

Financing Grassroots Sports Development in Nigeria: A Review of Public–Private Partnership Models

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ABSTRACT

This study analysed the applicability of public–private partnership (PPP) models to the financing of grassroots sports development in Nigeria through an integrative narrative review and qualitative policy synthesis. Grassroots sports support mass participation, talent identification, public health and social development, yet their delivery in Nigeria remains constrained by unstable funding, weak infrastructure and limited institutional capacity. Evidence was synthesised from peer-reviewed studies and relevant policy literature, with attention to financing arrangements, institutional capacity, governance, private-sector participation and implementation conditions. The review found that PPPs can diversify funding, improve infrastructure delivery and expand participation, but their contribution in Nigeria has remained limited by fragmented policy implementation, weak contract-management capacity, inadequate transparency and the private sector's preference for elite or commercially attractive sports. Comparative evidence further showed that effective sports PPPs require clear regulatory rules, transparent procurement, balanced risk allocation, measurable service obligations and sustained public oversight. The study developed an integrated pathway linking PPP financing to infrastructure, participation and talent development, subject to institutional and governance conditions. It concluded that PPPs offer a viable complementary financing strategy rather than a substitute for public responsibility. Nigeria should therefore adopt a sport-specific PPP framework, strengthen implementing institutions, standardise contracts and performance indicators, and create incentives tied to inclusive community-level outcomes.

Keywords: Public–Private Partnerships, Grassroots Sports Development, Sports Financing, Institutional Capacity, Governance, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Grassroots sports development forms the foundation of national sporting performance and contributes to public health, social inclusion, youth development and talent identification. In a country such as Nigeria, with a large youthful population, accessible community- and school-based sport can also support social mobility and productive engagement. Despite these benefits, grassroots sport has remained insufficiently developed because funding is unstable, facilities are inadequate and delivery responsibilities are fragmented (Adedeji & Adebayo, 2021; Ekechukwu, 2020).

As the global trend demonstrates, the process of sports financing has been gradually shifting towards hybrid solutions combining strengths of the public sector and the efficiency of the private sector. public–private partnerships (PPP) represent a viable mechanism for overcoming financing gaps and delivering sports projects and services in an efficient manner. In recent years, PPP has gained popularity as a means of expanding access to public goods and services, especially within the field of health care (Hodge & Greve, 2017; OECD, 2020). PPPs imply joint efforts from both government agencies and private organizations in financing, construction, management, and other aspects related to the development of sporting facilities and programs. Nations that possess more advanced systems of sports development have used PPPs to their advantage by implementing

sustainable financing mechanisms and enhancing managerial practices (Késenne, 2018). In contrast, in Nigeria, the use of PPP models in grassroots sports is rather sporadic, and faces various difficulties.

The lack of systemic understanding of PPPs' potential in terms of their effective design and implementation represents an important research issue since such knowledge would allow one to overcome existing barriers and make progress in the development of grassroots sports in Nigeria. Indeed, the current system of sports financing remains extremely ineffective due to reliance upon the public budget that may be subject to various political influences. At the same time, sports in Nigeria are not adequately funded due to low participation from private enterprises (Nwankwo & Okoye, 2019). Finally, the focus of the private sector on high-end sports leaves grassroots sports marginalized and neglected. Overall, this situation indicates that the current sports development policy has a number of flaws, and the use of PPP models could help address some of the issues that currently exist.

Accordingly, this study examined how PPP models can support the financing of grassroots sports development in Nigeria. It evaluated the relevant policy environment, analysed applicable PPP models, identified institutional and implementation gaps, and proposed reforms for more effective and inclusive delivery. The analysis was guided by three questions:

- To what extent have PPPs been used to finance grassroots sports in Nigeria?
- How have policy and institutional conditions affected the effectiveness of existing or proposed PPP arrangements?
- How should sports-development policy be modified to improve the contribution of PPP models?

The study addressed an important gap in sports-finance research. Although a growing literature has called for more diverse financing instruments in sport (Andreff, 2019; Schulenkorf et al., 2016), Nigerian studies have concentrated largely on elite sport, while community and school programmes have received less sustained attention (Ezenekwe & Nwaeze, 2021). Evidence that integrates grassroots financing, policy implementation and PPP design in Nigeria has remained limited. This review therefore brought these strands together and assessed the conditions under which PPPs could serve public-development objectives.

The study contributes to sports economics, public policy and sports management by clarifying how PPP design interacts with governance, institutional capacity and private investment. Its practical contribution lies in the policy and implementation measures proposed for governments, sports bodies and private partners seeking to finance accessible facilities and programmes without weakening public accountability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Grassroots Sports Development

Grassroots sports development refers to the foundation of a country's sporting system that entails various forms of organized and unorganized sports at community, school, and local levels to promote participation, develop talents, and create inclusiveness. It is viewed as one of the main elements in determining the success of athletes and improving public health in developing countries where sport is a platform through which young people and socio-economically disadvantaged communities can benefit (Schulenkorf et al., 2021; Giulianotti et al., 2022). Grassroots sports development in Nigeria is directly tied to the availability of sports infrastructure, personnel, and programs that encourage participation from an early stage. However, the successful implementation of grassroots sports development depends on the presence and sustainability of the financing mechanisms that facilitate such activities.

