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From Field to Policy: African Football as a Lever for South–South Cooperation

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Abstract

Football is increasingly asserting itself as a genuine strategic actor within the sphere of international relations. This reality is all the more evident in the African context. Far beyond its recreational dimension, the sport has evolved into a powerful vehicle for visibility, communication, influence, and diplomatic engagement in the service of development, progress, and universal human values.

This paper examines how the game of football is now embedded within the multisectoral dynamics of South-South cooperation, where it serves as an unconventional tool of development diplomacy.

The initial observation is clear: many African countries, with Morocco as a prominent example, are leveraging sport, and particularly the king of team sports, to promote their leadership, strengthen bilateral and multilateral ties, project a modern and positive image, and support strategic, cross-sectoral projects in areas such as infrastructure, training, and youth development.

The central question addressed is the following: **to what extent can football be regarded as a strategic vehicle for South-South cooperation and development diplomacy in Africa?** Through a cross-analysis of public sports policies, diplomatic initiatives, and inter-state partnerships centered on football, this paper aims to show how this popular sport is becoming a tool for convergence, solidarity, and international projection for African countries.

This study adopts an approach that integrates multiple perspectives and offers a renewed reading of the relationships between sport, regional cooperation, economic and societal development, and African leadership in the era of soft power.

Keywords: Football, Cooperation, South-South, Diplomacy, Development, Africa, Morocco



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Introduction

Football is the most popular sport in the world, whether measured by the number of participants (amateur and professional), supporters and followers, media interest, economic value, and influence, as well as by its unique capacity to transcend geopolitical, social, linguistic, cultural, and other divides.

According to the World Atlas website, the game has more than 3.5 billion fans worldwide. A FIFA¹ report published in 2023 indicates that professional football includes approximately 128,694 players across 3,968 clubs, operating in 135 countries. The economic value of the football industry is estimated at €38 billion for the 2023–2024 period, according to the international consulting firm Deloitte. The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar was watched by 5 billion fans across all platforms, including television and digital channels such as social media and online video-sharing platforms.

The popularity of football is rooted in its universal accessibility and the strong emotional power it generates as a collective game. *“Beyond the simple movement of the ball and the goals scored, it has established itself as a true passion.”*² More than an athletic contest for entertainment, it embodies an *“instrument of cultural influence and diplomatic rapprochement.”*³

¹ FIFA: The Fédération Internationale de Football Association is the international governing body for football, futsal, and beach soccer. Founded on May 21, 1904, in Paris, this association of national federations is tasked with managing and developing football worldwide. Source: Wikipedia.

² El-Guennouni, G., et al. (2025). Towards a better understanding of management control practices in Moroccan professional football clubs. *Staps*, Publication anticipée.

³ Benbouhou, R. (2024). Football, diplomacy, and cultural influence: The illusions of the Spain-France match (March 15, 1942). *20 & 21. Revue d'histoire*, 161(1).



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“Football was born global.”⁴ In Africa, the sport was introduced in the 20th century⁵ by European colonizers. It quickly became the most popular sport on the continent and played a significant role during the decolonization period. It contributed to the “*construction of multiple collective identities*”⁶ and to the strengthening of nationalist sentiment. Thus, beyond its “*popular and universal*”⁷ character and its socio-cultural impact, football has emerged as a space where strategies of influence, diplomacy, economics, and inter-State cooperation intersect. In Africa, it goes beyond the strictly sporting sphere to become a genuine instrument mobilized by countries to strengthen bilateral and regional relations, promote leadership and national image, and support development projects and dynamics.

It is from this perspective that the following question arises: **to what extent can football be considered a strategic vector of South–South cooperation and development diplomacy in Africa?**

Through a cross-cutting analysis of sports public policies, diplomatic initiatives, and inter-State partnerships centered on football, this paper aims to demonstrate how this popular sport becomes an instrument of convergence, solidarity, and international projection for African countries. This work is based on an approach that integrates multiple and complementary perspectives. It offers a renewed reading of the

⁴ Rebelo, A. (2014). Football, globalization, and national identity. *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 94(2).

