

Legal Framework for the Commercialisation of Football in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects*

Clementina Okeke-Linus PhD, BL, Notary Public

Private and Property Law, Margaret Lawrence University Abuja, Nigeria

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100300400>

Received: 14 March 2026; Accepted: 20 March 2026; Published: 10 April 2026

ABSTRACT

This article critically examined the adequacy of the legal and institutional framework governing the commercialisation of football in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the structural and normative deficiencies embedded within extant laws. While football has emerged globally as a multi-billion-dollar industry driven by broadcasting rights, sponsorship, merchandising and private investment, Nigeria's domestic football sector remains under-commercialised despite its vast talent pool and market potential. Adopting a doctrinal research methodology, this study analysed key legislative and regulatory instruments including the Nigeria Football Association Act, the Nigerian Football Federation Statutes, the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020, the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2018, and the National Broadcasting Commission Act. The study found that the legal regime is characterised by obsolescence, fragmentation, and regulatory incoherence. The coexistence of the Nigeria Football Association Act and the Nigerian Football Federation framework creates legal uncertainty and undermines institutional legitimacy. Several statutes failed to reflect the commercial realities of modern football, particularly in areas such as broadcasting rights, private investment protection, intellectual property enforcement, and sports-specific corporate governance. Furthermore, weak enforcement mechanisms, excessive governmental interference, and the absence of a specialised sports commercialisation framework significantly constrain market growth. The article argued that without a coherent and modernised legal architecture, Nigeria cannot effectively attract investment, develop infrastructure, or integrate into the global football economy. It recommended that comprehensive legislative harmonisation, regulatory clarity, and governance reforms are imperative to unlock the full commercial potential of football as a tool for economic diversification and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Football Law, Sports Governance, Commercialisation of Football and Nigerian Football Federation

INTRODUCTION

Football is widely regarded as the most popular sport in the world in terms of participation and spectatorship. It is played in almost every country and has evolved from a recreational activity into a sophisticated global industry. The modern football industry generates billions of dollars annually through broadcasting rights, sponsorship agreements, merchandising, and player transfers¹.

The transformation of football into a commercial enterprise has been particularly evident in Europe where football clubs operate as corporate entities with significant financial turnover². The English Premier League, for example, generates billions of dollars in broadcasting revenues annually and attracts global corporate sponsorship³.

Despite the global commercial success of football, many developing countries have not effectively harnessed the economic benefits associated with the sport. Nigeria is a notable example. While sports used to be excluded

*Clementina Okeke-Linus PhD, BL, Notary Public; Lecturer, Margaret Lawrence University Abuja; clementina.okeke@mlugalilee.edu.ng; 08138200223; ORCID ID: 0009-0005-3384-4482

¹Simon Gardiner et al., *Sports Law* (4th edn, Routledge 2012).

²Mark James, *Sports Law* (Palgrave Macmillan 2010).

³Deloitte, *Annual Review of Football Finance* (2020).

from the 46 activity sectors tracked by the National Bureau of Statistics, recent reforms and recognition by the National Sports Commission show that it is now considered a significant economic activity⁴. It only recently in 2025 officially recognized sport as part of its GDP and it has been measured as contributing 1.2% to the country's GDP in Q3 2025, generating about 140,000 jobs across its value chain

The country has produced internationally renowned football players and has achieved success in continental and global competitions, yet the domestic football industry remains poorly commercialised. Nigeria's economy has historically depended heavily on crude oil revenues. Fluctuations in global oil prices have highlighted the need for economic diversification. The sports sector, particularly football, presents an opportunity for economic diversification through job creation, tourism development, infrastructure investment, and private sector participation.

However, the commercialisation of football in Nigeria has been constrained by several legal, institutional, and governance challenges. This article therefore examined the legal framework governing football in Nigeria and evaluates whether the existing legal and institutional structures are capable of supporting the commercialisation of football as a driver of economic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly literature on the commercialisation of football has expanded significantly within the fields of sports law, sports economics and sports management. Scholars generally agree that football commercialisation is driven by the interaction of broadcasting markets, corporate sponsorship, globalisation and institutional governance.

Szymanski and Zimbalist argue that the modern football economy is largely shaped by broadcasting revenues and international media markets which have transformed football clubs into global entertainment brands⁵. Similarly, Giulianotti emphasises the role of globalisation in expanding football audiences and creating transnational fan communities that support the commercial growth of football leagues⁶.

Within the context of sports law, Gardiner and colleagues highlight the importance of regulatory institutions such as FIFA and continental confederations in shaping the governance structures of football associations worldwide. These institutions establish regulatory frameworks that influence how football organisations manage commercial rights, player transfers and sponsorship arrangements.

In the African context, Darby's research on football governance emphasises the political and institutional challenges affecting sports administration in many African countries. According to Darby, government interference, weak institutional capacity and governance challenges have historically limited the development of sustainable football industries across the continent⁷.

Although a growing body of literature examines the governance of African football, relatively few studies focus specifically on the legal framework governing football commercialisation in Nigeria. This article contributes to the literature by analysing the interaction between legal regulation, governance structures and commercial investment within the Nigerian football industry.