Sports Financing Mechanisms

Financing mechanisms in sport refer to the means of generating funds from various sources, including individuals, corporations, government organizations, and international donors, as well as management approaches used to allocate funds towards sport development activities. Traditionally, the source of funding in many developing countries' grassroots sports was the state budget allocations. However, despite the importance of budget financing in relation to the quasi-public good nature of sport, such sources are often insufficient, volatile, and prone to competing priorities (Andreff, 2021; Moyo & Ndlovu, 2023). This calls for diversified funding models involving public-private partnerships, donations, sponsorships, grants, crowdfunding, and others. Among the emerging financing tools are the public-private partnership (PPP) mechanisms aimed at attracting more capital into the delivery of public sports goods and services and optimizing costs.

Public-Private Partnership Models in Sports

PPP in the area of sports financing entails collaboration between state institutions and businesses geared towards leveraging private capital, knowledge, and efficiency for the benefit of public projects. There are various types of PPP arrangements ranging from BOT to joint venture models, depending on the degree of risk involvement on behalf of the private partner. For instance, under the Build-Operate-Transfer model, the company is responsible for financing and constructing the asset before taking control over its management for some time, after which the ownership is transferred back to the public authority (Hodge et al., 2020). Other models involve concessions that give private organizations an opportunity to operate and collect revenue from the facility, sponsorship programs where businesses provide capital, equipment, and other services in return for marketing purposes, and joint ventures allowing both parties to own the asset and manage it collectively. The efficiency of PPPs in promoting grassroots sports development relies on their financial and governance features, among other elements. Some of the PPP financing mechanisms in the area of grassroots sports are provided below in Fig. 1.

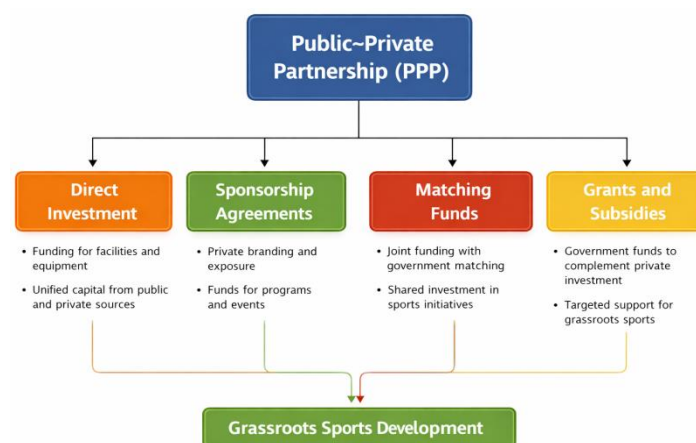


Figure 1: Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Financing Mechanisms for Grassroots Sports Development

Source: Author's conceptualization (2026)

This diagram depicts the scope of public-private partnership (PPP) financing schemes that may be considered within grassroots sports development, which include BOT schemes, concession schemes, sponsorship schemes, and joint ventures. This diagram shows how these PPP schemes are involved in forming an integrated fund pool, which is then utilized for developing sports facilities and grassroots schemes. The diagram highlights the importance of varied schemes of finance generation in making the sports system sustainable and efficient. As shown in Figure 1, varied PPP schemes offer many opportunities for generating finances, which can be effectively used in developing sports facilities and grass-root sports schemes.

Institutional Capacity

Furthermore, institutional capacity is an integral determinant in the success of the PPP model of sports financing. Institutional capacity refers to the capacity of public organizations in devising, implementing, regulating, and monitoring PPP initiatives in ways that promote efficiency and compliance (OECD, 2021; Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2022). Good institutional capacity is indicated by legal frameworks, specialized technical capacity, transparent bidding and contracting practices, and contract enforcement capabilities. Where institutional capacity is low, PPP arrangements exhibit low efficiency and higher costs associated with governance issues such as corruption and collusion (OECD, 2021; Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2022). Institutional constraints in Nigeria such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of technical expertise, and poor policy coordination have limited the capacity to effectively execute PPP projects in the country, thus reducing their developmental impacts.

Governance and Accountability

Another factor related to institutional capacity is governance and accountability, which are necessary for effective management of financial resources and equitable deployment of the same. Governance in the case of sports financing can refer to structures, mechanisms, and practices that influence decision-making and resource allocation and engage stakeholders in the process (Geeraert, 2021; Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2023). Governance and accountability involve mechanisms such as transparency, performance monitoring, and stakeholder oversight as means of preventing risks such as corruption and misappropriation of resources. Weak governance can lead to unequal distribution of benefits and disproportionate favoring of private interests at the expense of the broader welfare of the society, thus hindering the developmental objective of grassroots sports programs. As such, the governance framework should be aligned to PPP initiatives, with particular attention to policy targets and accountability mechanisms aimed at inclusiveness and sustainability.

