

Effectiveness of CFK Africa Girl's Empowerment Program in Enhancing Women's Economic Status in Kibera, Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

Background: In many parts of Africa, including Kenya, girls and women face significant barriers to participating in sports and accessing the benefits that come with it. Girls and women experience many challenges, including traditional gender norms that discriminate against them, poverty, and lack of financial resources, which limits their access to educational, social, and economic opportunities. Furthermore, girls and women living in urban slums and marginalized communities face increased risks of harassment, assault, and other safety issues. These barriers limit the ability of girls and women in Africa to access the transformative power of sports, which can build confidence, leadership skills, and unlock educational and economic opportunities. Addressing these challenges is crucial for promoting gender equality and empowering the next generation of African women.

Methods: In this regard, CFK Africa has implemented a holistic girls' empowerment program through soccer in the informal settlement of Kibera for over 20 years. The girls' empowerment soccer program enrolls young girls aged 10-30 years to participate in soccer games and receive life skills training. This study evaluated the impact of soccer on the well-being, social and economic development of program participants. A qualitative approach was used in the study, which involved focus group discussions and key informant interviews to collect stories on their experiences and assess changes. The specific objectives of the study were as follows: (a) to assess whether soccer initiatives are effective in promoting holistic girls' empowerment, particularly in the areas of social, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), individual agency, and capacity building, and (b) to examine the role of sports in providing socio-economic

opportunities to young women, the enhancement of leadership skills, and their contribution to economic empowerment.

Results: The evaluation found that the girls' empowerment through soccer fostered confidence, teamwork, and community engagement among the girls. Through participation in soccer programs specifically designed for girls, girls develop physical skills as well as valuable life lessons that enhance their personal growth, SRH, and economic empowerment. Twenty of the girls from the program have been incorporated into the Kenya National Premier League and are now earning around Kshs. 8,000 per month (including some who previously earned nothing at all).

Conclusion: The paper concludes that soccer initiatives play a crucial role in education and economic empowerment while challenging traditional gender norms and inspiring positive social change for girls in Kibera, offering them a platform to build resilience, leadership qualities, and women's economic empowerment. The paper recommends continued support and investment in soccer programs for the girls as these promote SRH, and enhance the social inclusion, well-being, and economic empowerment of young women in informal settlements like Kibera.

Keywords: Girls' empowerment, soccer, informal settlements, economic empowerment, adolescents

1.0 Introduction

Girls' empowerment through sports, particularly soccer, has emerged as a powerful tool for fostering social change and development in various parts of the world. In Africa, and specifically in Kenya, soccer programs designed for young girls are playing a pivotal role in challenging gender norms, enhancing self-esteem, and providing opportunities for education and economic advancement (Brady, 2005). These programs are especially impactful in informal settlements, where socio-economic challenges and limited resources often restrict the potential and aspirations of young girls.

Informal settlements, such as Kibera in Nairobi, are characterized by high levels of poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to educational and recreational facilities (Corburn & Karanja, 2016). It is estimated that 60% of Kenyans live in informal settlements (UN-HABITAT, 2023). Within these communities, girls face additional vulnerabilities, including gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, inequitable access to education, and lack of access to sexual reproductive health services, with poverty being the root cause of many issues. Female athletes from informal settlements face additional vulnerabilities, including a lack of access to proper training facilities and equipment, inadequate nutrition, social stigmatization, and limited financial resources for themselves and their families (Winter et al., 2023). The empowerment of girls and young women through soccer provides an innovative and accessible approach to address these challenges by creating safe spaces for girls to learn, grow, and develop important life skills (Kabeer, 2015).

CFK Africa is a leading NGO headquartered in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya, fighting extreme poverty in informal settlements through complementary youth leadership and public health initiatives. Since establishing Kibera's first all-girls soccer league in 2002, CFK Africa has pioneered soccer initiatives to promote community cooperation and development, connect girls to health services, build valuable life skills for girls to become active leaders in their communities, and increase economic opportunity. CFK Africa's soccer initiatives include Kenya-wide community football tournaments for youth aged 11-17 as well as a national football club, Kibera Soccer Women Football Club (FC), composed of talented athletes who use their platform to act as social change champions and advocate for girls' empowerment. This holistic approach ensures that girls are prepared for future economic opportunities and has grown through intentional partnerships with other local community-based organizations, including the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy (KGSA). Grown from a collaboration with the KGSA, the Kibera Soccer Women FC is showcasing the talent and resilience of informal

settlement youth to the world and were promoted into the Kenya Premier League in 2023—the only informal settlement team currently in the league. The team competed in the Football Kenya Federation Women’s Cup Final in July 2024.

