

For the good of the game? Governance on the outskirts of international football

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In those small football associations at the bottom of Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) rankings, participation in the finals of a major tournament is usually accepted as impossible. These associations often have a handful of players at best with any experience of playing professionally, and the imperative is on grassroots development. This is the key challenge with governance at small national associations, which are often charged with developing the game in areas no larger than a small town in most larger countries. With such a small pool of players, the national teams are usually unsuccessful and go largely ignored, yet their executives, as inexperienced off-the-pitch in international football as their players are on it, can rise to the well-remunerated upper echelons of FIFA whilst at times completely oblivious to the standards of governance needed at the national level.

When Tahiti qualified for the 2013 Confederations Cup in Brazil by winning the 2012 Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) Nations Cup,² the outgunned team was predictably sneered at by parts of the mainstream media, many of which previously had cause to mention the French overseas collective and football in the same article only in the context of corruption.³ This illustrates the dichotomy at the heart of media coverage of football in smaller nations and territories. It is all too easy for the lack of international media exposure to work to the disadvantage of those attempting to improve the quality of the governance in the minor associations on the periphery of international football.

Although FIFA has 209 members, media priorities usually generated by consumer demand dictate that coverage focuses on those countries and teams with the most support.⁴ As Roger Pielke Jr has

identified in another article, through the desire for autonomous development, national sports bodies often have ‘less well developed mechanisms of governance than many governments, businesses and civil society organisations’.⁵

FIFA and the non-interference rule

Local journalists attempting to uncover issues of poor governance and corruption can face vilification or isolation in small countries, where the size of the population is more akin to that of a minor city in a larger country. Attempts to draw the attention of local politicians to concerns about the governance of national football can be stifled by conflicts of interest and FIFA’s insistence on independence from political interference for national football associations. Such violations of independence led to five per cent of the member associations being suspended between 2005 and 2010.⁶ This insistence can discourage positive intervention on occasions when politicians witness genuine poor governance or suspect corruption.⁷ In places where everyone knows everyone else, sporting autonomy can supersede the rule of national law, and instances of poor governance or corruption can go unchecked for years.

Take, for example, French Caledonia, where Jacques Zimako was elected as vice president of the Fédération Calédonienne de Football (FCF) in July 2011, only to fall out for reasons unclear with president Edward Bowen, who then suspended Zimako.⁸ A civic tribunal ruled that the suspension was illegal, but this ruling was ignored.⁹ FIFA then appointed Bowen to its Disciplinary Committee at the 2013 annual congress, even though the FCF president had failed to disclose that he was facing criminal charges in Nouméa, the French Caledonian capital, for violence against local civil servants.¹⁰ Bowen was subsequently convicted, but the OFC president, David Chung, wrote to Bowen offering his support to the disgraced FCF president, who was jailed in December 2013.¹¹ According to the FCF’s statutes, Zimako should have taken over as president at this point, but he continues to be ignored, and Bowen was only belatedly removed from his FIFA position last year

after Zimako supporters had written directly to Michael Garcia, when he was still on FIFA's Ethics Committee.¹²

The leap from small football associations to lucrative international positions

Bowen is hardly the first local football official to have established a domestic position of power through intimidation and then win promotion to a well-paid executive-level position at a regional or international body.¹³ Moreover, making the transition can be difficult; and the sudden leap in income can also have a detrimental impact on the behaviour and expectations of newly enriched sporting officials. Whereas in richer economies, notably in western Europe, there is less of a discrepancy between the pay for national football association members and that of other high-level civic or business positions,¹⁴ the gulf between average national salaries and those of regional or international football associations can be enormous, particularly when officials secure a paid position at FIFA, where the average annual salary is £128,000 (some US\$194,000).¹⁵

In 2010 the then Guyana Football Federation (GFF) president, Colin Klass, insisted on flying first-class to the United Kingdom to watch his national team, at a cost of US\$10,576.¹⁶ Ultimately, Klass decided against making this trip for unknown reasons, but the incident illustrates the types of demands made by former domestic officials from poorer economies when they obtain the elite, five-star lifestyle of the international football executive. Ignoring or becoming enmeshed in poor governance is often the next step. If FIFA intervenes, this often happens only after a long period of poor governance that must surely have been known at some level in the world body but went ignored. FIFA later suspended Klass for 26 months from all football activities, in September 2011,¹⁷ but elections to vote in a new president were not held until April 2013¹⁸. His replacement, Christopher Mathias, proved so unpopular that some elements of Guyanese football wanted Klass back and there was no intervention taken by FIFA until Mathias had excluded virtually all overseas players from the national team and he had libelled a football agent on live television.¹⁹