Concept And Evolution of Football Commercialisation

Historically, football was played primarily for recreational purposes with minimal financial incentives for players and administrators. The early development of football in the nineteenth century was largely amateur in nature⁸. Over time, however, the sport evolved into a professional enterprise characterised by organised leagues, paid players, and commercial sponsorship. The commercialisation of football accelerated significantly in the late

⁴ Nigeria's sports sector hits 1.2% GDP contribution, creates 140,000 Jobs – Dikko

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/02/nigerias-sports-sector-hits-1-2-gdp-contribution-creates-140000/>

⁵ Stefan Szymanski and Andrew Zimbalist, *National Pastime* (Brookings Institution Press 2006).

⁶ Richard Giulianotti, *Football: A Sociology of the Global Game* (Polity Press 1999).

⁷ Paul Darby, *Africa, Football and FIFA* (Routledge 2002).

⁸ David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football* (Penguin 2006).

twentieth century with the expansion of television broadcasting. Media corporations began purchasing broadcasting rights for football competitions, thereby transforming the sport into a global entertainment product⁹. Modern football commercialisation involves several revenue streams including broadcasting rights, sponsorship and advertising, merchandising and licensing, ticket sales, player transfers, and stadium naming rights¹⁰. Football clubs have increasingly adopted corporate governance structures in order to manage these commercial activities effectively.

In Europe, football clubs such as Manchester United, Real Madrid, and Bayern Munich operate as large commercial organisations generating significant revenues from global fan bases¹¹. The economic impact of football extends beyond clubs to include employment opportunities in media, tourism, stadium management, and sports marketing. The global sports industry has been estimated to be worth hundreds of billions of dollars, with football representing a substantial share of this value¹². These developments demonstrate the significant economic potential of football when supported by appropriate legal and institutional frameworks.

Legal Framework for Football Commercialisation in Nigeria

The Nigeria Football Association Act

Football administration in Nigeria is governed by a combination of domestic legislation and international regulatory obligations. The Nigeria Football Association Act establishes the legal basis for football administration within the country¹³. The Act provides for the establishment of the Nigeria Football Association as the governing body responsible for organising and regulating football activities. But the Act is now obsolete and does not align with international best practices. The Nigerian Football Association Act¹⁴ has to a large extent achieved its purpose. At the time it was enacted the clamour was to encourage the development of all forms of amateur and professional football and encourage international affiliations amongst others.

However, the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF) currently functions as the operational governing body for football administration in Nigeria. The coexistence of the Nigeria Football Association Act and the Nigerian Football Federation structure has created legal and institutional ambiguity regarding the authority responsible for football governance¹⁵.

The Nigerian Football Federation (NFF) statute is drafted in alignment with the form and substance of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Statutes, albeit adapted to a country-specific format. Its provisions emphasise the promotion of friendly relations and neutrality in matters of politics and religion. However, significant points of divergence arise when juxtaposed with the Nigerian Football Association (NFA) Act.

The first area of conflict lies in the legal foundation of both instruments. The NFA Act is an enactment of the National Assembly, thereby constituting the principal legislative instrument for the regulation of football in Nigeria. In contrast, the NFF Statute is not derived from any legislative enactment, nor does it reference existing Nigerian law. Consequently, its application within the Nigerian legal framework lacks statutory legitimacy.

Secondly, the legal personality of both bodies differs fundamentally. The NFA is established as a body corporate with perpetual succession, a common seal, and the capacity to sue and be sued in its corporate name. Conversely, the NFF is characterized as a private association formed for an indefinite period. This distinction underscores that the two entities are structurally and legally distinct, despite their overlapping functions in football administration.

⁹ Simon Kuper and Stefan Szymanski, *Soccernomics* (Nation Books 2014).

¹⁰ Simon Chadwick and Dave Arthur, *International Cases in the Business of Sport* (Routledge 2008).

¹¹ Stefan Szymanski and Andrew Zimbalist, *National Pastime* (Brookings Institution Press 2005).

¹² PwC, *Sports Survey: The Changing Dynamics of the Global Sports Industry* (2018).

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Clementina Chika Okeke, 'A Review of the Nigerian Football Association Act 2004: The Need for an Update' (2023) 9(2) *Delsu Law Review* 192.

Furthermore, the objectives articulated in the NFA Act diverge from those contained in the NFF statute. Their organisational structures and governance frameworks also reflect significant differences. The provisions of the NFA Act and the NFF Statute are not only inconsistent but, in several respects, mutually exclusive. This raises a fundamental question as to whether both instruments purport to regulate the same entity or whether they represent parallel, and potentially conflicting, bodies within Nigerian football governance.

Nigeria is also a member of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the global governing body for football. As a member of FIFA, Nigeria is required to comply with FIFA statutes and regulations governing international football administration¹⁶. FIFA regulations require member associations to manage football affairs independently and prohibit government interference in football administration¹⁷. These requirements sometimes conflict with domestic legal frameworks in member states, particularly where government legislation regulates sports administration.

In 2020, the sport policy was introduced designating football as a commercial activity. The policy established the intent of government to reposition sports development and sports for development over the next decade into a vehicle for empowerment, development and growth through a Sports Industrialisation Agenda derived from a process of engagement over a 4-year period, with key stakeholders and participants across several cross-sectoral ancillary industries¹⁸. While the Nigerian National Sports Industry Policy (NSIP) of 2020 has achieved partial success by raising awareness of sports as an economic driver and led to measurable GDP contributions, but many of its broader aims—such as infrastructure development, private investment, and grassroots sports growth—remain underachieved.