Private-Sector Participation

Finally, the participation of private sector entities represents yet another principal variable associated with the financing of grassroots sports programs. The private sector contribution involves mobilizing financial resources and knowledge necessary for supporting the sports industry in a variety of ways (Bason & Austin, 2022). Businesses and corporations are often motivated by economic interests, corporate social responsibility, and marketing concerns to engage in the sports business environment (Bason & Austin, 2022). In developed countries, private sector participation has resulted in improvements in terms of the quality of infrastructure and efficiency of service delivery (Bason & Austin, 2022). Nevertheless, in the developing world, such as Nigeria, private sector engagement in grassroots sports is relatively weak and focused mainly on elite and commercially viable types of sports (Njororai, 2021).

PPP Financing and Grassroots Sports Outcomes

The interaction of the three main variables in question can be conceptualized as an interrelated dynamic system where PPPs serve as a catalyst promoting better results in financing and developing grassroots sports. Specifically, PPP initiatives improve funding opportunities, thus enabling investments in infrastructure development and maintenance. Better infrastructure is a crucial prerequisite for encouraging participation since it removes access barriers for people and ensures safer and more accessible sport venues (Hoekman et al., 2022). The increased number of participants, in turn, increases the talent pool available for selection and development of future professional athletes. Thus, there is a sequential chain of PPP arrangement leading to better funding, infrastructure, and participation, resulting in talent development.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Achieving this chain of events requires a conducive environment created through appropriate institutional capacity, sound governance, and private sector participation. In its absence, PPP initiatives are likely to prove ineffective and unproductive, with the results being underdeveloped and underused sports infrastructure and limited developmental benefits. For this reason, an understanding of conceptual relationships between

different variables is important for designing policies facilitating PPP in support of grassroots sports development in Nigeria and similar settings. Conceptual linkages between variables analyzed in this paper are presented in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in Financing Grassroots Sports Development

Source: Author's conceptualization (2026)

Figure 2 presents the proposed relationship between PPP financing and grassroots sports outcomes. PPP arrangements can expand the funding available for facilities and programmes, which may improve access, participation and talent development. Institutional capacity, governance quality and sustained private-sector participation condition each stage of this pathway.

The framework therefore treats PPP finance as an input whose developmental effect depends on effective institutions, transparent governance and explicit community-level service obligations.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The study combined Public Goods Theory and Resource Dependence Theory (RDT). Public Goods Theory explains the public obligation to support grassroots sport, while RDT explains how resource scarcity structures bargaining power within partnerships. Together, they clarify both the rationale for PPPs and the governance risks that arise when public agencies depend heavily on private finance, expertise or market access.

Grassroots sport is a quasi-public good because participation produces benefits that extend beyond individual users, including health improvement, social inclusion, youth development and community safety (Andreff, 2021; Downward & Rasciute, 2020). Since investors cannot readily capture all these returns, private markets tend to provide less community sport than is socially desirable. Government therefore retains responsibility for access, affordability and continuity, even where a private partner finances or operates a facility (Hodge et al., 2020; Késenne, 2021).

RDT starts from the proposition that organisations depend on external actors for critical resources and that dependence reduces autonomy when one party controls resources that are important, scarce and difficult to replace (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Hillman et al., 2021). Nigerian sports ministries, councils, schools and local associations often need private capital, technical competence, equipment, media reach and sponsorship. Private firms, in turn, need public land, licences, legitimacy, brand exposure and access to users. A PPP is therefore an exchange relationship, but the exchange is rarely balanced.

Power asymmetry increases where a public agency has few credible investors, weak project-preparation capacity or urgent funding needs. A sponsor or concessionaire may then shape project scope, user charges, naming rights, facility access and performance indicators around commercially attractive activities. Grassroots obligations can become residual because their social returns are less monetisable. Dependence may also move in the opposite direction: opaque approvals, delayed counterpart funding or political control over permits can

expose the private partner to administrative risk. RDT therefore directs attention to the substitutability of partners, control of critical resources and each party's ability to withstand withdrawal.

The same conditions explain regulatory capture. Repeated interaction, information asymmetry and the public agency's reliance on a private partner's finance or expertise may allow the partner to influence standards, monitoring or contract variation. Capture need not involve an illegal payment. It can occur when procurement specifications favour an incumbent, performance information is supplied mainly by the operator, community-access duties are weak, or renegotiation transfers commercial risk back to government. In such cases, the partnership can preserve a formal public purpose while allocating practical control and benefits to the resource-dominant actor (Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2022).

RDT consequently treats diversification and governance as safeguards. Competitive procurement, alternative revenue sources, disclosed contracts, independent performance data, community representation and enforceable access targets reduce dependence on any single actor. Public Goods Theory supplies the outcome test: whether the arrangement protects broad social access. RDT supplies the power test: who controls indispensable resources, who can set the terms, and whether oversight can resist capture. The integrated framework therefore expects PPPs to support grassroots sport only where public institutions can negotiate, monitor and enforce public-value obligations.

