

## **Nigerian Football System: Examining Meso-Level Practices against a Global Model for Integrated Development of Mass and Elite Sport**

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**Abstract :** This study was designed to examine mass participation and elite football performance in Nigeria with reference to advance international football management practices. Over 200 sources of literature on sport delivery systems were analyzed to construct a globally applicable model of elite football integrated with mass participation, comprising of the following three levels: macro- (socio-economic, cultural, legislative, and organizational), meso- (infrastructures, personnel, and services enabling sport programs) and micro-level (operations, processes, and methodologies for development of individual athletes). The model has received scholarly validation and showed to be a framework for program analysis that is not culturally bound. The Smolianov and Zakus model has been employed for further understanding of sport systems such as US soccer, US Rugby, swimming, tennis, and volleyball as well as Russian and Dutch swimming. A questionnaire was developed using the above-mentioned model. Survey questions were validated by 12 experts including academicians, executives from sport governing bodies, football coaches, and administrators. To identify best practices and determine areas for improvement of football in Nigeria, 120 coaches completed the questionnaire. Useful exemplars and possible improvements were further identified through semi-structured discussions with 10 Nigerian football administrators and experts. Finally, content analysis of Nigeria Football Federation's website and organizational documentation was conducted. This paper focuses on the meso-level of Nigerian football delivery, particularly infrastructures, personnel, and services enabling sport programs. This includes training centers, competition systems, and intellectual services. Results identified remarkable achievements coupled with great potential to further develop football in different types of public and private organizations in Nigeria. These include: assimilating football competitions with other cultural and educational activities, providing favorable conditions for employees of all possible organizations to partake and help in managing football programs and events, providing football coaching integrated with counseling for prevention of antisocial conduct, and improving cooperation between football programs and organizations for peace-making and advancement of international relations, tourism, and socio-economic development. Accurate reporting of the sports programs from the media should be encouraged through staff training for better awareness of various events. The systematic integration of these meso-level practices into the balanced development of mass and high-performance football will contribute to international sport success as well as national health, education, and social harmony.

**Keywords :** football, high performance, mass participation, Nigeria, sport development

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