Framework and Rules of Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL) 2023/2024 Season.

The NPFL Framework and Rules introduced a more structured framework and landmark commercial deals, signaling Nigeria's push to professionalize and monetize domestic football. The rules emphasize governance, club finance, and ownership standards, while commercialization efforts—like the ₦2 billion broadcast deal—aims to expand revenue streams and global visibility¹⁹.

Clubs must be registered under the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) and disclose significant interests, pass integrity checks, and avoid disqualifying events²⁰. Clubs are bound by compliance rules, ensuring transparency in operations. Change of Name/Ownership is Strictly regulated to prevent instability²¹. Clubs must maintain audited accounts, meet wage obligations, and avoid insolvency²². Centralised funds from sponsorships and broadcasting are shared among clubs²³.

Challenges with the rules: Political interference and lack of transparency reduce investor confidence, making commercialization less attractive. The framework does not adequately address stadium modernization, fan experience, or digital ticketing systems. Without world-class facilities, matchday revenues and sponsorship opportunities remain low.

The NPFL 2023 rules laid a foundation for professionalism, but commercialisation requires more than compliance—it needs innovation, infrastructure, and consistent enforcement. Without addressing these gaps, Nigerian football risks remaining under-commercialised despite landmark deals.

¹⁶ FIFA Statutes (2023).

¹⁷ Antoine Duval, 'Lex Sportiva: A Playground for Transnational Law' (2013) 19 European Law Journal 822.

¹⁸ Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, Draft 2020 National Sports Industry Policy (2020) <<https://fmic.gov.ng/draft-national-sports-industry-policy-2020>> accessed 1 December 2022.

¹⁹ Dayo Awoniyi, '₦2bn landmark deal ushers in broadcast and data revolution for NPFL' (Nigeria Football, November 2025) <<https://nigeriafootball.ng/>> accessed 24 March 2026

²⁰ Framework and Rules of Nigerian Professional Football League (NPFL) 2023/2024 Season, r.5

²¹ Ibid r.5.4

²² Ibid r.8

²³ Ibid r. 9

The Nigerian Football Federation (NFF) Club Licensing Regulations

The Nigerian Football Federation (NFF) Club Licensing Regulations are designed to professionalize and commercialize football in Nigeria by enforcing standards in governance, infrastructure, finance, and youth development. These rules align with FIFA and CAF frameworks, ensuring clubs operate sustainably and attract investment. Key Objectives of NFF Club Licensing are: Professionalization of clubs; Commercial viability: Encourages clubs to generate revenue through sponsorships, merchandising, and broadcasting rights; Compliance with FIFA/CAF standards; Aligns Nigerian football with international best practices and Youth development.²⁴

The NFF Club Licensing Regulations are a cornerstone for football commercialisation in Nigeria, pushing clubs toward sustainability, transparency, and professionalism. By aligning with FIFA and CAF standards, they create opportunities for sponsorship, broadcasting, merchandising, and talent development, though success depends heavily on strict enforcement and governance reforms. CAF released its new rules since 2023²⁵ and NFF is yet to upgrade its own regulation to align with the current CAF Regulations.

The key challenge with the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF) Club Licensing Regulations in respect of football commercialisation lies mainly in weak enforcement, inadequate infrastructure, poor financial transparency, and limited capacity of clubs to meet international standards. These gaps hinder the ability of Nigerian football to attract sustained investment, sponsorship, and broadcasting deals.

The Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020

The Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020 provides the legal framework for incorporating, regulating, and managing companies in Nigeria, and it directly impacts football commercialization by enabling clubs, leagues, and football-related businesses to operate as corporate entities, attract investment, and ensure transparency. In practice, football clubs can register as companies limited by shares or by guarantee, making them more attractive to sponsors, investors, and regulators.

The Act provides Corporate Structure for Football Clubs. Football clubs can register as private companies (for smaller community clubs) or public companies (for professional clubs seeking wider investment) or Company Limited by Guarantee which is Useful for football associations or federations that are non-profit but still need legal recognition²⁶. CAMA requires Mandatory Annual Returns and Audits²⁷: Clubs must file annual returns, ensuring accountability in financial dealings.; Disclosure of Interests²⁸: Prevents conflicts of interest in football administration and sponsorship deals; Board of Directors²⁹: Provides structured governance, reducing risks of mismanagement common in Nigerian football.; Access to Capital: Clubs can issue shares to investors, fans, or corporate sponsors³⁰.

The shortfalls of CAMA 2020 in respect to football commercialization lie mainly in its general corporate focus, which does not adequately address the unique realities of sports business—such as fan ownership, revenue-sharing models, and the informal nature of many Nigerian football clubs. While the Act modernizes corporate governance, it leaves gaps that hinder football's transition into a fully commercialised industry. Annual returns, audits, and corporate filings are costly and complex for grassroots clubs. This discourages formal registration, keeping many clubs outside the corporate framework.

²⁴ NFF Club Licensing regulations 2014/2015 Season, art 1.1

²⁵ 'NFF lectures clubs on new CAF Club Licensing System and Stadium Regulations' (SportsDay, 2 February 2023) <<https://sportsdayonline.com/nff-lectures-clubs-on-new-caf-club-licensing-system-and-stadium-regulations/>> accessed 24 March 2026.