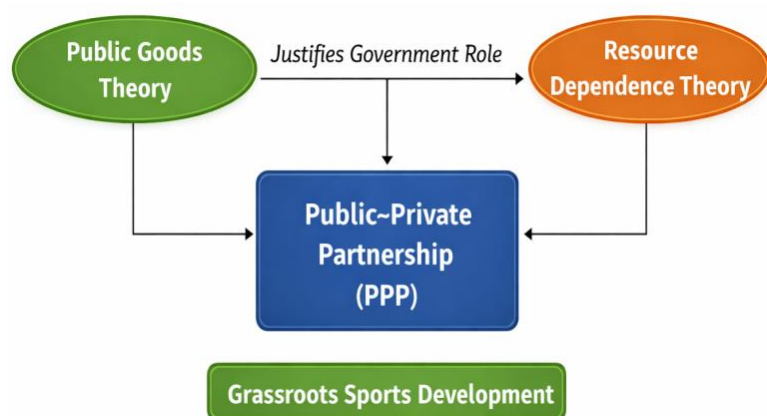


Figure 3: Theoretical Framework Linking Public Goods Theory and Resource Dependence Theory to PPP in Grassroots Sports Development

Source: Author's conceptualization (2026)

Figure 3 integrates the two theoretical lenses. Public Goods Theory explains continued government responsibility where market incentives underprovide community sport. Resource Dependence Theory explains why public agencies and private partners exchange critical resources, while also identifying bargaining asymmetry and capture risks. PPP performance therefore depends on whether governance safeguards preserve public access while managing the parties' interdependence.

Empirical Review

The literature base for recent research studies on grassroots sports development and financing, especially public-private partnership (PPP)-driven financing of sports, seems to be growing yet becoming increasingly fragmented, particularly with reference to developing country environments like Nigeria. As one trend that is evident from a number of recent scholarly publications is that the process of sports development has been increasingly understood in terms of the interconnected chain of governance, financing, infrastructure development, and participation. While the importance of this chain has become widely recognized, the research exploring the links between PPPs and the financing of grassroots sports development in Nigeria is still scarce. As a result, there is a clear need for a comprehensive literature review synthesis of evidence from Nigeria, Africa, and beyond.

Among the recently published studies, one of the contributions was made by Zhu et al. (2025). Their study explored the relationship between governance and participation, emphasizing the mediating role of infrastructure. In their study, the authors relied on a cross-sectional survey and structural equation modelling and found that governance has a great positive effect on participation mainly because of improved access to facilities and increased public awareness. Although this research demonstrates how the conceptual link between governance and participation is mediated through infrastructure, it does not specifically focus on financing or partnerships, thus limiting its applicability to Nigerian context.

Another study that has appeared recently is authored by Kopańska et al. (2024). Focusing on the private sector participation in PPP projects, the researchers used econometrics to analyze PPP tender data. Among the main conclusions was the identification of conditions under which the participation of private investors increases. According to Kopańska et al., balanced risks and contracts that allow certain flexibility, as well as strong institutional credibility, foster greater willingness to participate in PPPs. Targeted subsidies were another factor encouraging private participants, while general support could discourage them from investing. While the paper identifies conditions that make PPP projects successful, it does not relate to sports development, thus not meeting the research requirements.

In their study that also appeared in the last couple of years, Xu et al. (2024) sought to examine whether financial resources had any effect on the development of sports infrastructure in China. Using efficiency analysis approaches, they concluded that there is a great difference in terms of translating financial resources into development, implying that mere volumes do not suffice for development to occur. Thus, the issue of institutional efficiency comes into focus. However, like in the previous two studies, there is no examination of sports PPPs in the study conducted by Xu et al.

Another useful study is that of Ma et al. (2023), who conducted a systematic literature review of PPP applications in social infrastructure and identified key themes, including financing, risk management, governance, and performance. Based on the results, it was argued that PPPs remain an adequate mechanism for the delivery of social infrastructure despite some difficulties arising across the globe. Even though this study focuses on social infrastructure as such, it stresses that governance plays a crucial part in PPP success and is therefore useful for research.

The first group of studies related to the problem of grassroots sports development and financing consists of Nigeria-specific studies that explore various factors affecting development. For instance, Orighoye et al. (2023) employed a qualitative approach to investigate the factors that affect the participation of individuals in physical activity intervention program in Lagos. The authors identified accessibility, stakeholders' perspectives, and contextual feasibility as key determinants of participation outcomes. While the study provides insights into participation factors, it does not consider financial issues.

In the next study conducted by Adebuseye et al. (2021), the same methodological approach was chosen to analyze the differences in physical activity levels among teenagers in Lagos. The study shows that youth engagement with physical activities varies considerably depending on the socio-demographic features of young people. While providing evidence of fragility in the participation rates, it does not focus on financing and institutional issues affecting youth engagement.