Poor governance and the failure of FIFA to press for change

Only after numerous instances of poor governance had been exposed on a wider level in the international media did FIFA belatedly take action and appoint a normalisation committee to run the game in Guyana.²⁰ This is the last resort for FIFA, and all too often such action is taken only when domestic governance has completely broken down – to the detriment of all levels of the game. The disappearance of nearly US\$1 million worth of FIFA funds from a GOAL development project²¹ in Antigua and Barbuda was repeatedly exposed at the local level for a decade, with journalist Ian ‘Magic’ Hughes even losing his job over the issue in 2005.²² It was not until March 2014 that FIFA finally suspended the annual US\$250,000 Financial Assistance Programme (FAP) payment; it also imposed a fine of Swiss Fr. 30,000 (some US\$31,500) on the Antigua and Barbuda Football Association, after it had been accused on a wider international level of trying to mortgage the site for the GOAL project even though it had been purchased using FIFA funds.²³

Too often officials are allowed to disregard basic standards of governance and accountability because of the freedom they are given through a combination of ennui among the international media, local conflicts of interest and the inability of politicians – in times of real need – to intervene. In the British Overseas Territory of Anguilla, Raymond Guishard, the president of the national association, the Anguilla Football Association (AFA), was suspended by FIFA from all football activity for 45 days for his part in the 2011 Port of Spain bribery scandal that also led to the banning of Colin Klass.²⁴ Guishard did not explain this suspension to the AFA, in part due to the inopportune timing of his suspension during an ongoing dispute between the AFA and three disenfranchised clubs over both youth development and overseas players.²⁵ In February 2012, the disenfranchised clubs had not had access to information to the 2011 or even 2010 AFA financial accounts.²⁶ Damien Hughes, from Antigua, was the acting general secretary of the Caribbean Football Union (CFU) at the time, during which the CFU took no action.²⁷ Between 2000 and 2010

the AFA received US\$3.5 million from FIFA in FAP and GOAL funds, yet managed to play just 17 internationals.²⁸ Only in 2015 did Anguilla finally play its first ever full international match on the island, even though in 2010 FIFA president Sepp Blatter had inaugurated a US\$653,976 football centre, which was funded mainly by a US \$400,000 GOAL grant and another US \$200,00 grant from the world body's financial assistance programme (FAP).²⁹

Implications of poor governance and challenges for grassroots football development

Further down the FIFA rankings, there is often a disconnect between international and grassroots football. Some FIFA members only play senior male internationals in World Cup qualifying, which can mean there is a four-year gap between matches.³⁰ If children do not have a national team to which they aspire, they can easily give up on the game entirely. A lack of opportunities after primary school was another main concern of the disenfranchised AFA clubs.³¹ Anguilla is among the world's least active national teams, but the most inert in the first decade of the new millennium was that of São Tomé e Príncipe, which played just seven matches.³² After losing to Libya in 2003, its Federação Santomense de Futebol (FSF) subsequently cancelled four national club championships and merged another.³³ São Tomé e Príncipe disappeared from the FIFA rankings, and only after FSF president Manuel Dende had left in 2010, after 12 years in charge, did the country's football association then stage another international.³⁴ In the decade prior to Dende's departure, the FSF received US\$3.9 million from FIFA and the end result was no development from club through to international football.³⁵ With senior national teams not playing and clubs in turn complaining about a lack of youth development from the national association, this suggests an obvious lack of priorities and therefore poor governance despite the large financial incentives from FIFA.

The lack of senior international participation is not always due to poor governance and for some of the more remote national associations, particularly in areas such as Oceania, the cost of playing internationals can be prohibitive. Sara Barema the chief executive officer of Football Federation Samoa (FFS), described senior international matches as a ‘waste of resources in terms of air fares and preparation costs’.³⁶ The FFS is now focused on grassroots development and junior participation, but this only came after the FFS was suspended by FIFA in 2008 for playing too few internationals to meet FIFA requirements and running up huge debts, and a normalisation committee was sent to run the game there.³⁷

In some smaller, poorer countries, FAP funds can be a significant tool in both helping compensate for lack of government investment in grassroots sport and also for generating much-needed employment opportunities, which then empower both the association and the president – but not always for the good of the game. Local calls for accountability following alleged misuses of funds or poor governance are hard to sustain without government backing, as FIFA prohibits such government involvement, but the example of Belize shows this can be achieved. In April 2011, the central American country’s sports minister John Salvidar asked Bertie Chimilio, the President of the Football Federation of Belize, to answer questions about ‘numerous irregularities, misconduct and improprieties’ and the country’s clubs threatened to form their own association if no answers were forthcoming.³⁸ The result of this standoff was that the FFB agreed to rewrite its statutes and hold open elections, which resulted in Chimilio departing office in 2013.³⁹ The FFB was left broke and no action was taken against Chimilio but a positive change to improve governance was achieved not because of but in spite of FIFA.⁴⁰

Conclusions

FIFA has frequently been found wanting when trying to police governance at smaller associations.