⁵ Source : Wikipedia.

⁶ Nicolas, Claire. « Chapitre I. Sports, colonisation et modernité ». Une si longue course, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2024.

⁷ Gay, F. (2022). Football, popular and universal. *L'Humanité*, Hors-série(2).



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relationships between sport, regional cooperation, economic and social development, and African leadership in the era of soft power⁸.

This paper is structured in two parts. The first part analyzes African football as a lever for influence and diplomacy, highlighting its role as a vector of soft power as well as its impact on multisectoral development. The second part focuses on the dynamics and strategies of South–South cooperation through football. It examines selected public policies and diplomatic initiatives and sheds light on the role of football in social and community cohesion and in African solidarity.

Part I – African Football as a Lever for Influence and Diplomacy

1. Football as a Vector of Influence and Soft Power

*"High-level sport plays a crucial role in the contemporary staging of nation-states."*⁹ Football is *"much more than a sport."*¹⁰ It carries multiple stakes and has a highly strategic scope, extending far beyond the pitch into political, diplomatic, economic, and social spheres.

This team sport plays an important role in shaping national and regional image. *"It crosses borders and mobilizes populations, particularly youth."*¹¹ Due to its popularity and the emotions it evokes among the

⁸ Soft power is a concept used in international relations, developed by American professor Joseph Nye in 1990. The concept describes the ability of a political actor—whether a state, multinational corporation, NGO, international institution, or even a network of citizens—to indirectly influence the behavior of another actor or shape their perception of their own interests through non-coercive means (structural, cultural, or ideological).

⁹ Poli, R., et al. (2006). African football between inertia and extraversion. *Politique africaine*, 102(2).

¹⁰ Dietschy, P. (2010b). The World Cup: A political and economic stake for states? *Géoéconomie*, 54(3).

¹¹ Verschuuren, P. (2013). The multiple faces of "sport power." *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 89(1).



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international community, football serves as a vector for promoting countries and nations, whether in terms of leadership, sporting success, or support for various causes. It is a means of showcasing different cultures and highlighting ethical and human values through sport. It has become a universal language for people. "A match can, therefore, serve as a valuable lesson for youth on the virtues *of mutual support*."¹²

Certain FIFA initiatives illustrate this purpose, such as the "FIFA Football for Schools (F4S)" program, which aims to raise awareness against racism and to promote diversity and inclusion through education, supporting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Another example is the "She Believes" initiative, which leverages women's football to encourage the empowerment of girls and combat gender stereotypes. *She Believes* is an annual women's football tournament, established in 2016 by the United States Soccer Federation. "It brings together four of the top-ranked national teams in the world."¹³

The art of the global game is also a school of discipline, rigor, perseverance, and endurance. The arena of challenges is a theater of performance, achievement, and self-surpassing, where the virtuosity of playing as a team in harmony resembles a symphony masterfully orchestrated on the field of magic and glory.

"The term 'sports diplomacy' refers to the use of symbolic sporting competitions to foster *rapprochement between two countries*."¹⁴ After World War II (1939–1945), relations between England and Germany remained tense. The 1966 World Cup and subsequent football exchanges helped channel rivalries into sport, promoting dialogue, fair play, and cultural reconciliation between the two nations.

¹² Comte-Sponville, A. (2021). *From solidarity to politics*. In *Que le meilleur gagne!* Robert Laffont.

¹³ Source : Wikipédia https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coupe_SheBelieves

¹⁴ *Op. Cit.*



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Many historical examples illustrate the use of the “king of games” to promote peace. The initiative by former Ballon d’Or winner and former President of Liberia, George Weah, to organize a Peace Match in 2005 in Monrovia helped foster reconciliation after years of civil war.