²⁶ Company and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020; s.21

²⁷ CAMA 2020, chapters 15 and 16

²⁸ CAMA 2020, section 119

²⁹ Ibid, Section 269

³⁰ Ibid, Section 141

The Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act (FCCPA) 2018

The Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act (FCCPA) 2018 provides Nigeria with a framework to regulate fair competition and consumer rights. The Act promotes fair, efficient, and competitive markets in Nigeria, protect consumer rights, and prevent anti-competitive practices³¹. The Act applies to all commercial activities in Nigeria, including sports and entertainment sectors³². Football commercialisation in Nigeria involves broadcasting rights, sponsorship deals, merchandising, ticketing, and player transfers. The FCCPA is relevant because:

- a. Broadcasting rights: Prevents exclusive contracts that shut out competitors.
- b. Sponsorship and merchandising: Ensures fair competition among brands and protects consumers from counterfeit products.
- c. Ticketing and fan engagement: Guards against exploitative pricing and unfair restrictions.
- d. Club ownership and governance: Addresses monopolistic control and promotes transparency in financial dealings.

Limitation of the FCCPC includes;

- a. Administrative difficulties: Limited resources and expertise in sports law within FCCPC.
- b. Resistance from football stakeholders: Clubs and federations prefer internal regulation, creating friction with FCCPC oversight.
- c. Globalization of football: International contracts (e.g., FIFA/CAF broadcasting rights) often bypass Nigerian regulatory frameworks.

The National Sports Institute Act 2004³³

The National Sports Institute Act 2004 was intended to strengthen Nigeria's sports development, but in relation to football commercialization it has proven inadequate—its framework is outdated, overly centralized, and fails to create the legal and financial structures needed for football to thrive as a modern commercial industry. The Purpose of the Act was to Establish the National Sports Institute to promote training, research, and development in sports³⁴. It was designed more for capacity building than for commercialization. Football is Nigeria's most popular sport therefore football Commercialisation requires clear legal structures for sponsorship, broadcasting rights, merchandising, and dispute resolution. The Act does not explicitly address football's commercial ecosystem—there is no framework for private investment, club licensing, or revenue-sharing mechanisms. The Consequences for Football are:

- a. Weak Club Finances: Most Nigerian clubs cannot sustain themselves commercially; they depend on state governments.
- b. Poor Infrastructure: Stadiums and training facilities remain underdeveloped due to lack of private capital inflows.
- c. Talent Drain: Players often leave early for foreign leagues because local clubs cannot offer competitive contracts.
- d. Limited Global Partnerships: International sponsors hesitate to invest due to unclear legal protections and governance instability.

³¹ Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2018, s.1

³² Ibid, s.2(1)

³³ The National Sports Institute Act came into force in 1992 by a military Decree. Currently it is the primary legislation for sports in Nigeria. After over three decades of its application in Nigeria, there is an urgent need for its review to reflect current realities in sports law.

³⁴ The National Sports Institute Act 2004, s. 4

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act 2004

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act 2004 provides the legal framework for regulating broadcasting in Nigeria. The Act created the NBC to regulate broadcasting in Nigeria, including licensing and monitoring of radio and television stations. NBC can grant licenses, set conditions, regulate content, and enforce sanctions. The Commission is funded through license fees, government allocations, and other sources.³⁵

Football broadcasting is one of the most lucrative aspects of sports commercialisation worldwide. Broadcasters pay huge sums for exclusive rights to air matches, which in turn drives advertising, sponsorship, and subscription revenues. In Nigeria, however, when applied to football commercialisation, the Act falls short in addressing exclusivity of sports rights, competition law principles, and modern revenue models. These gaps limit Nigeria's ability to fully harness football as a commercial product.

Implications:

- a. **Reduced Investment:** Broadcasters hesitate to pay high fees for football rights if exclusivity is not guaranteed.
- b. **Stunted Growth:** Nigerian football leagues struggle to generate sustainable revenue compared to European leagues.
- c. **Piracy and Informal Broadcasting:** Weak enforcement allows unauthorized rebroadcasting, undermining commercialization.
- d. **Consumer Confusion:** Multiple broadcasters airing the same matches dilute brand value and reduce incentive for subscription.

Challenges to the Commercialisation of Football in Nigeria.

Inadequate and obsolete legislations

Inadequate and obsolete legislations in Nigeria negatively impact the commercialisation of football in several ways: Outdated or inadequate legal frameworks fail to provide sufficient protection for investors and sponsors. This lack of legal safeguards can discourage potential investors who seek assurance and clarity regarding their rights, contracts, and financial interests in football ventures. The Nigerian football Association Act came into existence in 1992, after over three decades of its application has become obsolete. In addition, the NBC Act and National Sports Institute Act are also obsolete.

Modern football commercialisation often involves the protection of intellectual property rights, including trademarks, broadcasting rights, and licensing agreements. Inadequate legislation can lead to uncertainties and challenges in enforcing these rights, affecting the attractiveness of the sport to commercial partners. Incomplete or outdated regulations regarding player transfers and the activities of football agents can contribute to unethical practices and irregularities. Clear and effective regulations are crucial for ensuring fair and transparent dealings, which, in turn, foster a more trustworthy environment for sponsors and investors.

In modern football, financial fair play regulations aim to ensure clubs operate within their means and promote financial sustainability. Inadequate legislations or their ineffective enforcement can lead to financial irregularities, creating an environment that is less appealing to sponsors and investors.