This paper explores the effectiveness of CFK Africa’s efforts to enhance women’s economic status in Kibera through soccer. It is argued that the Kibera women’s soccer project is a valuable model of development that can be replicated in informal settlements globally. Through focus group discussions with participants in CFK Africa’s soccer programs and key informant interviews, this paper uses the power of individual stories to shed light on the critical role of soccer in promoting the economic empowerment of young women. The paper concludes that soccer initiatives play a crucial role in education and economic empowerment while challenging traditional gender norms and inspiring positive social change for girls in Kibera, offering them a platform to build resilience, leadership qualities, and economic empowerment.

2.0 Literature Review

Girls' empowerment programs play a crucial role in addressing gender disparities and promoting socio-economic development in communities globally. These programs are designed to provide girls with skills, knowledge, and resources to overcome the challenges posed by patriarchal societies and economic hardships. Girlhood and adolescence are marked by significant growth, remarkable development, and rapid changes, filled with vulnerabilities and risks, as well as a period of incredible opportunity and potential. Evidence and data show that girls and adolescent women fare worse than boys on a range of outcomes including education, health, income opportunities, and experiencing violence (Presler-Marshall et al., 2022; Ramaiya et al., 2023). Key events that happen in adolescence like early marriage, motherhood, and sexual and gender-based violence are inherently gendered and can change the life course of a girl (Stark et al., 2021). Empowerment programs often include educational initiatives, vocational training, life skills development, and health education, all of which contribute to the overall well-being and economic advancement of girls and women, combatting the vulnerabilities they face (Gould et al., 2007).

Research consistently shows that empowering girls leads to significant economic benefits. For example, one study by Duflo (2011) found that increased education and vocational training for girls resulted in higher income levels, improved employment opportunities, and greater financial independence. Additionally, women who participate in empowerment programs are more likely to start their own businesses and contribute to local economies, further promoting

economic development and poverty reduction. Numerous case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa highlight the effectiveness of girls' empowerment programs in increasing economic benefits. For example, in Uganda, microfinance programs targeting women have been successful in enhancing financial independence and business success (Bruton et al., 2013). Similarly, vocational training initiatives in Nigeria have significantly increased employment rates among women (Blattman & Annan, 2016). These examples underscore the positive impact of targeted empowerment programs on women's economic status.

Sports not only promote physical health but also instill essential life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and resilience (Brady, 2005). Specifically in Kenya, girls' empowerment programs that include a sports component have shown promising results in improving the economic status of women. Initiatives such as Moving the Goalposts and Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) integrate sports with education and life skills training, leading to increased self-esteem, better educational outcomes, and improved economic prospects for young women (Forde & Kendall-Taylor, 2007).

Kibera, one of the largest informal settlements in Africa, presents a unique context for girls' empowerment programs. The informal settlement is characterized by high levels of poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to education and healthcare, making it a challenging environment for girls (Hansen & Larson, 2007). Despite these challenges, CFK Africa has made significant strides in empowering girls through soccer and complementary health and leadership programs. Soccer serves as an entry point to informal settlement communities throughout Kenya, builds trust among youth, and encourages girls to thrive both on and off the field. When combined with educational support and vocational training, these programs provide girls with a strong foundation for economic independence and success. Informal settlements are dynamic and rapidly changing environments. Given the complexities and the transient nature of people living in these communities, it can be difficult to obtain reliable data on the lived experiences of girls and women in informal settlements. This paper contributes to the broader body of research on the economic empowerment of young women through sport within the informal settlement context.