FIFA insists that ‘members which do not participate in at least two of all FIFA competitions over a period of four consecutive years shall be suspended from voting at the Congress until they have fulfilled their obligations in this respect’,⁴¹ but there is no financial penalty for inaction or lack of development. The only conditions for stopping development money are if ‘funds may not have been used in accordance with the approved application in every respect’,⁴²

Much of Blatter’s support has traditionally come from associations that are grateful for this financial support from FIFA, however, and often they are equally indebted to the international media for its lack of interest in their governance. A solution has been offered by FIFA presidential candidate Jérôme Champagne, whose manifesto included proposals for a Division of National Associations to daily monitor all member associations and to provide support and improve governance.⁴³

Even if Champagne’s admirable initiative is not enacted, another, simpler, solution could be found. The Financial Assistance Programme began in 1999, and FIFA distributes US\$250,000 a year to all member associations, sometimes more in World Cup years.⁴⁴ In return, FIFA should demand that all 209 members be paid only when detailed annual financial accounts and the results of executive votes and personnel changes are made available to the public via its website. While FIFA does publish financial accounts, the results of votes and personnel changes could be expanded upon as an example for the world body’s members. This would provide valuable information that could be used by clubs, politicians and the media – or a coalition of all three - to monitor governance and would, surely, be for the Good of the Game everywhere.

Notes

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² This was the result of a grass-roots development programme started back in 2010 by the same coach, Eddy Etaeta. Before winning the OFC Nations Cup, Tahiti had reached the finals of the 2009 U20 World Cup and the final of the 2011 OFC U17 Championship. *World Soccer* (UK), 'Brazil Awaits', November 2012.

³ After Tahiti's showing in the Confederations Cup, BBC football commentator Robbie Savage said that "poor" teams like Tahiti "devalue tournaments". In 2010 Tahitian FIFA executive committee member Raymond Temarii was suspended for his involvement in the votes-for-sale' scandal: Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 'Statement of the Chairman of the Adjudicatory Chamber of the FIFA Ethics Committee', 13 November 2014, www.fifa.com/mm/document/affederation/footballgovernance/02/47/41/75/statementchairmanadjcheckert_neutral.pdf.

⁴ Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 'Associations', www.fifa.com/associations/index.html.

⁵ See Roger Pielke Jr, 'Obstacles to Accountability in International Sports Governance', in this volume, www.transparency.org/files/content/feature/1.2_ObstaclesToAccountability_Pielke_GCRSport.pdf.

⁶ *When Saturday Comes* (UK), 'Carrot on a Stick'. February 2010.

⁷ For further reading on the arguments for and against the autonomy of national football associations, see Jean Louis Chappelet, 'Autonomy and Governance: Necessary Bedfellows in the Fight against Corruption in Sport', in this volume,

www.transparency.org/files/content/feature/1.1_AutonomyAndGovernance_Chappelet_GCRSport.pdf.

⁸ *World Soccer* (UK), 'FIFA Steps In at Troubled Federation', November 2014.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ A copy of Chung's letter is in the author's possession.

¹² *Letter from* Le COLLECTIF pour la Défense des Intérêts et du Développement Technique du Football, 15 April 2013, in the author's possession.

¹³ *Letter from* Le COLLECTIF pour la Défense des Intérêts et du Développement Technique du Football, 12 June 2014, to FIFA president Sepp Blatter in the author's possession. In this letter, the Collective claim to 'not go a week without aggression.'

¹⁴ The average Union of European Football Associations salary is £97,000 (US\$147,000): *The Guardian* (UK), 'Said and done', 11 April 2015, www.theguardian.com/football/2015/apr/11/said-and-done-sepp-blatter-issa-hayatou.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Sporting Intelligence (US), 'FIFA paid \$88.6m in salaries in 2014. We can guesstimate Blatter's take at \$6m+', 20 March 2015, www.sportingintelligence.com/2015/03/20/fifa-paid-88-6m-in-salaries-in-2014-we-can-guesstimate-blatters-take-at-11m-200301.

¹⁶ Details of the travel reservation are available to the author.

¹⁷ In September 2011 Klass was banned by FIFA from all football activity for 26 months: Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 'Ethics Committee bans Guyana FA president Colin Klass for 26 months', 23 September 2011, www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/organisation/news/newsid=1515457.