Government interference

Government interference in Nigerian football has various adverse effects on the commercialisation of the sport: Frequent changes in sports leadership due to political interference leads to instability and uncertainty. This can create challenges for long-term planning and investment, making potential sponsors and investors hesitant to commit to a volatile environment. Also, excessive government involvement in the decision-making processes of football organisations limits their autonomy. This interference impedes the ability of football bodies to make

³⁵ National Broadcasting Commission Act 2004, s. 1

strategic and commercial decisions independently, affecting their appeal to sponsors seeking stable and professionally managed partnerships.

The NFA Act empowers the Association to make regulations for giving full effect to the provisions of the Act, but subject to the Approval of the Minister³⁶. These sections negate the principle of independence of member associations and non-interference from third parties as captured in FIFA Statutes³⁷. This has been one of the major controversies that surrounds Nigerian football and has led to numerous sanctions by FIFA. By the provisions of Article 19(1) of the FIFA Statutes, each member association shall manage its affairs independently and without undue influence from third parties. A member association's bodies shall be either elected or appointed in that association. A member association's statutes shall provide for a democratic procedure that guarantees the complete independence of the election or appointment³⁸.

FIFA requires their national member associations to manage their affairs independently and without influence from third parties, including national government. This is aimed at protecting the game from outside influences, particularly political interference. The ministry of sports in Nigeria, however, takes a somewhat intrusive position in sports, particularly at Elite level and in the operation of National Sports Federations³⁹. This apparently flows from its assertion that even though International Federations confer on National Sports Federations roles and responsibilities relating to participation in events and competitions, they did not envisage the situation in most African countries including Nigeria where most if not all of these roles and responsibilities are undertaken by the National Government⁴⁰. Indeed, the government of Nigeria shoulders the bulk of the funding responsibilities of the country's National Sports Federation⁴¹ thus, it is normal that they would interfere.

In addition, the NSFs in Nigeria are not registered as corporate entities and therefore do not possess legal personality⁴². In practical terms, they operate as appendages to the ministry of sport, which is difficult to reconcile with the principle of autonomy prescribed by International Federations⁴³. An example of this, is the Code of Governance for NSFs laid down by the Ministry of Sport, which stipulates that the Secretary-General and Treasurer of each NSF shall be appointed by the Ministry and gives the minister of sport the power to dissolve or suspend the board of an NSF and appoint a caretaker committee in its place⁴⁴.

Government interference has led to favouritism and political patronage within football administration. This in turn has resulted in unfair advantages for certain clubs or individuals, creating an environment that lacks the fair competition essential for attracting sponsors and maintaining the integrity of the sport. Excessive government control deters private sector involvement in football. Private investors and sponsors are more likely to engage in an industry where they can operate with a degree of autonomy and without undue political influence, fostering a healthier commercial ecosystem. Foreign investors and sponsors may be hesitant to enter the Nigerian football market if they perceive a high level of government interference. This reluctance can limit the flow of international capital, partnerships, and opportunities for global exposure of the sport. Government interference compromises the principles of good corporate governance within football organisations. This impacts the transparency and accountability required to attract reputable sponsors and investors who value ethical and well-governed entities.

Lack of professionalism and accountability.

Professionalism and accountability are crucial for building trust with sponsors and investors. The absence of transparent and accountable practices within Nigerian football deters potential commercial partners who seek

³⁶ NFA Act, s.21

³⁷ Art. 19 FIFA Statutes

³⁸ Art.19.2. FIFA Statute

³⁹K C Omuojine, 'Tackling Government Interference in Sport: The River Hoopers Nigerian Basketball Case' (2022) <<https://www.lawinsport.com>> accessed 2 August 2022.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² *Supra*, note 20

⁴³ K C Omuojine, 'Tackling Government Interference in Sport: The River Hoopers Nigerian Basketball Case' (2022) <<https://www.lawinsport.com>> accessed 2 August 2022.

⁴⁴ *ibid*

reliable and ethical entities for their investments. Sponsors are more likely to associate their brands with professionally managed and accountable football entities. The lack of professionalism can result in mismanagement of sponsorship deals, diminishing the appeal of the sport to companies looking for effective and mutually beneficial partnerships. Professionalism is a cornerstone of good corporate governance. Without adherence to proper governance practices, football organisations may struggle to attract reputable sponsors and investors who prioritize ethical and well-governed entities.

Oluwashina Okeleji, the sports journalist, says the NFF could not claim FIFA grant for three years because of accountability issues. Shina spoke in a chat with 90 minutes Africa, an online new programme hosted by Rudolf Okonkwo and Chido Onumah. The BBC journalist revealed he got the scoop from a FIFA official in 2018, saying NFF was denied the annual grant thrice because it failed to defend the projects it listed. He said NFF gets about \$1.6 million every year from FIFA alongside other sponsorship deals but there is no accountability on how this money is spent and where it goes⁴⁵.

Lack of accountability often leads to financial mismanagement within football clubs and organisations. This not only affects the stability of these entities but also deters potential sponsors who require assurance that their investments will be used responsibly and efficiently. Unprofessionalism and a lack of accountability can lead to disputes over player contracts, transfers, and wages. Such issues not only harm the reputation of the clubs involved but also create an unfavourable environment for sponsors and advertisers who seek stability in their partnerships. Professionalism is essential for effective marketing and branding of football events and leagues. Poorly executed marketing strategies and a lack of accountability can result in missed opportunities to maximize the commercial potential of the sport through merchandising, licensing, and other branding activities.