A study specifically addressing sports financing in schools was conducted by Bamidele and Abu (2020). Using survey methods, they found that inadequate financing leads to difficulties associated with provision of the necessary facilities, equipment, and staff. As the study shows, cooperation between the government and private entities may help improve the situation. However, there is no detailed information about partnerships that might solve the problem under discussion.

Further, two studies discuss issues relating to the implementation of sports policies in African nations. According to Charway et al. (2022), even though the policy in Ghana recognizes the usefulness of sport as a tool for economic development, the implementation faces a number of barriers including unequal resource distribution, ineffective stakeholder coordination, and marginalization of locals. Similarly, Sebata and Li

(2022) point out issues of funding, policy implementation, and resource distribution in Uganda. Both papers show that policies alone are useless and require the implementation of measures that will facilitate financing. Charway and Houlihan (2020) also indicate that there is an excessive reliance on government funds in Ghana, limiting the long-term strategic goals.

Finally, the papers devoted to PPPs on a global level include the works of Chojnacka (2021) and Kusio and Hajdys (2021). The former shows that PPPs are effectively used for financing sports infrastructure despite problems with finances, legal regulations, and uncertain risk allocation. The latter study suggests that wider stakeholder participation increases the effectiveness of PPP projects and their longevity. Therefore, even though these papers show how PPPs function in developed countries, they may be used to gain insight into the subject matter under investigation.

Thus, three distinct patterns can be seen among the reviewed sources. First, Nigerian papers emphasize financing and infrastructure deficiencies as key obstacles to development. Second, studies focusing on Africa suggest that sports development is impeded by poor policies, governance, and overdependence on the public sector. Finally, global literature indicates that PPP projects increase the financing efficiency if there is sufficient governance and institutional capacity. Despite all these patterns, one critical gap emerges. Namely, there is currently a lack of integrative evidence related to the applicability of PPPs to grassroots sports in Nigeria. At the same time, empirical evidence about PPP operation within Nigeria's sports policy-making processes is also insufficient.

METHODS

Research Design

The study adopted an integrative narrative review and qualitative policy-synthesis design. This design was appropriate because the evidence comprised heterogeneous academic studies, policy documents, regulatory materials and reported Nigerian partnership cases that could not be combined through statistical meta-analysis. The review integrated conceptual, empirical and practice-based evidence, while the policy synthesis examined how institutional rules, financing arrangements and implementation conditions shaped PPP performance (Snyder, 2019; Bacchi, 2020; Cairney, 2021).

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Academic evidence was identified through Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and JSTOR. Searches combined terms relating to grassroots or community sport, financing or sponsorship, public-private partnership, governance, infrastructure, Nigeria and Africa. Illustrative strings included:

"grassroots sport*" AND financing AND Nigeria; "public-private partnership*" AND sport* AND Africa; and sponsorship AND school sport* AND Nigeria.

The search prioritised material published from 2020 to 2026. Seminal earlier works were retained for theory, and backward citation checking supplemented database searches. Official federal and state materials and credible reports were used to document Nigerian cases where peer-reviewed evidence was unavailable.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Materials were included when they addressed at least one review question and provided substantive evidence on sports finance, PPP design, sponsorship, community or school sport, institutional capacity, governance or implementation. Eligible sources comprised peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, official policy and regulatory documents, and credible case reports. Nigerian evidence was prioritised, then supplemented by African and wider comparative evidence where it clarified mechanisms or design conditions.

Evidence Selection and Appraisal

Titles, abstracts and document summaries were first checked against the review questions. Potentially relevant full texts were then examined for their contribution to the analytical categories. Greater interpretive weight was assigned to peer-reviewed research and official records; media reports were used narrowly to establish publicly reported case events and were triangulated where possible. The authors compared claims across source types, recorded convergence and contradiction, and avoided treating a project announcement as evidence of completed delivery.

Analytical Framework

The reviewed evidence was analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Policy analysis was then applied to Nigerian sports-policy provisions and relevant PPP arrangements, with emphasis on policy objectives, delivery responsibilities, financing mechanisms, governance safeguards and reported outcomes.

Four analytical dimensions guided the review: policy objectives; implementation mechanisms and institutional responsibilities; sources and structures of finance; and reported outputs or outcomes. These dimensions provided a consistent basis for comparing evidence across Nigerian, African and wider international contexts.

Conceptual Structural Model

The analysis used a directional structural model rather than a mathematical equation. PPP resource inputs, comprising public commitments, private finance, managerial competence and sponsorship assets, were expected to affect delivery mechanisms such as facility rehabilitation, maintenance, programme provision and coaching support. These mechanisms were expected to produce immediate outputs in facility availability, affordability and programme continuity, followed by outcomes in participation, inclusion and talent development.

Institutional capacity and governance operated as conditioning structures across the pathway. Procurement quality, balanced risk allocation, contract-management competence, disclosure, community-access obligations and independent monitoring could strengthen transmission from finance to outcomes. Power imbalance, regulatory capture, fragmented mandates and weak enforcement could interrupt it. The model therefore organised the synthesis around four linked questions: what resources entered the partnership, who controlled them, how they were converted into services, and whether the resulting benefits reached grassroots users. Figure 2 depicts these relationships.