2.1 Thematic Areas and Theoretical Orientation

CFK Africa utilizes a participatory development methodology in all programming. Participatory development is rooted in postcolonial, emancipatory social science. Through this methodology, CFK Africa aims to shift the power of knowledge production to centralized

vulnerable and marginalized voices (Keahey, 2021). Since its founding in 2001, CFK Africa has prioritized locally-led leadership at all levels of the organizational structure. CFK Africa's approach to participatory community development is rooted in the conviction that sustainable impact and solutions to poverty are only possible when the communities most affected by it are the real change-makers. As such, all CFK Africa programs incorporate the ideas and lived experiences of the communities most intimately experiencing the issues CFK Africa aims to solve.

Additionally, CFK Africa operates under a theory of change model. According to the United Nations Development Group, a theory of change model can assist organizations in systematically thinking through the root causes of development challenges, provides a framework for learning within and between programming cycles, as a means for developing and managing partnerships, and is a basis for more effective and unified communication through clear communication of the organization's mission and vision. CFK Africa's theory of change model is an ongoing process of reflection to explore how change happens in the context and communities the organization operates within. The seven guiding principles CFK Africa implements in all aspects of their work and programming include being locally led, always learning, always adapting, engaging in powerful partnerships, being system sensitive, thoroughly transparent, and no duplication.

In regard to CFK Africa's girls' empowerment programs, the organization engages in an intersectionality theoretical framework, acknowledging the relationship between the social and political identities of girls and young women living in informal settlements, and the challenges faced at the convergence of multiple marginalized identities. The communities that CFK Africa serves are affected by issues of gender, politics, socio-economic status, and perceived societal discrimination including widespread discrimination against informal settlement communities. Residents of informal settlements are often stigmatized and stereotyped as uneducated, unclean, and prone to crime, leading to social exclusion and marginalization. CFK Africa's comprehensive sports for development program elevates the perception of and opportunities for people from informal settlement communities, who are denied opportunities and thus often work in low-paying, insecure jobs perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

3.0 Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of CFK Africa's soccer initiatives in enhancing the economic status of participating young women. The

qualitative approach enabled a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and the impact of the program on the girls. The primary data collection methods included focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). The study featured girls and young women who are current participants in CFK Africa's soccer initiatives, including women on the Kibera Soccer Women FC team who play on a national level. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the program. A total of 23 participants who were willing to participate in the study were selected, divided equally between two FGDs with one group composed of 12 young women and the other of 11 young women to ensure manageability and active participation. The younger age cohort of ages 10-19 provided insights that were crucial in understanding the immediate impacts of the program on education, life skills, and economic aspirations. The older participants, aged between 20-30, had been part of CFK Africa's soccer program for a longer period. Their experiences provided valuable information on the long-term impacts of the program on economic status, employment, and financial independence. The discussions were moderated by experienced facilitators who used a semi-structured guide (See Appendix I) to ensure consistency while allowing for flexibility in exploring emerging topics.

The FGDs focused on the following themes: motivation to join a soccer program, effectiveness of soccer initiatives in promoting the empowerment of young women and girls, the role of soccer in sexual and reproductive health, behavioural change and empowerment through soccer, experiences and impact of playing soccer on the participants, and the impact of the program on their economic opportunity. The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and respect of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

In addition to the FDGs, KIIs were conducted for the study with three key informants, including coaches and players on the Kibera Soccer Women FC. These key informants were selected due to their long-standing connections to CFK Africa's soccer programs. The interviews aimed to gather insights into challenges experienced by young women in informal settlements, the impact of playing soccer on their economic empowerment, and recommendations for enhancing the program's effectiveness. The data collected from FGDs and KIIs were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved coding the data to identify key themes and patterns related to the research objectives. By using FGDs and KIIs, this qualitative methodology provided data on the effectiveness of using soccer on

women’s economic empowerment, capturing the nuanced experiences and impacts on girls and young women in Kibera.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Demographic information

4.1.1 Age

The FDGs were heterogenous in nature, comprising of participants of different age groups, education levels and the number of children. Overall, their ages ranged from 15 – 30 and the average age of participants was 22 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Age distribution of the participants of Focus Group Discussion

Age	n	%
10 - 20	2	9.0
21 - 30	19	81.1
31 - 40	2	9.0
Total	23	100.0

Data source: Field data, CFK Africa (2014)