Mismanagement

Mismanagement in Nigerian football has profound implications for the commercialisation of the sport: Poor financial management has led to budgetary deficits, unpaid wages, and overall financial instability within football clubs. This financial uncertainty is a significant deterrent for potential sponsors and investors who seek stability and a secure return on their investments. This mismanagement has resulted in inadequate investment in infrastructure, including stadiums and training facilities. The lack of modern and well-maintained infrastructure diminishes the overall appeal of the football experience, impacting the marketability of the sport for potential commercial partners in Nigeria. Additionally, inefficient management has hindered player development programs, coaching quality, and talent identification. This has in turn affected the production of high-quality players who are essential for attracting sponsors and advertisers seeking to associate their brands with top talent. Mismanagement has resulted in inadequate fan engagement efforts in Nigeria football. Engaged fans are vital for the commercial success of football, contributing to ticket sales, merchandise purchases, and viewership. FIFPro, the world players' union has tackled the NFF for failing to pay super falcons players their outstanding allowances. During the lead-up to the 2023 Women's World cup, Randy Waldrum, Falcon's head coach, revealed that some players are owed "per diem and bonuses" from two years ago⁴⁶.

Corruption and Governance Challenges

Corruption and poor governance remain significant challenges within Nigerian football administration. Weak institutional structures have undermined transparency and accountability in the management of football resources⁴⁷. These governance problems have discouraged corporate sponsorship and private investment. Corruption in Nigerian football has been a longstanding issue, involving various levels of the sport. Corruption scandals, such as match-fixing or financial embezzlement, damage the credibility of football organisations. Sponsors and investors are less likely to associate their brands with a sport tainted by unethical practices, reducing the overall appeal for commercial partnerships. Potential investors and sponsors are wary of committing to a football environment where corruption is prevalent. They seek transparency and ethical conduct in their

⁴⁵ I Shehu, 'The NFF could not claim FIFA grant for 3 years for accountability issues' (The Cable, 2022) <<https://thecable.ng/>> accessed 13 December 2023.

⁴⁶ Note 26

⁴⁷ John Tsabora, 'Corruption and Governance Challenges in African Football' (2014) 2 Africa Sports Law and Business Bulletin <<http://www.africansportslawjournal.com>> accessed 1 March 2019.

partnerships, and corruption undermines the trust necessary for long-term investment in the sport. In Nigeria, corrupt practices have led to mismanagement of funds meant for development, infrastructure, and marketing. When funds are not utilised efficiently, it hampers the growth and commercial potential of the sport, making it less attractive to potential sponsors. High-profile corruption cases within Nigerian football federation have created a negative public perception.

In October 2016, former Super Eagles attacker, Daniel Amokachi opened a can of worms when he alleged that the nation's sport had become a den of corruption. Amokachi's major concern was the plight of the Nigerian youth, who, he alleged was forced to pay as much as 250,000 each to get into the national U-17 team⁴⁸. Addressing corruption in Nigerian football is crucial for creating a transparent and trustworthy environment that can attract sponsors, investors, and fans. By promoting ethical practices, NFF can enhance the sport's commercial potential and contribute to its overall growth and success.

Some Nigerian football stakeholders say they are set to engage former and current officials of the Nigerian Football Federation in a fresh legal battle over alleged corruption and misappropriation of football development funds. The funds according to the stakeholders include FIFA's \$8.6m 2014 world cup grant, \$10m 2018 world cup grant among other streams of FIFA and CAF development funds, as well as sponsorship money from corporate bodies between 2014 and 2022⁴⁹.

Poor infrastructure

Poor infrastructure in Nigeria has significant implications for the commercialisation of football. Inadequate stadiums and facilities reduce the attractiveness of football events. Potential sponsors and advertisers are less inclined to associate their brands with poorly maintained or outdated venues, impacting the overall commercial value of the sport. Poor infrastructure affects the fan experience during matches. Fans are less likely to attend games or engage in other commercial activities like purchasing merchandise or participating in fan zones if the stadium experience is subpar due to inadequate facilities. Outdated infrastructure can hinder the quality of broadcasts and live streaming, affecting the visual appeal of football events. Broadcasting partners may be less interested in acquiring rights for leagues or competitions held in venues with inadequate technical capabilities. Lack of proper training facilities and academies due to poor infrastructure can hinder player development. High-quality players are essential for attracting sponsors and advertisers who are interested in associating their brands with top talent. Poorly maintained facilities may contribute to security concerns during matches, deterring fans from attending live events. This can impact ticket sales, hospitality revenues, and overall fan engagement, affecting the commercial potential of football. Modern football commercialisation relies heavily on digital platforms for fan engagement, content distribution, and marketing. In areas with poor infrastructure, including limited internet access, the ability to leverage digital strategies for commercial purposes is constrained.

Limited Private Sector Participation

In many developed football economies, private investors play a central role in club ownership, stadium development, and league organisation. In Nigeria, however, football clubs are largely funded by state governments. This dependence on public funding limits financial sustainability and reduces incentives for efficient management.

