a move that the press calls ‘look west’ and ‘shift from East’ (Nyamori 2022; Mitchell 2022).

## 7. Conclusion

Given the above, by early 2024, the Kenyan football sector seems ‘out of the woods’, again: it is arguably at the beginning of a revival period, including in commercial terms. Compared to the Ugandan case of revival that started a decade ago, this surge phase is currently led in stronger terms by the government and its political, diplomatic and financial powers (Munguti 2023). The FKF elections will be (analytically) interesting in terms of how the incoming president aligns with the government agenda and what that implies for football development and commercialization. Evidently, the actors in sector have to tackle a range of severe challenges that require in various ways a step change to address and handle better protracted conflicts and bottlenecks. But as the report shows, the occasional outright negative portrayal of the sector - that not seldom is not backed up by detailed data from the vast and ever-shifting empirical realities (including the exemplary, innovative practices; the revivals; the things that go well/better/are relatively ok) - should be taken with analytical caution. Given the sheer number of actors on ground - literally thousands - that are working towards and achieving a number of progressive changes, and thereby solutions, however temporary and under risk of reversal, to some of the long existing problems, this side of the sector deserves to be included in the analysis more than is the case to-date.

Further, the case of Uganda shows that revival and commercialisation are possible, even after a deep and prolonged crisis. It evidences that key success factors are: (1) the organisational nerve centre, the federation, is reasonably strong and effective in taking steps that are vital for commercialisation (organising local buy-in, competitions, bringing in sponsors, managing conflicts, tackling challenges, (re-)branding football, stabilising and opening up the sector to all sorts of actors that now reproduce and advance popularity, vibrancy, players development); (2) the economic and political context is conducive (as was shown, the government over time revitalised and strengthened its ties with FUFA/the sector, for various political reasons; and sponsors also were looking for partners in sports/football and were ready to come in); and (3) there is an increasing group of professionals across domains that commit and work for sector advancement. These three together create a positive spiral of gradual revival, improvements, and growth in commercial terms.

Commercialisation imperatives are now shaping a variety of matters in the sector: practices (from team to players: from celebration styles to social media postings), slogans/mottos (often coproduced by sports, commercial and political actors), infrastructure development, imaginaries, and aspirations (e.g., regarding career and income trajectories). Significantly, the recent commercialisation trajectory is in many ways shaped by the specifics of the neoliberal-capitalist reforms and transformations in

the country in the last four decades, i.e. the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of Uganda's march towards a fully-fledged market society. The commercialisation of football is a prime exemplar of the making and operation of Uganda as a market society, in other words of contemporary capitalist Uganda (Wiegratz 2016; Wiegratz, Martiniello and Greco 2018). Just two examples of the various reform repercussions as well as cross-sector entanglements and inter-locking dynamics: (i) the commercialisation of education is crucial to the case of Vipers as well as the reported boom in and commercial aspects of school football; (ii) the reform-induced decline or demise of many large-scale domestic companies and the struggle of large domestic businesses (especially politically unconnected or independent ones) to survive and thrive ever since shapes the dynamics of club football, funding and sponsorship to this date (i.e. explains for example the dominance of foreign multinationals as major sponsors). The sponsorship trajectory is thus also shaped by the dynamics of local capital (domestic capitalists etc.) vs foreign capital, in a context where foreign capital dominates crucial sectors (telecommunication, banking, coffee, beverages etc.) and the private sector has a very particular composition and political-economic and cultural-economic character (regarding ownership, ties with and support from government/the state, the role of religion etc.). Similar points can be made about other key phenomena of commercial(-ising) football in Uganda (and Kenya too of course): about betting, the politics of football promotion, the gender dynamics, the marketing campaigns, the local-global interlinkages in the sector, and so on. In short, the football sector commercialisation is to a significant extent a product and reflection of neoliberal Uganda, i.e. of key processes, transformations and agencies that we analytically bundle under neoliberalisation (ibid).<sup>58</sup> The same argument applies to Kenyan football: the sector's commercialisation is to a significant extent shaped by and a product of (i) the specifics of the neoliberalisation of the country in the past few decades, i.e. of the history, politics, economy, political economy and culture of Kenya's capitalism and (ii) Kenya's integration and role in and the impact of global capitalism.