4.1.2 Level of education

Approximately 73.9% of the women soccer players had completed secondary education, 17.4% had university degrees while 8.7% had not completed secondary education as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Education level of FGD participants

Level of education	n	%
Some secondary	2	8.7
Secondary completed	17	73.9
University	4	17.4
Total	23	100.0

Data source: Field data, CFK Africa (2024)

4.1.3 Number of Children

87% of the women soccer players had no children, 8.7% of the women had 2 one child, and 4.3% of the women had two children (Figure 3). During the FDGs, the majority of women

reported that the mentorship they received and increased confidence through the soccer program deterred them from becoming pregnant.

Figure 3: Number of Children of FGD participants

Number of Children	n	%
No children	20	87
One child	2	8.7
Two children	1	4.3
Total	23	100.0

Data source: Field data, CFK Africa (2024)

4.2 Motivations for Joining Soccer

The motivations for playing soccer varied among the participants. Some were drawn to the dynamics within the team itself, the allure of competitive soccer, the influence of a coach or mentor, the resourcefulness of youth playing soccer with handmade footballs, or in one instance, a deeply personal motivation rooted in a family member’s athletic legacy. One girl reported, “*my grandmother was an athlete and I admired her a lot, she gave me motivation to push my interest in soccer.*” According to Cope et al, (2013), the thrill of competition and the prospect of achieving excellence can significantly inspire young athletes. These findings suggest that a nurturing and inclusive environment motivates girls to engage in sports thereby accessing opportunities that promote personal growth.

4.3 Behavioural Change and Empowerment through Soccer

The findings reveal that soccer programs foster confidence, teamwork, and community engagement among participating girls and young women. Through participation in sports, girls and young women develop valuable life skills that enhance their personal growth, sexual and reproductive health, and economic empowerment. The women in the FGDs expressed that they have acquired critical life skills such as self-care, leadership, time-keeping, courage, mentorship, emotional regulation, informed decision-making, teamwork, and effective communication through soccer. The participants shared that they have learned to “*avoid arguments,*” “*everything has to be done with passion,*” and to “*take every situation as it comes.*” One player emphasized the importance of problem solving through soccer, “*When a problem is identified the team members come together to solve the problems. They don’t wait for the coach to solve their problems.*” Furthermore, the team actively engages in community initiatives, such as clean-up events which foster a commitment to giving back to their

community. The players said, *“We have made it a habit of engaging in community cleaning and this is also being practiced at home as charity begins at home.”* Growing up in the same community allows the girls to view each other as sisters, promoting deep camaraderie and trust, which are crucial for effective teamwork.

Players also talked about feeling like a family, having a sense of belonging, staying united, and encouraging team members to be there for one another in times of illness or injury. One FGD participant shared that the players on her team were *“brought up in the community and therefore view each other as siblings.”* Another noted the feeling of safety that the team environment provides, *“Kibera has become home. I come from a violent family, and it provides an escape space for me.”* This strong bond enhances their ability to work together and support each other, creating a cohesive team dynamic. The players also reported feeling more confident as a result of their engagement in soccer. One noted that before joining the team, she could not address a crowd because of shyness, but after going through the program, she can now face a crowd with confidence. Another plainly stated, *“My confidence has improved since I joined the team.”* Drills have encouraged the players to speak out on issues that they care about, to believe in themselves, and increase self-esteem through positive performance in matches and at tournaments.

The girls have also learned how to handle team conflicts and issues effectively, showcasing their ability to work through challenges and maintain a positive team dynamic. According to Weiss et al. (2016), sports participation enhances communication skills by providing a structured environment where young athletes must communicate strategies, provide feedback, and motivate teammates. One of the fundamental aspects of the Kibera Soccer Women FC is the emphasis on safety and awareness. Discussions with coaches about safety have made the players more conscious of their surroundings and the importance of being cautious, particularly late at night: *“Our coaches talk to us about our safety and that it is paramount. I am now conscious about my safety.”* Participants reported a notable decrease in late-night activities, a behaviour change attributed to the safety education provided by the coaches.