Prospects Of Football Commercialisation In Nigeria.

The prospects of football commercialisation are significant, with the sport being a global phenomenon. Commercialisation in football involves various aspects like sponsorships, broadcasting rights, merchandise, and more. As the demand for football continues to grow worldwide, there's a substantial opportunity for increased revenue through commercial ventures.

⁴⁸ G Akpodonor, 'Sports as Den of Corruption in Nigeria' (Guardian, 2019) <<https://guardian.ng/>> accessed 13 December 2023.

⁴⁹ B Adewale, 'Corruption: Stakeholders engage NFF in fresh legal battle' (Punch, 2023) <<https://punchng.com/>> accessed 13 December 2023.

Economic Growth and Job Creation

Football commercialisation has the potential to stimulate economic growth by attracting investments, creating job opportunities, and contributing to various sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and merchandising. This can have positive ripple effects on the overall economy. It opens up diverse revenue streams, including sponsorships, broadcasting rights, merchandise sales, and advertising. Clubs and leagues can capitalize on these opportunities to enhance their financial stability and invest in player development and infrastructure. Companies eager to associate with popular football clubs or leagues invest in sponsorships, providing financial support in exchange for brand exposure. Television and digital platforms bid for broadcasting rights, injecting substantial funds into football organizations. Merchandise Sales: Clubs capitalize on their brand by selling jerseys, merchandise, and memorabilia, creating a lucrative revenue stream.

Global Expansion and Fan Base Growth

Commercialisation allows football to reach a broader global audience. International broadcasting deals and marketing initiatives contribute to the sport's popularity worldwide, attracting new fans and sponsors from different regions. By securing international broadcasting deals, football gains a truly global audience, increasing viewership and attracting sponsors interested in a worldwide reach. Strategic marketing campaigns, events, and partnerships help football leagues and clubs establish a presence in new markets, fostering a diverse and expansive fan base.

Player Branding and Endorsements

Successful commercialisation enables football players to build personal brands, attracting endorsements and sponsorship deals. This not only benefits individual players but also enhances the marketability of leagues and teams, fostering a symbiotic relationship between players and the commercial aspect of the sport. Personal Brand Building: Successful commercialization enables players to build personal brands, leveraging their popularity for endorsements, merchandise deals, and social media partnerships. As players become more marketable, it benefits both individual athletes and the overall commercial appeal of the football industry. A thriving football commercialisation ecosystem can lead to improved player development programs. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of discovering and nurturing top talent. With a well-commercialised football industry, Nigerian players may have more opportunities to showcase their skills globally, contributing to the country's reputation in the football world.

Infrastructure Development

Commercialisation can bring in investments for the development of modern stadiums, training facilities, and infrastructure. This not only benefits football but also contributes to the overall improvement of sports facilities in the country. Upgraded infrastructure can attract more prestigious tournaments and events to Nigeria, boosting its sports tourism potential. Increased commercialisation often leads to investments in sports infrastructure. Clubs and leagues may upgrade stadiums, training facilities, and overall infrastructure, contributing to the long-term growth and sustainability of football as a commercial entity. Stadium Upgrades: Commercial success allows clubs to invest in stadium upgrades, improving facilities for players and enhancing the overall fan experience. Quality training facilities attract top talent and contribute to the long-term success of football organisations.

Digital Fan Engagement

Online Communities: Football commercialization can leverage digital platforms to create online communities, enhancing fan engagement through forums, social media, and interactive content. Virtual experiences, such as live-streamed events, exclusive interviews, and behind-the-scenes content, provide additional revenue streams and strengthen the connection between fans and the sport. Creating robust online communities enables fans to connect globally, fostering a sense of belonging. Clubs and leagues can monetize these platforms through premium content, memberships, and targeted advertising. Hosting virtual events, such as live Q&A sessions, virtual meet-and-greets, and online fan forums, provides an interactive experience, driving fan engagement and generating revenue through ticket sales or exclusive memberships.

E-Sports Integration

As e-sports continue to grow, football commercialisation can explore partnerships with gaming platforms and competitions, creating new revenue streams and engaging a younger audience. Creating virtual football leagues or tournaments allows clubs and leagues to tap into the popularity of online gaming and expand their reach to a tech-savvy demographic. Collaborating with gaming platforms for exclusive in-game content, virtual merchandise, and hosting e-sports competitions taps into the growing gaming industry's revenue potential. Creating or participating in virtual football leagues caters to the interests of gaming enthusiasts, fostering a crossover between traditional sports and e-sports, with potential sponsorships and advertising opportunities.

Corporate Sponsorship and Partnerships

Football commercialisation opens avenues for collaborations with various industries, such as technology, finance, and automotive, leading to mutually beneficial partnerships and sponsorship deals. Stadium naming rights and jersey sponsorships provide corporate entities with valuable branding opportunities, contributing to the financial strength of football organisations. Stadium naming rights and jersey sponsorships not only inject funds but also offer companies a prominent platform for brand exposure, enhancing their visibility and association with the football brand. Partnerships with corporations from various sectors can extend beyond traditional sponsorships, involving joint marketing campaigns, co-branded events, and shared initiatives, providing mutual benefits and diversified revenue streams.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that although Nigeria possesses substantial human capital and market potential in football, the legal and regulatory environment significantly undermines its commercialisation prospects. First, the Nigeria Football Association Act is obsolete and no longer reflects contemporary realities of global football governance. Its provisions are inconsistent with the operational structure of the Nigerian Football Federation, thereby creating a dual regulatory regime marked by ambiguity and conflict of authority. Second, the Nigerian Football Federation Statutes, although aligned with international standards, lack statutory backing within Nigerian law. This absence of legislative legitimacy weakens enforcement capacity and creates uncertainty for investors and stakeholders.