¹⁸ News Source (Guyana) 'Klass resurfaces after FIFA ban' 1 January 2014,

<http://newssourcegy.com/sports/klass-resurfaces-after-fifa-ban/>

¹⁹ *World Soccer* (UK), 'In Guyana, Overseas Players Are Not Wanted', October 2014.

²⁰ *Guyana Chronicle* (Guyana), 'FIFA names GFF normalisation committee', 28 October 2014.

²¹ The GOAL project is an initiative by FIFA to assist countries around the world to construct their own football facilities for the development and continued progress of football activities. In Antigua, FIFA granted applications for three GOAL projects on the same site for a total of US\$1.3 million but only a minor amount of work has been undertaken to build walls around the site. An estimated US\$1 million remains missing/unspent. PlaytheGame.org (Denmark), 'Something rotten in the football state of Antigua', 9 November 2005. Also, see <http://www.fifa.com/development/facts-and-figures/association=atg/index.html>, <http://www.playthegame.org/upload/magazine%202005/realtransparency.pdf>, and <http://s38.podbean.com/pb/d5d17957163fe884828f01e13df2dc29/5566dc4f/data2/blogs25/324465/uploads/Foul.pdf>

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *World Soccer* (UK), 'Where Did the Money Go?', April 2014.

²⁴ *Reuters* (UK), 'Soccer-FIFA bans six more Caribbean officials' 18 November 2011, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/11/18/soccer-fifa-bans-idUKL3E7MI2K120111118>.

²⁵ Letter from Roaring Lions, Strikers and KICKS United to the author, 15 March 2012.

²⁶ *World Soccer* (UK), 'Caribbean Union Hit by Fresh Controversy', May 2012.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *The Blizzard* (UK) 'What's a Vote Worth? How FIFA's Attempt to Devolve Power Could Be a Bribers' Charter', December 2011.

²⁹ *World Soccer* (May 2012), with details on Anguilla's FIFA grants available here:

<http://www.fifa.com/development/facts-and-figures/association=aia/index.html>

³⁰ Bahamas and Tonga did not play a senior international between the 2014 and 2018 World Cup qualifiers, while PNG dropped off the FIFA rankings altogether after not playing a match between July 2007 and August 2011.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *The Blizzard* (December 2011).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Author interview with Sara Barema, 13 May 2013.

³⁷ *When Saturday Comes* (UK), Issue 276 February 2010.

³⁸ Irish Times (Ireland), 'Northern Ireland is the most successful country ever in World Cup finals', 12 June 2014, <http://www.irishtimes.com/sport/soccer/northern-ireland-is-the-most-successful-country-ever-in-world-cup-finals-1.1828661>.

³⁹ Irish Times (Ireland), 'Northern Ireland is the most successful country ever in World Cup finals', 12 June 2014, <http://www.irishtimes.com/sport/soccer/northern-ireland-is-the-most-successful-country-ever-in-world-cup-finals-1.1828661>.

⁴⁰ News 5 (Belize), 'No witch hunt for former F.F.B. President, Dr. Bertie Chimilio', 27 March 2012, <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/68549>.

⁴¹ Fédération Internationale de Football Association, *FIFA Statutes: Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes: Standing Orders of the Congress* (Zurich: FIFA, 2008), article 14.4, p. 12.

⁴² Fédération Internationale de Football Association, *General regulations for FIFA Development Programmes* (Zurich: FIFA, 2013) http://www.fifa.com/mm/document/footballdevelopment/generic/02/22/32/94/12_11_2013_generalregulationsforfifadevelopmentprogrammes_neutral.pdf

⁴³ Jérôme Champagne, 'My Agenda for the Twenty First Century FIFA', letter no. 6, annex 1, 20 October 2014, www.jeromechampagne2015.com/documents/document_fusionne_en.pdf.

⁴⁴ Fédération Internationale de Football Association, *Regulations: FIFA Financial Assistance Programme (FAP)* (Zurich: FIFA, 2013),

www.fifa.com/mm/document/footballdevelopment/fap/50/16/69/12_11_2013_fapregulations_neutral.pdf, and

and *FIFA Circular no. 1463*, [http://resources.fifa.com/mm/document/affederation/administration/02/49/61/02/circularno.1463-fifafinancialassistanceprogramme2015%28fap%29andbonusrelatingtothe2011-](http://resources.fifa.com/mm/document/affederation/administration/02/49/61/02/circularno.1463-fifafinancialassistanceprogramme2015%28fap%29andbonusrelatingtothe2011-2014financialresultsregulationsandadministrativeguidelinesfor2015_neutral.pdf)

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