Further, the analysis has shown that commercial aspects cause problems (concerning players' welfare for example) but can also be an enabling factor for tackling given problems (including welfare). The specifics of the country's economic, political, social and cultural dynamics - and Uganda's place in the wider global and regional political economy (such as its relationship with China) - will in crucial ways shape the next few years of commercialisation of the sector. One question is: what might accelerate and intensify the process; what might become a gamechanger, breakthrough, hype booster - a trend that uplifts the situation significantly (also financially)? Perhaps

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<sup>58</sup> See also e.g. Pier (2015, 2022) on relevant marketing trends in Uganda and Behuria (2021) on domestic capitalists in neoliberal Africa (see also respective entries in the roape.net blog series Capitalism in Africa; <https://roape.net/reviews-briefings-debates/capitalism-in-africa/>)



this might come about in the context of AFCON 2027, a senior team/player making it big at continental/global level (say a UPL team repeatedly qualifying for the CAF Champions League finals), or the start of oil production later in the 2020s that is expected to bring Uganda significant revenues. The same question arises regarding Kenya.

That said, there are evident features and trends in politics and society (and economy) that cut across both countries and suggest that the commercialisation trends outlined here will continue and gather pace and depth: the age composition of both countries (youth dominate), the tying of sports and nation (sports is a major realm in which national aspirations, energies, emotions get expressed), the zeal (in the population, but also political sphere) to grow the sports and sports economy, also and especially in football. A large section of the youth loves football: watching, playing, debating, betting on it. Sports is deeply embedded in everyday life, is a way of life for many – at the level of active play, spectatorship, social media/TV consumption, work - arguably in some aspect more than ever in the last decade. Many actors in the two countries want to (see their own) excel in sports on a broader based, and more competitive and financially rewarding level. The media actors as well as various corporate, political, societal and professional sponsors, supporters and enablers (including schools, universities, professional bodies) seem to be ready to work with the sports sector, including football. And they seem to largely agree (though not necessarily on all aspects) that commercialisation should be a vital part of sports/football in the two countries. The professionalisation of football is enhancing, across board.

Importantly, the evidence that sports/football can improve lives and can bring income, opportunity, and social mobility for the best athletes (though not for all that try or wish to make it in sports) is for all to see. The two countries analysed here want to have a bigger role and stake and heightened significance at regional, continental and global level, at the level of athletes, teams, leagues, and competitions. Winning trophies, contracts, awards and recognition, and making a name and career (and advance in personal development terms) are imagined by (and motivating) thousands of actors, and inform their thinking, decisions, training efforts, collaborations, and investments. Symbolically speaking, they do not want to drop the ball but carry it over the goal line. Especially given that the alternatives for large sections of the youth - the opportunities and incomes in the rest of the economy in Uganda and Kenya - are far from better; many sectors are in crisis. Further, politics is in various ways in crisis and ‘stuck’ too, and careers and opportunities there are a matter for the (highly) well-off. In comparative terms then, sports including football are a good bet for many a youth.

Overall, the study has further shown the usefulness of exploring in a wide sense, commercialisation aspects in the football sector of a given country, instead of focusing on one aspect such as fandom only. The two-country study approach has allowed to compare and contrast the developments in two neighbouring countries that experience significantly different trajectories, and to identify a large number of different commercialisation-relevant activities and trends across the two countries that are embedded in the respective local history, politics, economy, society and culture. Further extension and deepening of the analysis would be desirable, especially in terms of data collection of issues such as club revenues, social media followers (of clubs, players, pundits, fan groups.), players sales revenues, and financial sums involved in various sponsorship deals/formats. This would create a more detailed, data-based baseline understanding of the state of affairs as commercialisation continues and deepens in the two countries in the coming years. This should help to further analyse aspects that this report touched upon. A comparison with dynamics in Tanzania and Rwanda would also be of value to identify relevant activities and trends there, identify and analyse exemplars (clubs, formats, alliances, practices) and share and discuss information and analysis about respective achievements, difficulties and transformations.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, scholarship that thoroughly identifies and unpacks the transformations to come, and analyses their political-economic character, will be a vital part of the domestic sports/football economies in East Africa. Analytical work that tracks and accounts for the business and political drives and practices that fuel (i) positive impacts (such as better fan numbers/experiences, better players' contracts, sign-on fees and wages, better club finances, better sports/sports performances, more sustainable growth, and (ii) exploitation and individual/social harm (from betting to players' treatment) respectively in for-profit sports is a key component of that. A cross-country, comparative analytical perspective promises to be highly instructive (Wiegatz and Rofe 2023).

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<sup>59</sup> Note that has according to one recent ranking the strongest men football league in the region, 6th in Africa (IFFHS 2024). Tanzania went out of the AFCON 2024 at group stages though.

## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Revenue of KCCA FC, years 2022, 2023

REVENUE	Year 2023	Year 2022
	UGX billions	UGX billions
KCCA Support	2	1
Match day revenue	0.177	0.130
Player Sales	0.295	0.404
Sale of Club Merchandise	0.120	0.122
Sponsorship Income	0.555	0.373
Grants and other income	1.005	2.08
	<b>4.152</b>	<b>4.184</b>

Source: KCCA FC, January 2024

### Appendix 2: Example of Football club expenditure (estimates)



Source: New Vision 2024.