Third, sector-specific gaps exist across key legislations. The Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020, while modernising corporate governance, does not account for the peculiarities of sports enterprises such as fan ownership models, revenue-sharing systems, and hybrid commercial structures. Similarly, the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2018 suffers from limited institutional capacity to regulate complex sports markets, particularly in broadcasting and sponsorship arrangements.

Fourth, the National Broadcasting Commission Act fails to adequately regulate exclusivity and monetisation of sports broadcasting rights, thereby discouraging high-value media investments. In addition, the National Sports Institute Act remains largely developmental in focus and does not provide a commercial framework for football as an economic industry. Fifth, regulatory enforcement across all frameworks is weak and inconsistent. The Nigerian Football Federation Club Licensing Regulations and NPFL Rules, although progressive in design, suffer from poor implementation, limited compliance, and inadequate infrastructure support.

Finally, systemic issues such as government interference, corruption, poor accountability, and infrastructural deficits further exacerbate the inadequacies of the legal framework, collectively deterring private sector participation and foreign investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the identified deficiencies, this study proposed a comprehensive reform agenda aimed at repositioning football as a viable commercial industry in Nigeria.

First, there is an urgent need for legislative harmonisation through the repeal or substantive amendment of the Nigeria Football Association Act to align with the Nigerian Football Federation framework and international

best practices. A unified legal instrument should clearly define governance structures, powers, and regulatory authority. In addition, the Nigerian Football Federation Statutes should be formally incorporated into domestic law to enhance their enforceability and legitimacy. This will provide legal certainty for stakeholders and strengthen institutional accountability.

Second, Nigeria should develop a specialised Sports Commercialisation Law that addresses critical areas such as broadcasting rights, intellectual property protection, sponsorship regulation, digital monetisation, and dispute resolution. This will bridge the gaps left by general legislation such as CAMA and FCCPA.

Third, regulatory agencies such as the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the National Broadcasting Commission should be strengthened with sector-specific expertise to effectively oversee football-related commercial activities. Fourth, enforcement mechanisms must be enhanced through independent regulatory oversight, strict compliance monitoring, and sanctions for financial mismanagement and governance failures within football institutions.

Fifth, government involvement in football administration should be limited to policy formulation and facilitation, while ensuring institutional autonomy in line with international standards. This will improve investor confidence and reduce political interference. Finally, deliberate policies should be implemented to incentivise private sector participation, including tax incentives, public-private partnerships in infrastructure development, and legal protections for investors. These measures will create a more attractive and sustainable commercial ecosystem for Nigerian football.

CONCLUSION

The commercialisation of football in Nigeria presents a compelling yet unrealised opportunity for economic diversification, revenue generation, and global competitiveness. While the country possesses an abundance of football talent, a vibrant fan base, and a growing recognition of sports as an economic sector, the legal and institutional framework governing the industry remains fundamentally inadequate to support a modern commercial ecosystem.

This study has demonstrated that the existing legal architecture is characterised by obsolescence, fragmentation, and regulatory incoherence. The continued reliance on the outdated Nigeria Football Association Act, alongside the operational dominance of the Nigerian Football Federation without firm statutory grounding, creates a dual and conflicting governance structure that undermines legal certainty. Furthermore, key legislative instruments such as the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020, the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2018, and the National Broadcasting Commission Act fail to sufficiently address the peculiar commercial realities of football, including broadcasting rights monetisation, intellectual property protection, and sports-specific corporate governance.

Beyond legislative gaps, the study revealed that weak enforcement mechanisms, government interference, infrastructural deficits, and governance failures significantly impede the commercial viability of football in Nigeria. Regulatory frameworks such as the NPFL Rules and NFF Club Licensing Regulations, although conceptually aligned with international best practices, are undermined by inconsistent implementation and limited institutional capacity. These systemic deficiencies collectively erode investor confidence, restrict private sector participation, and prevent the emergence of a sustainable football economy.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the prospects for football commercialisation in Nigeria remains substantial. With the right legal and institutional reforms, football can evolve into a strategic sector capable of generating employment, attracting foreign investment, stimulating infrastructure development, and enhancing Nigeria's global brand. However, realising this potential requires a paradigm shift from state-dominated administration to a market-oriented, legally coherent, and professionally governed framework.

Accordingly, this paper concluded that comprehensive legal reform is indispensable. The harmonisation of existing laws, the domestication of the Nigerian Football Federation framework, the development of a specialised sports commercialisation regime, and the strengthening of regulatory institutions are critical steps toward

establishing a credible and investment-friendly environment. Equally important is the need to insulate football governance from political interference while promoting transparency, accountability, and private sector engagement.

Ultimately, the transformation of Nigerian football into a commercially viable industry is not merely a sporting objective but a strategic economic imperative. A coherent and modern legal framework, supported by effective governance and enforcement, will position Nigeria to fully participate in the global football economy and harness the sport as a catalyst for sustainable national development.