4.4 The Role of Soccer in Sexual and Reproductive Health

In addition to increasing their understanding of life skills, CFK Africa provides comprehensive mentorship and training on important health issues, including menstrual hygiene, self-care, and combatting sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Research by Holt (2020) suggests that peer mentoring in sports can positively influence younger participants by providing relatable

role models who demonstrate desirable behaviors and attitudes. Access to CFK Africa's menstrual hygiene lab empowers the players with the knowledge and resources to manage their menstrual health effectively, thereby improving their overall well-being and confidence. The players are now educating young girls in the community as well as distributing sanitary towels and other menstrual hygiene products. Comprehensive training on sexual and reproductive health provided by CFK Africa has empowered players with essential knowledge to make informed decisions about their health. Topics include menstrual hygiene, contraception, and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). *"I now know my rights concerning sexual reproductive health issues,"* shared one player. *"Having learnt quite a lot through participating in soccer, we openly talk about family planning and other forms of protection including abstinence,"* shared another.

Further training on SGBV, including understanding its forms and reporting channels, is a vital component of the program and helps create a safer and more supportive environment for the girls. Through the training sessions, the girls have gained a profound awareness of their rights and the various situations they might encounter. This enhanced understanding enables them to make contextually appropriate decisions. *"I know what is right and wrong and that I have a right in my own health,"* said one player. *"I have more confidence in making my own decisions,"* said another. Other players who gave birth at an early age have to provide advice to other team members on sexual and reproductive health including how to avoid early pregnancies.

4.5 The Role of Soccer on Overall Girls' Empowerment

Playing on the Kibera Soccer Women FC not only nurtures the athletic talents of the players but also provides them with essential life and professional skills that contribute to their empowerment. The girls shared that participation in soccer activities has significantly refined their communication and interpersonal skills. The ability to convey ideas effectively and the courage to express oneself within team dynamics are critical skills developed through soccer. Soccer has also significantly enhanced the participants' time management skills. Participants reported that they have developed self-supervision skills, taking responsibility for their actions and decisions both on and off the field. Their problem-solving skills have also improved, enabling them to identify and resolve challenges independently without always relying on their coaches for guidance.

Participants have also learned to serve as role models for younger girls, inspiring and motivating them to follow in their footsteps. This mentorship role is crucial for the younger

girls' development and contributes to a supportive community. *"Through leadership skills I have become a role model to others,"* one participant shared. *"The girls at the community level look up to us as role models, even the parents urge them to emulate footballers because of their commitment to football, timekeeping and the fact that they have no time to engage in destructive activities at the community level,"* said another. This is also evidenced in the quote, *"I came from humble beginnings to be a role model in the villages in Kibera informal settlement. I am admired and parents urge their daughters to be like me."* Some participants have taken on specific roles, such as team captains, while others have generally exhibited leadership qualities. *"Being a captain at the soccer team has helped me better on leadership skills and I can use both at home and at the field,"* explained one of the captains.

4.6 Experiences and Impact of Playing Soccer on the Participants

Soccer has opened significant educational opportunities for the players, enabling them to pursue secondary education and beyond. Education is key to economic empowerment opportunities. Receiving scholarships for secondary education due to their involvement in soccer was a common theme that emerged among the participants of the FGDs. *"My school principal offered me a scholarship for my secondary education thanks to football."* In another example, one player who had previously dropped out of school was re-enrolled with the support of the soccer program. Another shared, *"My mum was a single parent, and encouraged me to use my soccer talent to go to school. I got opportunities in big schools but declined and opted for a smaller school instead. I then completed form 4 and got an opportunity to play for the national team."* The ability to secure scholarships underscores the importance of sports as not only a tool for educational advancement but also for economic empowerment after the players retire from football.

Participation in soccer has afforded the Kibera Soccer Women FC players the opportunity to travel and gain exposure, broadening their horizons and offering new experiences. Some players have travelled to countries like Spain and Tanzania to play soccer, representing Kenya in various tournaments. Another player even had the opportunity to train other footballers in Tanzania. This exposure is crucial for personal development, as it allows the girls to experience different cultures and broaden their worldviews. *"I have gained more skills through interactions abroad,"* shared one player.

