

THE PRIORITIZATION OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL THROUGH CROSS-CONTINENTAL AND CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS

Tasha Cory

Wilfrid Laurier University



Introduction

The Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has a long-standing history surrounding the structural imbalance pertaining to the global expansion of Women's Football. As the expansion and popularization of women in soccer increases FIFA needs to alter their priorities in order to be more inclusive, this begins with increasing accountability throughout the seven continental confederations and their respective countries. One of the effects of FIFA's structural imbalance is the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities for women's soccer. FIFA allocates only a fraction of its revenue and investment to women's soccer compared to men's soccer, despite the growing popularity and potential of the women's game. Many women's teams and leagues struggle to access adequate facilities, equipment, coaching, and support. This also affects the quality and quantity of women's soccer competitions, as FIFA organizes fewer tournaments and offers lower prize money for women than for men. The purpose of this knowledge mobilization is to gain a deeper understanding regarding the level of prioritization placed upon the advancements of women's football. Through a cross-continental comparison between the seven continental confederation and their strategic plans, to determine which continents priorities align with that of FIFA's Women's Strategic Plan. Similarly, a cross-national analysis of the qualifying countries for the Women's World Cup 2023 will further provide an understanding of the discrepancies between countries within the same continent. [FIFA's Women's Strategic Plan](#) has three overarching goals are that of; growing participation, enhance commercial value, and build the foundations. FIFA's five main objectives of their Strategic Plan are; develop and grow, showcase, communicate and commercialize, govern and lead, educate and empower. As each countries may view strategic plans in various different ways it is important to understand how the top governing body formats their strategic objectives. Methodologies for obtaining all the relevant information began sifting through each continental federation to hopefully find a publicly available women's strategic plan. Other sources provided knowledge of a known strategic plan that would not be available to the public. It is also meaningful to add that specific language differs between countries however, prioritizes should ideally align with that of FIFA's.



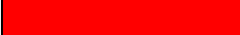

Legends

Categorical criteria have been identified and defined within the following legends below. Each criteria focuses on the outlined objectives within FIFA's Women's' Strategic Plan. Language differences throughout the strategic plans vary, to compensate, more general terms are noted as the category titles. A descriptive legend outlines the attainable criteria within each relative continent and country. Colours depict the level of prioritization of women's football within each respective category.

Categorical Legend

Criteria	Description
Grow Participation	Providing/developing participation through accessible means through grassroots programs, physical education, and amateur recreation. The growth of participation is essential to the development of women's football making accessible programs an integral priority.
Build Foundations	Refers to the pathway development between grassroots and elite with key focus on providing adequate resources towards these cohorts. Creating and maintaining infrastructure to support promising athletes is crucial to the long-term excellent of women's football.
Commercial Value	Commercial value leverages exposure for women's football. Developing a wider audience is the driving force for many of the other criteria in order to develop proper policies, advocate for resources, level the playing field. Communication through digital platforms, equitable air-time for elite players and exposure enhances the values generated through women's football both in the short-term and long-term.
Govern and Lead	Representation in decision-making roles is influential to the development of women's football as a whole, creating an equal work environment enabling an female voices to be heard. This also includes changing policies and governing structures in order to create a level playing field for women on and off the pitch.
Transparency	Organizations ability to be transparent within their strategies objectives towards equal play for women in football. Having strategic plans/initiatives publicly available unity within the region pertaining to the prioritization of women in sport.
Independent Women's Strategic Plan	Having a strategic plan specifically dedicated to the development of women's football.
Implementation Plan	Construction of implementation plan is pivotal to the change that is required to be made within the short-term and long-term.

Descriptive Legend

Colour	Description
	Strategic objectives aligns with FIFA's priorities. Have the acquired information publicly available.
	Partially address strategic objectives. Does not fulfil the full criteria, however, it is briefly conveyed with no elaboration.
	Required criteria has not been conveyed, failing to confide with FIFA's priorities.
	Unknown information, refers to the organization not fulfilling the criteria. Includes the possibility that the required information has not been presented publicly.



