

RESEARCH TUTORIAL ABROAD: THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN NIGERIA

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The excitement of football (soccer) is felt around the world by many fans and supporters of the sport. While the game inspires fans from all countries and backgrounds to root for their own country or their favorite teams and players, the sport offers a lot more than just results of matches. Football can provide a glimpse into the gender roles of society, cultural and religious matters, and national pride. This past year for approximately three weeks we were able to get a first-hand look at the broader societal role football plays for the most successful team in Africa, the Nigerian women's national team, and the Nigerian women's professional league.

Traveling to Nigeria in August 2017 we were able to meet with and interview some of the leaders in the sport. Beginning our journey in Lagos, worked to become acquainted with a local women's professional team known as FC Robos. Girls as young as thirteen were training with the team to make a professional debut by their mid-teens. From the team, we interviewed

some girls including Rasheedat Ajibade, the current National Women's Premier League Player of the year and rising star for the Nigerian women's national teams. Rasheedat made one interesting comment about football being a man's game, which speaks to the broader societal view of the sport; the brightest young talent for female footballers in Nigeria believes the sport she is participating in is masculine. In addition to Rasheedat, we interviewed the coach of FC Robos. He explained the difficulties of securing funding for women's football because of the lack of support, and he emphasized the importance of the girls receiving an education while participating to ensure a career after football.

Traveling from Lagos to Abuja we were able to speak with Ruth David, the head of women's football at the Nigerian Football Federation, the Secretary General for the NFF, and various reporters. Ms. David proved to be very proud of the success of the women's team but emphasized that development was hurt primarily by funding, rather than any other factors.

The Secretary-General, however, stated that women did not deserve the same prize money in an upcoming tournament because it wouldn't be as successful and the level of play wasn't as outstanding as the men's games.

Our time and travels in Nigeria allowed us to speak with many essential individuals involved in Nigerian women's football. The development and future for the Super Falcons (a name commonly used to mention the Nigerian Women's national team) are bright but is not without hurdles. As all the officials for the NFF suggested the lack of funding contributes to the struggles but often overlooked is the cultural implications towards women in football. The nature of Nigerian sports culture along with financial and religious restrictions are some of the significant factors in hindering the growth and development of women's football.

On the other hand, football allows women to redefine the perception of traditional gender roles by participating in sports, claim financial independence as a professional athlete, and contribute to the national pride of Nigeria by competing and being successful at international tournaments. Despite the setbacks, women's football offers a gateway to the advancement of women in Nigeria.

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