### Appendix 3: Budget template of FKF-WPL club

**Soccer Club Budget Template**

DETAILS	PAX	AGREED ON RATE	MONTHLY COST TOTALS	QUANTITY		TOTALS	
				Games, Units, etc	CATEGORY	YEARLY	
<b>Salaries</b>							
1	Category A Players	10	25,000.00	250,000.00			3,000,000.00
	Category B Players	10	15,000.00	150,000.00			1,800,000.00
	Category C Players	10	10,000.00	100,000.00			1,200,000.00
	Coaching Staff	7		250,000.00			3,000,000.00
	Management & Support Staff	5		250,000.00			3,000,000.00
<b>Match Bonuses</b>							
2	<b>Official Matches Only</b> 18 Players + 7 Coaching Staff	25	3,000.00		50	Games	3,750,000.00
<b>Insurance</b>							
3	Medical Insurance (NHIF)	42	500.00	21,000.00			252,000.00
	Life Insurance	42	5,000.00	-			210,000.00
<b>Home Matches</b>							
4	Stadium Hire	20	25,000.00	25,000 a Game	20	Games	500,000.00
	Home Match Expenses (Field Marking, Sec	20	50,000.00	45,000 a Game	20	Games	1,000,000.00
	Pre-Match Camp						
<b>Away Matches In Nairobi</b>							
5	Away Matches in Nairobi	20	50,000.00	35,000 a Game	14	Games	700,000.00
	Pre-Match Camp						
<b>Travelling - Away Matches</b>							
6	Away Match Expenses	10	300,000.00		6	Games	1,800,000.00
	Hotel Accomodation						
<b>Team Kit &amp; Equipment</b>							
7	Buying Team Kit - Practise	180	2,000.00		3	Sets	360,000.00
	Buying Team Kit - Game Days	180	3,000.00		3	Sets	540,000.00
	Soccer Boots	180	4,000.00		3	Soccer Boots	720,000.00
	Safety Gear (Anklets, Shinpads)	60	2,500.00		2	Shinpads Ea	150,000.00
	Buying Team Equipment - Cones	4	8,000.00		4	Sets of Cone	32,000.00
	Buying Team Equipment - Bibs	36	500.00		3	Sets of 12 (D	18,000.00
	Soccer Balls - Training	60	3,000.00		60	Balls	180,000.00
	Soccer Balls - Game	12	5,000.00		12	Balls	60,000.00
	GK Gloves	12	10,000.00		3	Gloves per G	120,000.00
	Hurdles	36	1,000.00		3	Sets of 12	36,000.00
	Agility Ladder	6	5,000.00		6	Ladders	30,000.00
	Stakes	12	1,000.00		1	Sets of 12	12,000.00
	Wall figures	12	5,000.00		1	Sets of 12	60,000.00
<b>Training Pitch Expenses</b>							
8	Pitch Hire		100,000.00		11	Months	1,100,000.00
	Pitch Marking	-					-
	Pitch Watering						-
	Pitch Maintenance						-
<b>Training Expenses</b>							
9	Water Dispenser	-	10,000.00		2	Unit	20,000.00
	Drinking Water	-	40,000.00		11	Months	440,000.00
	Nutrition Support Programme	-			11	Months	-
	Gym Sessions	-	1,200,000.00		11	Months	1,200,000.00
	Medical Kit Replenishing	-	40,000.00		11	Months	440,000.00
	Transport & Storage for Equipment	-			11	Months	
<b>Marketing</b>							
10	Match Kit (Banner Holders, Tents & Chairs	-					-
	Website Design & Hosting	-					-
	Home Games Marketing	-					-
	Eventing Fees	-					-
	Merchandising	-					-
	Gaming	-					-
<b>Office Expenses</b>							
11	Rent	-	210,000.00		3	Months	630,000.00
	Recurring Costs (Electricity, Water, Cleanin	-	25,000.00		10	Months	250,000.00
	Float Money (Stationery, Ink, etc)	-	15,000.00		10	Months	150,000.00
	Buy Office Furniture	-					-
<b>Motor Vehicles Costs</b>							
12		-					-
		-					-
		-					-
<b>Team Building &amp; Events</b>							
13	Team Buildings	-		300,000.00	2		600,000.00
	End of Year Awards	-		1,000,000.00			1,000,000.00
<b>FKF Affiliation Fees</b>							
14	FKF NSL/KPL Affiliation Fees	-	150,000.00				150,000.00
	Match Officiating Contributions	-	10,000.00		50		500,000.00
<b>TOTALS</b>							<b>28,938,000.00</b>

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