The “Football for Peace (FFP)” initiative, launched in 2013 by former British international footballer of Pakistani origin Kashif Siddiqi and Chilean FIFA legend Elias Figueroa during an event at the United Nations in New York, under the leadership of Dr. Djibril Diallo and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, aims to use football as a diplomatic tool to promote peace, conflict prevention, social cohesion, and intercultural dialogue on a global scale.

On 7 May 2024, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed World Football Day, designating 25 May as its annual observance. This choice was deliberate, commemorating the centenary of the first Olympic football tournament in history, held in Paris in 1924. The same date, 25 May, also coincides with the 1928 decision to create the FIFA World Cup. This day provides an ideal opportunity to organize awareness campaigns and initiatives, drawing the attention of the international community to noble causes and thereby strengthening collective commitment to achieving global and sustainable goals.

Morocco’s historic and unprecedented journey in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar served to strengthen the country’s image under the visionary and enlightened leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI. It was an opportunity to showcase the progress and modernization achieved by the country. Moroccan soft power was thus demonstrated through sports diplomacy, respect for fundamental family values (such as the presence of players’ mothers during competitions), national cohesion, and the



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promotion of Morocco as an influential and modern actor on the African and global stage. The global game of football is a *“tool for Morocco’s geopolitical emergence.”*¹⁵

Beyond the perspective of ideals, the success of the game has also seen *“the blossoming of multiple attempts by states to instrumentalize sport.”*¹⁶ In some African countries, football has been used by regimes or governments to divert public attention from political, economic, or social crises, leveraging *“the national sentiments that football could inspire”*¹⁷ during moments of victory and honor.

2. Football as a Driver of Development and Multisectoral Projects

*“The role of sport in international relations was highlighted by Joseph Nye in his concept of soft power.”*¹⁸ Football is a *“means of development in Africa.”*¹⁹ It is a sport closely linked to economic development. *“Football is a big business,”* as described by William McGregor, a Scottish draper of the Victorian era and the first president of the English football club Aston Villa.

*“Contemporary professional football is a globalized economic activity that generates ever-increasing financial flows.”*²⁰ Nations’ interest in football translates into investments in infrastructure such as stadiums,

¹⁵ Jeune Afrique. (2023, October 21). *Le foot, outil d’émergence géopolitique du Maroc*. Jeune Afrique. Retrieved September 25, 2025, from <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1495003/politique/le-foot-outil-demergence-geopolitique-du-maroc/>

¹⁶ *Op. Cit.*

¹⁷ Baller, S., et al. (2010). Football politics in Africa: Mobilizations and trajectories. *Politique africaine*, 118(2).

¹⁸ Mancoš, M., et al. (2022). Sport, a new soft power tool of the European Union. *Hermès, La Revue*, 90(2).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.168.

²⁰ Piraudeau, B. (2011). Young African players: Migrants with “high added value” in the international production system of professional footballers. *Migrations Société*, 133(1).



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roads, airports, hotels, and more. Sporting successes stimulate sports tourism and foster the growth of related industries, including catering, transportation, handicrafts, digital services, and others. This dynamic contributes to the creation of both direct and indirect employment.

Morocco's co-hosting of the 2030 World Cup represents a mark of international influence and soft power. It is also a challenge and a catalyst that accelerates the pace of national development.

"The total volume of investments directly or indirectly related to the 2030 World Cup is estimated at approximately 322.4 billion MAD."²¹ These investments cover sports infrastructure, road, rail, and airport networks (including airport modernization and expansion of the national airline fleet), the tourism sector, as well as improvements in digital connectivity, among others.