4.7 Economic Opportunity

The participants shared how playing on the Kibera Soccer Women FC has improved their socio-economic status and financial situation. One of the most tangible benefits of playing on the team and the renewed partnership with CFK Africa is the provision of a monthly stipend, which significantly enhances the financial stability of its participants. According to (Eime et al., 2013), financial empowerment through sports programs can significantly enhance participants' self-esteem and life satisfaction. The team members receive a monthly stipend of about 8,000 Kenyan shillings, including allowances for transportation. In comparison to their previous reliance on occasional meals and applause for rewards, which were not sustainable or motivating, this regular income is a considerable improvement. Previously, as one player stated, she *“was playing in other soccer teams and the reward was a meal, clap and this was quite discouraging.”*

For some, the stipend amount has been transformational and has had cascading effects for the economic status of their families. One player reported that she was able to build her grandmother a house because the previous one was leaking. She was paid Kshs. 35,000 to join a team, which she then used for the construction and *“put a smile on [the] grandmother’s face.”* Another participant shared that together with her sister, they can pay for her brother’s school fees. They are the breadwinners of the family as their father passed away and their mother has been affected with grief and unable to work. *“I get to support my family members when I go home,”* said another. One player demonstrated her innovation to be able to buy a motorbike with funds earned from her soccer-playing, which she rents out to others and earns Kshs. 300 daily from its use. Several FGD participants mentioned being able to now pay for their own rent, which can be a major challenge to ensure safe and reliable housing in informal settlement communities.

Economic empowerment has also increased health outcomes for the girls and their families. One player shared that she is now *“saving jointly with her mother for emergencies because her mother is a single mother and soon, she will need a piece of land to build a home.”* Another shared that she is using her earnings to pay for her sickly mother’s medical treatment. Other girls shared that they can now buy food, resulting in a more balanced diet for themselves and their families, which is increasingly necessary given the amount of physical activity that the athletes engage in on a regular basis. These discussions overwhelmingly demonstrate that financial independence empowers the girls to make decisions about their lives and futures, fostering self-reliance and responsibility. The ability to earn and manage their own money

enables the girls to support themselves financially, pursue further education, and plan for their futures.

These key findings are exemplified in two stories of impact gathered from the KIIs, included below.

Box 1: Zainab Hamisi: A Journey of Resilience and Empowerment

Zainab Hamisi, a 29-year-old woman brought up in the heart of Kibera by a single parent, has an inspiring story of resilience and empowerment through soccer. Her journey began during childhood when she started playing football with boys in her neighbourhood, using a makeshift ball crafted from polythene papers. Her passion for the game was influenced by her father who was a footballer in Uganda. This early exposure to soccer ignited a lifelong love for the sport.

Growing up near Kibera Primary School, Zainab would often head to the playground after school. Along with other girls, she would stay there to play football once she had completed her household chores and homework. This camaraderie and routine of playing football laid the foundation for her involvement in the sport. By the age of 14, Zainab began participating in local tournaments, often playing barefoot yet determined to play.

Zainab's life took a significant turn when her coach helped develop a secondary school named Kibera Girls Soccer Academy (KGSA). This new school, which offered both academic education and football training, became a pivotal opportunity for Zainab. In 2008, she joined Form 1 at KGSA and continued her football practice at Toi Primary after school. The combination of academic and athletic training provided her with a well-rounded education and further honed her football skills. Throughout her school years, Zainab earned small amounts of money from tournaments, which she used to purchase books. This financial independence, albeit modest, was crucial for her education. She also learned valuable life lessons, such as accepting defeats gracefully, which helped build her resilience.

After finishing school in 2012, Zainab pursued computer classes while continuing her football training in the evenings. This period marked the beginning of her participation in premier leagues, where her team achieved a top 7 position. Despite their success, the team struggled to advance further due to a lack of funds. They participated in several leagues, including one in Nakuru with Super Asasi, where they scored 1 against 3.