CONCACAF	The Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football
CONMEBOL	South American Football Confederation (Spanish: Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol)
OFC	Oceania Football Confederation
UEFA	the Union of European Football Associations
AFC	Asian Football Confederation
CAF	Confederation of African Football

Cross-national Analysis

Out of the thirty-two teams competing in the 2023 Women's World Cup, it is extremely surprising that only two teams attained all the criteria. This only proves that the quality of women's football is not being prioritized globally. Thirteen of the countries did not even have a women's strategic plan or the information was not publicly available. This draws concerns based on the transparency from countries and the lack of accountability from FIFA. The continental confederations possess a great deal of influence upon the objectives of their respective countries. As the continental governing bodies strategic discrepancies trickle downward through their various countries it becomes more evident at why many national teams have spoken out regarding the lack of support. In particular, the [Jamaican national team, Reggae Girlz](#), have expressed, despite meetings with the Jamaican Football Federation (JFF), there is a sever issues relating to 'sub-par planning, transportation, accommodations, training conditions, compensation, communication, nutrition, and accessibility to proper resources' with only weeks out from the Women's World Cup. One would assume that support would be granted surrounding the biggest international competition, this is far from reality. The Reggae Girlz are just one from the majority of countries who have spoken out about the lack of support and unequal treatment. Others include; [Brazil, China, Italy, Australia, England, United States, Nigeria](#) and considerably more. CONCACAF's relative countries do not play as large of a role within international competition. This is reflected within their limited transparency through the lack of strategic plans from four of their six countries. Throughout CONMEBOL, there is limited prioritization surrounding the growth of participation. As these regions popularize football, growth of participation may be less prevalent. However, growth of female participation and developmental pathways should be emphasized as these areas have struggled to create supportive environments for women to play football. The OFC only has one qualifying country whom is automatically representing the federation due to New Zealand being one of the hosts of the tournament. Regardless, this should be a major concern for the OFC as they failed to support women within their region to obtain successful performance. A deeper analysis is needed in order to better understand the intricacies that enable more countries to qualify. The UEFA has the most countries that qualified globally, nonetheless, the largest inconsistency within their strategic plans is integrating more women within their governance and in decision making roles. This speaks volumes towards the deep rooted culture of football within Europe and their traditionally male dominated field. In order to attain a

more equal future on and off the pitch, women need to have the opportunity to become a part of the governance system in order to have a voice around the decision making process. The affiliated countries within the UEFA also struggled to have independent strategic plans surrounding the enhancement of women's football. Without the presents of a strategic plan it becomes more evident at where each countries prioritizes reside. Throughout the AFC there are many issues that need to be address as zero of their five countries aligned with the criteria, one of them, Australia, being the host. None of the countries have an independent strategic plan and reciprocating implementation plans. As the AFC does not highlight education and empowerment for women, neither do their corresponding nations. These issues can be seen throughout their women's football culture as little growth is able to be made at the grassroots level due to the little progress made at the elite and professional level. The insufficient transparency ricochets throughout the CAF as none of the countries have independent strategic plans, having three of the four not having publicly available objectives. This is extremely concerning as seemingly little action is being taken to support women's football. The three most inconsistent criteria was that of, opportunity for women to govern and lead, independent women's strategic plan, and the action of an implementation plan. These are significant criteria because they are necessary to develop a more equal sport globally. FIFA's power and influence is extensive, they set the standard for what is right and wrong, in spite of that there is little to no public accountability from FIFA to actively align football globally. There are no consequences for not having a strategic plan, developmental pathways, implementation plans habiting the growth of women's football from the top down. Holding the power of being the largest sport governing body comes with the responsibility of aligning all the continental confederations to actively deal with the structural imbalance of football and level the playing field for equal play.



Table 2: CONCACAF vs Relative Countries Strategic Plans/Objectives

Women's Strategic Plans (Key Objectives)	Grow Participation*	Build Foundations* (player development)	Commercial Value*	Govern and Lead*	Educate and Empower*	Transparency (publicly available strategic plan)	Independent Strategic Plan for Women	Implementation Plan
FIFA*	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
CONCACAF	Green	Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red
Canada	Green	Green	Red	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Red
United States	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow
Costa Rica	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
Jamaica	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
Haiti	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
Panama	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey

Available Strategic Plans: [CONCACAF](#), [Canada](#)