"According to projections, the event could generate an increase of 0.5 to 1% of annual GDP, representing an overall impact of 3 to 4 billion dollars. Tourism revenues are expected to reach around 120 billion dirhams by 2030, strengthening Morocco's position as a preferred destination for international visitors."²²

Co-hosting the World Cup will have additional economic and social benefits, such as the creation of tens of thousands of jobs across various sectors and the promotion of the Kingdom's rich heritage and

²¹ Medias24.com. (2025, May 28). *Coupe du monde 2030 : plus de 322 MMDH d'investissements recensés à ce jour.* medias24.com. Retrieved September 23, 2025, from <https://medias24.com/2025/05/28/coupe-du-monde-2030-plus-de-322-mmdh-dinvestissements-recenses-a-ce-jour/>

²² Lebrief.ma. (2024, December 2). *Coupe du Monde 2030 : le Maroc, au cœur d'une révolution sportive et économique.* lebrief.ma. Retrieved September 23, 2024, from <https://www.lebrief.ma/coupe-du-monde-2030-le-maroc-au-coeur-dune-revolution-sportive-et-economique-100022177/#:~:text=La%20contribution%20du%20Maroc%20%C3%A0,services%20pour%20les%20r%C3%A9sidents%20locaux>



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centuries-old cultural legacy. This event could contribute positively to Morocco's GDP, estimated at between 0.6% and 0.9%²³.

The global football industry market is estimated at 54.34 billion dollars in 2023, with a projected annual growth of 3.9%, reaching 70.29 billion dollars by 2030²⁴.

Studies conducted by FIFA and the World Trade Organization estimate the economic impact of the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup and the 2026 FIFA World Cup, jointly hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, at 47 billion dollars²⁵. Research on the 2026 World Cup indicates that "this competition could contribute to a 40.9 billion-dollar increase in global GDP, generate social benefits worth 8.28 billion dollars, and create nearly 824,000 full-time equivalent jobs worldwide."²⁶

"Football holds a central place in Africa, not only in sporting terms but also economically and socially."²⁷ It serves as a driver of regional integration. Continental and regional tournaments, such as the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), the African Nations Championship (CHAN), and interclub competitions, encourage and stimulate exchanges between African states. These tournaments provide regular opportunities for dialogue and interaction among leaders and state representatives, facilitating informal

²³ ibidem.

²⁴ Source : www.futuredatastats.com

²⁵ <https://inside.fifa.com/fr/organisation/media-releases/fifa-omc-47-milliards-dollars-retombees-economiques-coupe-monde-etats-unis>

²⁶ Etude : FIFA World Cup 2026 : Socio Economic Impact Analysis, March 2025, publié sur www.digitalhub.fifa.com

²⁷ Akindes, G., et al. (2024). VI / Socio-economic stakes and football broadcasting in Africa. *L'économie africaine 2024*. La Découverte.



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bilateral or multilateral discussions, thereby strengthening diplomatic ties and promoting a culture of peaceful, multidimensional cooperation.

Football competitions attract investments that stimulate the inter-state flow of sports-related goods and services, boosting both the economy and regional cooperation.

Tournaments bring people together, foster encounters between supporters, and promote shared values of fair play and team spirit, thereby strengthening mutual understanding and regional cohesion. These competitions also reinforce intra-African dialogue and South-South solidarity.

Part II – Dynamics and Strategies of South-South Cooperation through Football

1. Sports Public Policies and Diplomatic Initiatives

The implementation of structured sports public policies can only reflect a genuine political will expressed by the highest levels of the state. African countries recognize football as a key lever—now indispensable—for development and international influence.

The successful hosting of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) illustrates how Morocco leverages sports development as a strategic tool to strengthen its African and international diplomatic relations, supported by a robust and forward-looking public policy framework. Public initiatives, such as the establishment of the Mohammed VI Football Academy in 2009, the professionalization of federations, and the review of “training pathway engineering,”²⁸ illustrate a deliberate and well-thought-out state strategy.

²⁸ Desfontaine, P., et al. (2022). Video analysts in French high-level football: An innovative neo-profession in search of legitimacy. *Movement & Sport Sciences - Science & Motricité*, 117(3).