Method of Analysis

The study used narrative synthesis, thematic coding and qualitative policy comparison. Evidence was coded under partnership form, resource contribution, infrastructure or programme delivery, institutional capacity, bargaining power, governance safeguards, implementation gaps and grassroots outcomes. Narrative synthesis integrated findings across heterogeneous designs and contexts, while policy comparison assessed Nigerian arrangements against design principles reported in the wider PPP literature (Popay et al., 2020).

This combined approach supported both descriptive and interpretive analysis and allowed the review to explain how institutional and policy conditions shaped the relationship between PPP financing and grassroots sports outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on empirical and policy studies, it can be noted that PPPs have a high potential for increasing the funding of grassroots sport development initiatives; yet, their effectiveness is highly dependent on particular conditions related to governance and institutions. PPPs in sports, as well as in other spheres, were repeatedly shown to facilitate the enhancement of resource mobilization opportunities; specifically, they contribute to

increasing sources of financing within the conditions of limited public budget resources (Hodge et al., 2020; Késenne, 2021). Through the utilization of private financing opportunities and increased innovation, PPPs make more financing opportunities available, addressing the existing issue associated with a shortage of necessary funding and financial resources in grassroots sports systems of developing countries (Hodge et al., 2020; Késenne, 2021). At the same time, the effectiveness of PPPs is conditional on their design and the ability to establish an adequate contractual arrangement between public and private sectors (Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2022). In this regard, considering the current state of PPP engagement in Nigerian sports, it is reasonable to assume that despite their high potential, the contribution of PPPs to increased sports funding remains limited.

When analyzing the current state of policy in Nigeria in terms of promoting PPPs, the conclusion can be made that the sports sector benefits from enabling policies; yet, a significant part of potential opportunities remains unrealized due to the gap in policy design and implementation practices. Current sports policies recognize the need for involvement of private parties, diversification of funding approaches, and utilization of PPPs to enhance the development of the sector. Yet, policy documents often lack implementation strategies and enforcement measures necessary for effective transformation of intentions into concrete actions (Cairney, 2021; Njororai, 2021). This gap reflects one of the main challenges related to sports policies' inability to achieve the desired effect when lacking necessary financial, management, or coordinating capacities (Charway et al., 2022). Therefore, while Nigerian policy on PPPs can be considered quite progressive and innovative, the absence of effective implementation tools limits its success. The differences between policy design and practice in relation to Nigerian sports policy can be seen in Figure 5.

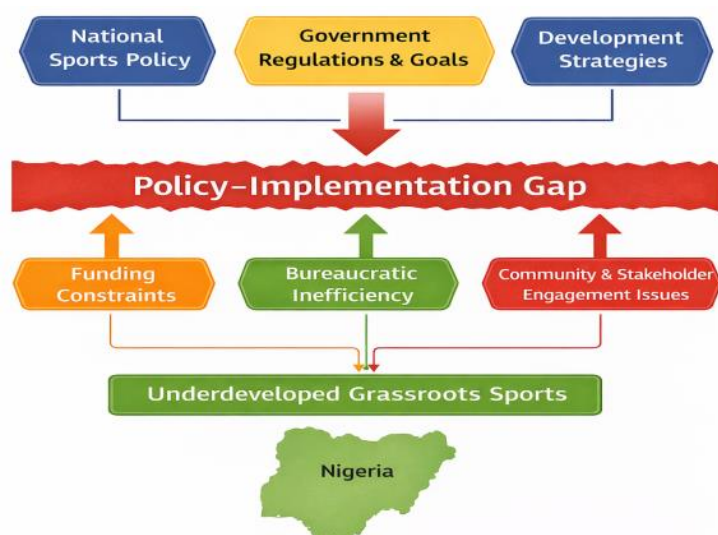


Figure 5: Policy–Implementation Gap in Grassroots Sports Development in Nigeria

Source: Author’s conceptualization (2026)

The problem with policy intention and reality is illustrated in Figure 5, which shows how Nigeria’s grassroots sports development is hindered by its policies. The policies clearly outline their intentions and what they wish to achieve through the implementation of specific goals and targets. However, there are structural limitations that prevent the policies from being implemented, such as financial inadequacies, poor governance, and ineffective stakeholder participation.

Nigerian Partnership Cases

Three Nigerian cases clarify the difference between partnership announcements, asset rehabilitation and sustained grassroots service delivery. They include one federal rehabilitation partnership, one stadium-concession process and one state-corporate school-sport sponsorship. Table 1 summarises the evidence.