In 2011, Zainab started playing street soccer, a seven-a-side format. With the assistance and motivation from a key community coach, she and four other players were selected for training at Huruma Secondary. Their coach supported them by covering transportation costs from Kibera to Huruma. The team faced numerous challenges, including obtaining passports and visas, but their coaches' fundraising efforts made it possible for them to travel. One significant hurdle for Zainab was obtaining her passport, as she was raised by a single mother and her father was absent. Without her father's identification, she struggled to get her own ID. However, her coach stepped in as a guardian, helping her navigate the bureaucratic challenges. Eventually, Zainab and her team travelled to France to represent their country. Despite the cultural and climatic challenges they faced, the experience had a long-lasting impression on her.

The team, consisting of 16 players, coaches, and the team president, competed against 64 countries. They won matches against Brazil and Mexico, and brought home a trophy. Despite their success, the team did not receive the promised financial rewards, other than small contributions from friends in the Netherlands. In addition, no official welcome was provided at the airport upon their return to Kenya.

Zainab's journey reflects the significant impact of the KGSA, its partnership with CFK Africa, and soccer in her life. From playing with a makeshift ball to competing internationally, her story is a testament to the power of sports in empowering girls in challenging environments.

Box 2: Rose Achieng: Overcoming Adversity Through Soccer

Rose Achieng, a resilient mother of two and resident of Kibera, has a story marked by both hardship and triumph. Raised by both parents alongside her six siblings, her life took a difficult turn when her father passed away, plunging her mother into depression. Her mother's struggle with alcoholism led Rose to drop out of school at the tender age of ten, as education lost its priority in their household.

Rose's life began to change when CFK Africa took an interest in developing her talent alongside other local girls. They recruited them into a soccer team, providing jerseys and other prizes after winning tournaments. This introduction to organized sports opened new avenues for Rose, offering her a sense of purpose and community. Rose re-enrolled in school

at New Direction in Kianda, joining class 6, while continuing to play soccer in tournaments and training after classes. Her prowess on the field made her a sought-after player, and after completing her Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) exams, many secondary schools competed to enroll her. She chose to continue her education at Kibera Girls Soccer Academy (KGSA), balancing her studies and her passion for soccer.

Unfortunately, Rose's educational journey was interrupted when she conceived during her second year of high school. She was forced to drop out after the third term to care for her baby, but she started working as a hairdresser and continued to play soccer. Her dedication to the sport continued, and she was selected to represent Kenya in France for a special match after various training sessions at Huruma.

Despite facing challenges in obtaining her passport and nearly being dropped from the team at the last minute, Rose managed to secure her place on the trip to France. Her team triumphed, defeating the Netherlands and bringing home a trophy. The achievement was a significant milestone in Rose's life.

Rose's soccer career continued to flourish. She was enrolled by Chapa Dimba Sakata and emerged as the top scorer and midfielder, earning Kshs. 5,000. She was also called to play for the Harambee Stars National Team for under-20 but was unable to participate. In 2011, she moved in with her baby's father and conceived her second child. However, their relationship deteriorated, and in 2016, she moved out to live with her sister, despite facing threats from her former partner.

Individuals who face significant adversity can still achieve success through resilience and adaptability. Rose Achieng's story demonstrates that with determination and the right support, it is possible to overcome personal and societal challenges, pursue one's passions, and attain personal and professional milestones.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

CFK Africa's soccer initiatives have had a positive effect on the socio-economic status and financial situation of its participants. By elevating their community status, facilitating educational advancement, offering exposure to new people and places through travel, and fostering financial independence by providing consistent stipends, the program has enriched the lives of young women and positioned them for future success. Participants noted that the

soccer team has become like a family to them, that it offers them community and the opportunity to build a "*brighter future.*" The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the lived experience of girls in informal settlements, underlining the multifaceted benefits of sports participation for socioeconomic development.

The paper recommends continued support and investment in soccer programs for girls as these promote sexual and reproductive health, enhance social inclusion, well-being, and economic empowerment of young women in informal settlements like Kibera. The participants of the focus group discussions and key informant interviews shared their own recommendations to provide more opportunities for girls including to hold more trainings and expand current training opportunities for others to join in. There is also a continued need for equipment like cleats, training kits, track suits, uniforms, training fees including gym access and membership costs, stipends for the players, travel to games, and signing new players to increase the team roster.