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“The academy operates on a ‘sports-study’ model similar to European training centers,”²⁹ making it a true reference point at the African level. “It is a ‘sports complex oriented towards excellence,’” writes the Argentine daily *Clarín*³⁰. This premier training hub has already proven its effectiveness and productivity by shaping new generations of high-level talent. Several of its graduates have distinguished themselves on the international stage, notably reaching the semi-finals of the U20 World Cup and AFCON, thereby confirming the academy’s structuring role in the emergence of a professional, competitive, and prominent Moroccan football.

In Morocco, football governance is guided by a strategic vision aimed at enhancing both sporting performance and the social role of sport. Within this framework, the “Morocco 2030 Foundation”³¹ was established, tasked with coordinating and monitoring the implementation of various initiatives to ensure the success of major international football competitions, notably the 2030 World Cup.

Proper legal and financial oversight of the Moroccan football ecosystem is also a key consideration to ensure transparency, attractiveness, and sustainability within the sport.

African countries are implementing targeted strategies to project their influence and attract international partnerships through football. This notably involves promoting African clubs and players on the global stage. It is worth noting that “Africa remains the main exporter of talent to European leagues.”³²

²⁹ Source : https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acad%C3%A9mie_Mohammed_VI_de_football

³⁰ Source : <https://www.mapexpress.ma/actualite/sports/academie-mohammed-vi-football-complexe-tourne-vers-lexcellece-journal-argentin/>

³¹ Source : www.mapnews.ma, <https://www.mapnews.ma/fr/actualites/politique/le-conseil-de-gouvernement-adopte-le-projet-de-loi-portant-cr%C3%A9ation-de-la>

³² le360.ma. (2025, April 29). *L’Afrique, 1er exportateur de footballeurs: les schémas tactiques pour la rentabilité économique*. le360.ma. Retrieved September 23, 2025, from



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“Since the early 2000s, the presence of African footballers in European professional leagues has become massive.”³³ Egypt and Senegal, for example, use football as an international showcase, exporting their players and national talent to European leagues while strengthening regional training programs, thereby enhancing the visibility and reach of their sports diplomacy.

“Players have gradually become commodities, luxury sports products sought after by international clubs.”³⁴ Africa is a treasure trove of talent. “Each year, approximately 6,000 African minors leave the continent to join European clubs, illustrating the magnitude of the talent flow.”³⁵

“African stars shine everywhere.”³⁶ “They represented 26% of players in European first divisions in 2020.”³⁷ Despite this extraordinary asset, the continent receives only “1% of global sponsorship funds,

https://afrique.le360.ma/economie/lafrrique-1er-exportateur-de-footballeurs-les-schemas-tactiques-pour-la-rentabilite-economique_XCOU26R6LVDYHGQ7XXW7HIEZBI/

³³ Dietschy, P. (2010a). History of early African player migrations to Europe: Between assimilation, assertion, and uprooting. *Afrique contemporaine*, 233(1).

³⁴ *Op. Cit.*

³⁵ *Op. Cit.*

³⁶ Article : “Impact des joueurs africains sur le football mondial”, publié le 24 décembre 2024, consulté le 24 septembre 2025,

<https://www.africatopsports.com/2024/12/03/impact-des-joueurs-africains-sur-le-football-mondial/>

³⁷ Article : “Impact des joueurs africains sur le football mondial”, publié le 24 décembre 2024, consulté le 24 septembre 2025,

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amounting to 300 million dollars.”³⁸ This highlights the urgent need to “shift from being a supplier of talent to an architect of its own football wealth.”³⁹

It is therefore imperative to strengthen African governance so that the entire Pan-African space can secure a fairer share of the economic and financial benefits generated by the game of 22. Such a rebalancing requires, among other measures, the establishment of more transparent regulatory frameworks, better-adapted redistribution mechanisms, and reinforced South-South cooperation among national federations, continental bodies, and key stakeholders. Through this approach, football could become not only a vehicle for sporting prominence but also a crucial lever for sustainable development and inclusive, long-term regional integration.