Table 1: Selected Nigerian Public-Private Sports Partnership Cases

Case	Partnership form	Reported result	Implementation lesson
Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Abuja	Federal Adopt-a-Pitch arrangement with Aliko Dangote	Rehabilitated football pitch was handed over in 2021.	Private funding can restore an asset, but a one-off rehabilitation does not itself finance continuing community access, programming or lifecycle maintenance (Punch, 2021).
National Stadium, Surulere, Lagos	Proposed federal concession, alongside earlier privately supported rehabilitation	ICRC issued a concession request, but the process attracted stakeholder objections over transparency and remained contested in 2024.	Procurement disclosure, stakeholder consultation, service obligations and a credible transition plan are necessary before a concession can command legitimacy (ICRC, n.d.; ThisDay, 2024).
Zenith Bank/Delta Principals' Cup	Corporate sponsorship in partnership with Delta State Government	The statewide secondary-school football competition reached its seventh edition in 2024.	Sponsorship can sustain recurring grassroots programming, but continuity depends on sponsor renewal and should be supported by documented participation, inclusion and talent-progression indicators (ThisDay, 2024b).

The cases reveal three distinct implementation gaps. First, asset rehabilitation is often treated as the endpoint even though grassroots value requires a funded plan for maintenance, affordable access and regular programming. Second, concession preparation can become vulnerable to distrust where bidding criteria, contract terms and stakeholder roles are unclear. Third, sponsorship can deliver repeated school-level activity, yet its public value remains difficult to assess without disclosed indicators on geographic reach, female and disability participation, safeguarding and progression. These cases support the structural model: finance affects outcomes only through specified delivery duties and enforceable governance arrangements.

Institutional capacity and governance quality emerge as central determinants of PPP performance in grassroots sports financing. The literature consistently highlights that weak institutional frameworks—manifested in bureaucratic inefficiencies, regulatory inconsistencies, and limited technical expertise—undermine the ability of public agencies to design, negotiate, and manage PPP contracts effectively (OECD, 2021; Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2022). In Nigeria, these challenges are compounded by issues of transparency and accountability, which increase the risk of misallocation of resources and reduce private sector confidence in partnership arrangements. The absence of robust monitoring and evaluation systems further limits the ability to assess the performance of PPP initiatives and to ensure that they deliver on their developmental objectives. From an analytical standpoint, these findings suggest that the success of PPPs in grassroots sports is less a function of the availability of private capital and more a reflection of the institutional environment within which partnerships are embedded. Without strong governance structures, PPPs risk becoming inefficient or skewed toward private interests, thereby undermining their potential to deliver public value.

When compared with global best practices, Nigeria's experience with PPPs in sports financing reveals a significant gap in both scale and sophistication. In more advanced contexts, PPPs are supported by well-defined legal frameworks, transparent procurement processes, and established risk-sharing mechanisms that enhance investor confidence and project sustainability (Roumboutsos & Saussier, 2021). These systems also emphasize performance-based contracts, stakeholder engagement, and long-term planning, which contribute to more effective infrastructure delivery and service provision. In contrast, Nigeria's PPP landscape in the sports sector is characterized by limited institutionalization, ad hoc implementation, and a lack of standardized contractual frameworks. This disparity underscores the importance of institutional reforms aimed at strengthening regulatory capacity, improving transparency, and fostering a more predictable investment environment. Importantly, global evidence also indicates that PPPs are most effective when they are integrated into broader development strategies that prioritize inclusivity and accessibility, rather than solely focusing on revenue generation or elite sports development (Hoekman et al., 2022).

The findings of this study are strongly aligned with the theoretical insights derived from Public Goods Theory and Resource Dependence Theory. From a Public Goods perspective, the persistent underfunding of grassroots sports in Nigeria can be interpreted as a consequence of market failure, where the social benefits of sports participation are not adequately captured by private investment incentives (Andreff, 2021; Downward & Rasciute, 2020). PPPs, in this context, represent a mechanism for addressing this gap by combining public responsibility with private sector efficiency. However, the limited success of PPPs in Nigeria suggests that the mere introduction of partnership models is insufficient without the institutional capacity to ensure that public interests are safeguarded. This reinforces the theoretical proposition that government involvement remains indispensable in the provision of quasi-public goods such as grassroots sports.

From the perspective of Resource Dependence Theory, the findings highlight the strategic importance of diversifying funding sources to reduce reliance on government allocations. Grassroots sports organizations and public institutions in Nigeria operate within a resource-constrained environment, making them highly dependent on unstable public funding streams. PPPs offer a pathway for reducing this dependency by facilitating access to private capital and expertise (Hillman et al., 2021; Bason & Austin, 2022). However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on the ability of organizations to manage interdependencies, negotiate equitable partnerships, and maintain control over strategic objectives. In the absence of strong institutional and governance frameworks, resource dependence may simply shift from the public sector to private actors, potentially creating new forms of imbalance and vulnerability.

Overall, the evidence showed that PPPs could improve grassroots sports financing, but policy coherence, institutional capacity and governance quality determined whether additional resources translated into infrastructure, participation and talent-development outcomes. PPPs should therefore form part of a wider reform programme that strengthens the institutional foundations of sports development. Figure 6 summarises this integrated pathway.