With the accessible and relatively low barrier to entry to implement soccer programs in communities experiencing extreme poverty, this paper strongly recommends continued funding support by foundations, non-governmental organizations, corporate sponsors, and other stakeholders to meaningfully improve the lives of young women and enhance their economic opportunities. As CFK Africa's sports for development program continues to evolve, it holds great potential to further empower young girls and contribute to their holistic development.

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Appendix I

FGD Questionnaire for Current Players

A. Introduction and Background

1. What motivated you to join Kibera Girls' Soccer?
2. Can you share your overall experience with Kibera Girls' Soccer?

B. Effectiveness of Soccer Initiatives in Promoting Girls' Empowerment

3. How do you think participating in soccer has impacted on your confidence and self-esteem?
4. In what ways has soccer helped you develop teamwork skills and community engagement?
5. (a) What changes have you observed in how you perceive your agency since joining the team?
5. (b) If yes, can you describe them?

C. Role of Soccer in Social, Sexual, and Reproductive Health (SRH)

6. How has soccer contributed to your understanding and awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues?
7. Can you share any experiences where soccer has facilitated discussions or actions related to SRH within your community?
8. Do you feel more empowered to make informed decisions about your sexual and reproductive health due to your involvement in sports activities?

D. Capacity Building and Leadership Skills

9. What specific skills or qualities have you developed through your participation in soccer?

10. Can you provide examples of how participating in soccer activities has enhanced your leadership skills, both on and off the field?

11. Have you experienced any opportunities for personal or professional growth as a result of your involvement in sporting activities?

E. Socio-Economic Opportunities

12. (a) How has participating in soccer influenced your social status or financial situation?

Probe: How was the situation before joining Kibera Soccer or other sporting teams/activities?

12. (b) To what extent has participating in soccer through CFK impacted your economic status? Probe on income before joining CFK women's soccer and income after joining the team e.g approximate incomes per month

13. (a) Please describe an event/ situation that you are proud of as a soccer player. Probe for success stories; what makes these memorable e.g money earned/medal etc

13. (b) What are the main challenges related to earning income through soccer that you have faced?

14. (a) In your view, what should CFK do to ensure the women in the soccer programs earn high incomes?

14. (b) What in your view should be done to ensure sustainable economic empowerment for women and girls involved in soccer in Kibera?

F. Overall Impact and Recommendations

15. What do you consider to be the most significant benefits of the CFK Africa Girl's Empowerment Program?

16. Based on your experience, what recommendations would you make to improve or expand the impact of soccer on girls in Kibera?

17. Is there any other information you would like to add?

KII Questionnaire

Background and Program Overview

1. Can you provide an overview of Kibera Girls' Soccer?

2. What motivated CFK Africa to implement a soccer-based empowerment program for girls in Kibera?

3. How has girls' soccer evolved over the last 24 years?

Objectives and Outcomes

4. From your perspective, what are the main objectives of the soccer initiatives in promoting girls' empowerment?
5. In your experience, what are the key outcomes or impacts of the program on the participating girls?
6. Can you share any specific success stories or notable achievements resulting from girls' soccer?

Role of Soccer in Empowerment

7. How do you perceive the role of soccer in fostering confidence, teamwork, and community engagement among the girls?
8. From your observations, how does participation in soccer contribute to the development of life skills and individual agency among the girls?
9. In what ways does soccer serve as a platform for challenging traditional gender norms and promoting positive social change?

Socio-Economic Opportunities

10. What socio-economic opportunities are provided to the girls through their involvement in soccer?
11. In your view, has participation in soccer led to improved economic status or livelihoods for the women and girls in Kibera? Anyone whose story demonstrates such success? Probe for details
12. How sustainable are these socio-economic opportunities in the long term?

Challenges and Recommendations

13. What are the main challenges faced in implementing and sustaining the soccer empowerment program?
14. From your perspective, what are the key factors contributing to the success of the initiative?
15. Based on your experience, what recommendations would you make to enhance the effectiveness and impact of the program?

Future Directions and Sustainability

16. How do you envision the future of the Kibera Girls' Soccer Program and its impact on the girls in Kibera?
17. What measures are in place to ensure the sustainability of the program in the face of potential challenges or changes?