2. Football as a Tool for Convergence, Social Cohesion, and African Solidarity

“Sport has the power to change the world,” as Nelson Mandela emphasized. Football is a discipline that conveys values and ethical messages. “It is a team sport, which entails all kinds of solidarity.”⁴⁰ It also has a “socializing effect.”⁴¹

³⁸ Article : “Impact des joueurs africains sur le football mondial”, publié le 24 décembre 2024, consulté le 24 septembre 2025,

<https://www.africatopsports.com/2024/12/03/impact-des-joueurs-africains-sur-le-football-mondial/>

³⁹ Article, “L’Afrique, 1er exportateur de footballeurs: les schémas tactiques pour la rentabilité économique” le360.ma, publié le 29 avril 2025 , consulté le 23 septembre 2025, https://afrique.le360.ma/economie/lafrique-1er-exportateur-de-footballeurs-les-schemas-tactiques-pour-la-rentabilite-economique_XCOU26R6LVDYHGO7XXW7HIEZBI/

⁴⁰ *Op. Cit.*

⁴¹ Martin, C. (2022). Developing football, moralizing female players: Gender socialization of players at the heart of sports policy. *Agora débats/jeunesses*, 90(1).



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“Football is a spectacle where the ultimate goal is victory,”⁴² making it a “powerful factor of social cohesion.”⁴³ Spectators follow it to “appreciate the technical, tactical, and athletic qualities of a high-level match.”⁴⁴ By bringing together individuals from all backgrounds and social strata around a shared passion, football creates a sense of collective belonging and fosters dialogue between communities. Beyond the pitch, football events strengthen intergenerational bonds and stimulate local, national, and regional solidarity, thereby contributing to social integration and the reinforcement of the community fabric.

During the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Africa, as well as Muslim, African, and Arab countries, identified with the Moroccan team, sharing emotions, pride, and hope. It is worth noting that the Moroccan team was the first African, Arab, and Muslim team to reach such a level in the world’s premier football competitions and championships. In this way, football transcends the sporting arena to become a vector of unity and solidarity at a supranational level, whether regional or continental.

The “king of sports” is also “the most controversial game there is.”⁴⁵ It is “a mirror of society.”⁴⁶ It “also reveals, in the stands during matches, violence, prejudices, and discrimination.” On the pitch as well as in the stands, football sometimes reflects social tensions and societal ills, while offering a unique platform to promote dialogue, inclusion, and cohesion. “For the past twenty years, the focus on developing social

⁴² Aglietta, M., et al. (2008). Stock market and football. *Revue d'économie politique*, 118(2).

⁴³ Gasparini, W., et al. (2005). Salvation through sport?: Effects and paradoxes of a local integration policy. *Déviante et Société*, 29(4).

⁴⁴ Sonntag, A. (2008). Chapter 4. Identifications. In *The identities of European football*. Presses universitaires de Grenoble.

⁴⁵ Müller, D. (2006). Football as a mirror. *Études*, 404(5).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*



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integration to prevent outbreaks of violence in urban neighborhoods has made sport a key tool in the emergency toolkit for managing vulnerable areas.”⁴⁷

“The integration of social concerns,”⁴⁸ some of which are expressed through football, is a real and present phenomenon in many countries. Sport thus becomes a vector for raising awareness of social issues, strengthening unity and the social fabric, and promoting values such as inclusion, equality, and solidarity.

At the African level, football highlights social and cultural initiatives, encourages intercommunity dialogue, and promotes moral principles and ideals such as inclusion, cooperation, and mutual respect. In this sense, it serves as a genuine tool of sports diplomacy and a driver for strengthening inter-state and regional ties, contributing to shared social and identity-based development across the continent.