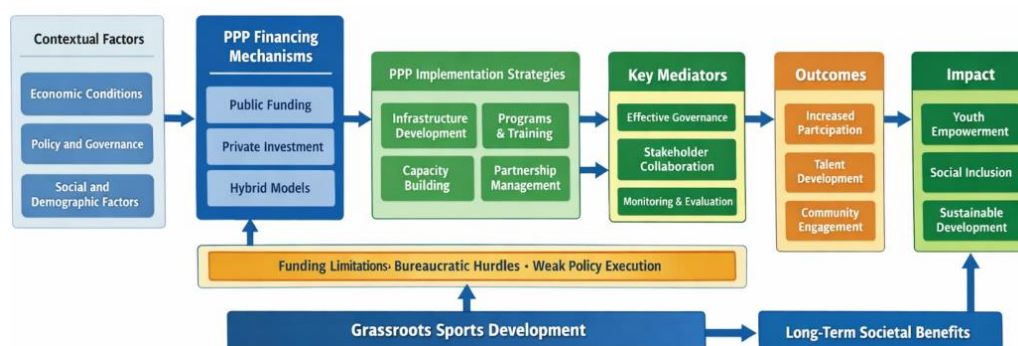


Figure 6: Integrated Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Impact Pathway for Grassroots Sports Development

Source: Author's conceptualization (2026)

Figure 6 presents the integrated pathway from PPP financing to implementation, immediate outcomes and wider social effects. Governance quality, stakeholder collaboration and monitoring operate as conditioning structures throughout the pathway. Funding constraints, bureaucratic hurdles and weak policy execution can interrupt conversion of financial inputs into accessible facilities and programmes. The figure therefore reinforces the conceptual structural model: resources produce grassroots outcomes only when institutions specify, coordinate and enforce delivery obligations.

In summary, Figure 6 shows that the effect PPPs have on grassroots sports development depends on the interaction of a number of financing options, institutional quality, governance systems, and contextual constraints.

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The review found that grassroots sports development in Nigeria remained constrained by insufficient and unpredictable public funding, inadequate infrastructure and weak coordination among responsible institutions. PPP arrangements offered a credible means of widening the resource base and improving infrastructure delivery, but their use in Nigerian sport remained limited and insufficiently institutionalised.

The evidence further showed that private capital alone did not guarantee improved outcomes. Effective PPPs depended on credible regulation, transparent procurement, technical contract-management capacity, balanced risk allocation and consistent monitoring. Private-sector participation also remained concentrated in elite and commercially attractive sport, leaving many community and school programmes underserved.

The synthesis supported the conceptual pathway in which partnership finance improves facilities and programme delivery, wider access increases participation, and participation enlarges the pool for talent identification. In Nigeria, weak implementation capacity and governance frequently interrupted this pathway.

Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

The Federal Ministry responsible for sports, in collaboration with state governments and the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission, should issue a sport-specific PPP policy. The policy should define responsibilities, procurement procedures, minimum community-access requirements, monitoring indicators and remedies for non-performance. Grassroots sport should also receive identifiable budget provisions so that public commitments can anchor, rather than merely solicit, private investment.

Institutional Reforms

Public agencies responsible for sports and PPPs should establish dedicated project teams with competence in feasibility analysis, procurement, contract negotiation, financial appraisal and performance monitoring. Procurement decisions, contract summaries and annual performance results should be disclosed publicly. Independent technical and financial audits should be required for major facilities and programmes.

Private Sector Incentives

Government incentives should be tied to measurable public benefits. Tax relief, viability-gap support, co-financing or recognition under corporate social-responsibility programmes should apply only where partners meet targets for community access, youth participation, inclusion, facility maintenance and programme continuity. Revenue models may combine affordable user fees, facility hire, sponsorship and community programming, with safeguards for low-income participants.

PPP Framework Improvement

A sport-specific PPP framework should standardise feasibility studies, contract clauses, risk-allocation principles, service standards and key performance indicators. Local sports associations, schools, communities, athletes and disability groups should participate in project design and monitoring. Performance-based contracting and lifecycle costing should be adopted to protect service quality and maintenance over the full contract period.

Conclusion

The study concluded that PPPs constitute a viable complementary mechanism for financing grassroots sports development in Nigeria. Their value lies in widening access to capital and expertise while retaining the government's responsibility to protect equitable access and public value. Their effectiveness, however, depends on coherent policy, competent institutions, transparent procurement, enforceable contracts and sustained monitoring.

Nigeria's principal constraint is therefore not the absence of potential private partners, but the lack of a sufficiently predictable and accountable framework for converting partnerships into community-level outcomes. Properly designed PPP projects can improve facilities, participation and talent-development pathways, but only when contracts specify affordability, inclusion, maintenance and performance obligations.

Embedding PPPs within broader institutional reform would allow Nigeria to mobilise private resources without transferring public responsibilities or creating inaccessible facilities. A phased approach, beginning with well-appraised pilot projects and independently reported results, would provide a more credible basis for expansion.

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