Table 3: CONMEBOL vs Relative Countries Strategic Plans/Objectives

Women's Strategic Plans (Key Objectives)	Grow Participation*	Build Foundations* (player development)	Commercial Value*	Govern and Lead*	Educate and Empower*	Transparency (publicly available)	Independent Strategic Plan for Women	Implementation Plan
FIFA*	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
CONMEBOL	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Red	Red
Brazil	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
Argentina	Red	Green	Red	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Yellow
Colombia	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey

Available Strategic Plans: [CONMEBOL](#), [Argentina](#)

Table 4: OFC vs Relative Countries Strategic Plans/Objectives

Women's Strategic Plans (Key Objectives)	Grow Participation*	Build Foundations*	Commercial Value*	Govern and Lead*	Educate and Empower*	Transparency (publicly available strategic plan)	Independent Strategic Plan for Women	Implementation Plan
FIFA*								
OFC								
New Zealand (host)								

Available Strategic Plans: [OFC](#), [New Zealand](#)

Table 5: UEFA vs Relative Countries Strategic Plans/Objectives

Women's Strategic Plans (Key Objectives)	Grow Participation*	Build Foundations*	Commercial Value*	Govern and Lead*	Educate and Empower* (social impact)	Transparency (publicly available strategic plan)	Independent Strategic Plan for Women	Implementation Plan
FIFA*								
UEFA								
Norway								
Switzerland								
Spain								
England								
Denmark								
Netherlands								
France								
Sweden								
Italy								
Germany								
Republic of Ireland								
Portugal								

Available Strategic Plans: [UEFA](#), [Norway](#), [England](#), [Denmark](#), [Netherlands](#), [France](#), [Italy](#), [Germany](#), [Republic of Ireland](#), [Portugal](#)

Table 6: AFC vs Relative Countries Strategic Plans/Objectives

Women's Strategic Plans (Key Objectives)	Grow Participation*	Build Foundations*	Commercial Value*	Govern and Lead*	Educate and Empower*	Transparency (publicly available strategic plan)	Independent Strategic Plan for Women	Implementation Plan
FIFA*	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
AFC	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Red
Australia (host)	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red	Green
Philippines	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
Japan	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red	Green
China	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red
Vietnam	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red

Available Strategic Plans: [AFC](#), [Australia](#), [Japan](#), [Vietnam](#)

Table 7: CAF vs Relative Countries Strategic Plans/Objectives

Women's Strategic Plans (Key Objectives)	Grow Participation*	Build Foundations*	Commercial Value*	Govern and Lead*	Educate and Empower*	Transparency (publicly available strategic plan)	Independent Strategic Plan for Women	Implementation Plan
FIFA*	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
CAF	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
South Africa	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red
Zambia	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
Nigeria	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
Morocco	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey

Available Strategic Plans: [CAF](#), [South Africa](#)

Future Research

Future research to take into consideration is that of the strategic plans pertaining to the countries that did not qualify for the 2023 Women's World Cup, to compare and contrast in order to determine if the criteria of FIFA should alter to be more inclusive globally. Is there a greater meaning to how/why these countries did not qualify for the Women's World Cup. Other areas that should be researched is the active accountability from FIFA, what are the consequences put into place if an specific region does not have a strategic plan for instance? What is the role of the continental federations in terms of accountability? How can the continental federations play a more relevant role within the development of women's football? FIFA's power spans globally, as such more needs to be done bringing countries that traditionally might forbid women from partaking in sport to change the narrative and provide initiatives in these locations. Throughout professional women's football there is a massive difference in the treatment of athletes compared to their male counterparts, how might the continental confederations play a role in assisting the transition towards equally play and equal treatment. Professionalization is a rarity in many countries, what might the role of FIFA do to assist with developing professional leagues in countries with a higher status?

Final Remarks

Throughout history women's football has not had the chance and the opportunity to develop, as a traditionally male dominated field has resisted this change. Leveling the playing field does not just happen within football clubs, change is made through women having the same opportunities to be decision makers in governance. Change is made by providing adequate resource on and off the field for developing athletes. Change is made through giving women a place within the commercial realm, providing adequate coverage of international games on major streaming outlets to be watched globally. Change is made through action. FIFA, the continental confederations and every respective nation has a role in changing the narrative. Given the resources and opportunities, leveling the playing field is possible through implementation and action.