As an illustration, in September 2025, FIFA launched the “Players’ Voice Panel” initiative. This initiative aims to combat racism in football. It is led by former footballer and ex-Liberian president George Weah and includes other iconic figures of the sport, such as Didier Drogba, Formiga, and Briana Scurry. The panel advises on anti-racism measures, participates in educational programs, and helps implement reforms to promote inclusivity in sport.

Another compelling example, where culture and cinema intersect with sport to highlight the challenges faced by women wishing to play football in Sudan, is the 2019 Sudanese documentary “Khartoum Offside.” The film raises public awareness of social and cultural barriers, while emphasizing the importance of sport in supporting women’s empowerment in Sudanese society. Beyond sport, this

⁴⁷ Duret, P. (2012). *Social integration through sport*. Presses Universitaires de France.

⁴⁸ Tanoh, K., et al. (2024). Social responsibility in French professional football clubs: An exploratory study. *Management & Prospective*, 41(4).



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cinematic work reinforces football's liberating role, providing women with a space for autonomy, visibility, self-expression, and confidence, while educating the public on issues of equality and inclusion in Sudanese society.

From a perspective of Pan-African solidarity and cooperation, football academies and training programs have been launched and funded by several African countries, enabling talent mobility and the exchange of technical expertise.

In 2019, the French Development Agency (AFD) and FIFA signed an agreement to implement joint projects focused on "access to sport, women's empowerment, and education through football, primarily in Africa."⁴⁹ In this context, several programs were launched, including initiatives to strengthen inclusive sports academies across the continent.

⁴⁹ <https://inside.fifa.com/fr/organisation/news/la-fifa-et-lafd-renouvellent-laccord-pour-promouvoir-laces-au-sport>



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Conclusion:

Football is a “spectacle,”⁵⁰ a “competition,”⁵¹ and also a “symbol.”⁵² Its universal popularity and multi-sectoral impact extend far beyond the green rectangle of the pitch. It stands as a strong and genuine vector of diplomacy, social cohesion, and economic development. It embodies significant geopolitical and geostrategic stakes.

“Of all sports, football is the most instrumentalized in service of economic and political objectives.”⁵³

In Africa, football has accompanied processes of identity-building and nationalism. It has been, and continues to be, a powerful means of consolidating national sentiment and promoting regional inter-state cooperation. “Sporting competitions evoke attachment, a sense of belonging, and partisanship: to a club, a national team, or the values attributed to athletes or disciplines.”⁵⁴

Public initiatives, such as the establishment of training academies or the professionalization of federations, illustrate a clear political will to leverage sport in the service of national prominence and strategic influence.

⁵⁰ *Op. Cit.*, p.618.

⁵¹ *ibidem*.

⁵² *ibidem*.

⁵³ Le Noé, O. (2002). Football, a local issue. *Pouvoirs*, 101(2).

⁵⁴ Clérima, Steven. « Le “sport national”, une construction médiatique ». *Effeillage*, 2014/1 N° 3, 2014. p.82.



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Football has now become a tool of social and cultural convergence, capable of bringing together populations, communities, and nations around noble, human, and shared values such as fair play, solidarity, and inclusion.

It also proves to be an instrument of diplomacy and soft power, fostering intercultural dialogue, South-South cooperation, and the promotion of sustainable development projects.

African successes and victories, whether sporting or institutional, demonstrate the continent's ability to use football as a lever of influence, visibility, and cohesion, while also stimulating the economy, tourism, and social innovation.

Finally, beyond its economic, social, and diplomatic dimensions, football emerges as a laboratory for empowerment and transformation. It offers unprecedented opportunities for youth, women, and the most marginalized communities and populations. In this way, it embodies a powerful platform at the intersection of sport, development, and diplomacy, reinforcing Africa's role on the global stage and reaffirming this team sport as a driver of solidarity, identity, and cooperation at both the continental and international levels.



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