

Challenges Faced by the Zimbabwe Football Association on Securing Corporate Sponsorship

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Abstract: *The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges being faced by the Zimbabwe Football Association in its quest to secure corporate sponsorship. This study adopted a qualitative methodology, utilizing the case study as the research design which guided the generation of relevant data. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used to collect data from senior and middle management personnel at the Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) and the Sports and Recreation Commission (SRC). Data was also collected from football coaches and football fans using questionnaires and some was extracted from relevant ZIFA documents. A total of 45 study respondents were purposively sampled for data collection. The study established that the Zimbabwe Football Association faced a myriad of challenges in sourcing corporate sponsorship. These included negative publicity, socio-economic challenges, ineffective marketing strategies, poorly qualified administrative personnel as well as maladministration or poor corporate governance issues. The study also established that these challenges can be overcome by inter alia engaging appropriately qualified personnel, engaging relevant ministries, improving marketing strategies and corporate governance issues.*

Keywords: Challenges, corporate sponsorship, Zimbabwe Football Association, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

In the history of sport, sponsorship is considered a critical factor in the development and growth of any sport code. Sponsorship is the provision of funds or other forms of support to an individual or organization in return for a commercial return [1]. From the above definition it can be deduced that corporate organizations on one hand and sports organizations as well as individual sport persons on the other hand can have a symbiotic (win - win) relationship through sponsorship. The win- win relation is based on the fact that sports organizations and individuals can rely on corporate organizations for financial and material support while the corporate organizations can also rely on sports organizations for economic mileage. Companies can sponsor big sports events for big money in exchange for having the brand logo on boards at the sides of the playing fields [2]. This would benefit the sponsors as a marketing strategy. In this respect, it would then become a win - win situation.

For this reason, many corporate organizations have targeted football for purposes of branding. In the developed world there has been a stampede by members of the corporate sector to invest in football. Examples include Heineken and Amstel, companies which specialize in alcoholic beverages and sponsor football in Europe. The companies have invested huge sums of money into football and have also significantly benefited from the sponsorship deals. Heineken and Amstel have since expanded their market share in Europe, Africa, the Americas and certain parts of Asia.

Apart from clubs and leagues there are also nations that enjoy significant corporate sponsorship. One good example of a nation which has vast football corporate sponsorship is Brazil. Volkswagen is recently said to have committed US 3, 5 billion to its business in Brazil to be spread over the next 15 years, targeting the Brazilian football team. Regionally, South Africa is a good example of a nation where football is adequately sponsored. For instance giant companies like South Africa Breweries (SAB) and ABSA Bank injected an

amount more than R500 million to the South African Football Association (SAFA) while Ned Bank injected R20 million as prize money for the Ned Bank tournament.

Zimbabwe, like any other country requires corporate sponsorship in order to run its football affairs successfully. In the past, sponsorship was not very difficult to secure particularly in football which is arguably the most beautiful and most popular sport in Zimbabwe. There used to be many companies that used to sponsor Football in Zimbabwe. Consequently, local football became very competitive with major tournaments such as the Chibuku Trophy, Rose bowl Cup, Castle Cup, the Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) cup and the British American Tobacco (BAT) league. At the turn of the 21st millennium and right up to 2014, there was a general decline in the standards of football in Zimbabwe. This was largely due to inadequate sponsorship coming from the corporate world. This study therefore attempts to investigate the challenges being face by the Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA) in their quest to secure meaningful corporate sponsorship.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

On many occasions ZIFA has struggled to put the national team in camp and pay players' and officials' allowances on time. A few years ago the football mother body was fined and suspended by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) after the national team failed to fulfill a continental fixture. Financial woes at ZIFA seem to have continued unabated due to lack of sponsorship. The current study therefore seeks to investigate the challenges that affect the process of securing corporate sponsorship by ZIFA and propose recommendations for improvement.

1.2 Research Questions

- What challenges are faced by ZIFA in attracting corporate sponsorship?

- How can the challenges of failing to secure corporate sponsorship by ZIFA be overcome?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The History of Corporate Sponsorship

According to [2] the origins of corporate sponsorship date back to the beginning of commercial media in the United States in the 1970s. Corporate sponsorship exploded in the 1980s through 1990s becoming an integral part of business. Most nations used corporate sponsorship to improve the state of football.

Several factors contributed to the growth of sport sponsorship in the late 1970s and have continued to support this growth in the 1990s [3]. The growth of sponsorship coincided with the ban of tobacco and alcoholic drink advertising. During that time, tobacco and alcoholic drink manufacturers were forced to look for alternative ways to promote their products other than direct advertising channels. The result compelled companies to redirect their massive advertising clout (and budgeting) to sport sponsorship, [3].

[3] Posit that the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics were the first privately organized Olympics in the history of sport and a landmark in the evolution of corporate sponsorship and promotional licensing through sport. The 1984 Olympic sponsors received significant media exposure and to some extent positive image building, whilst games generated a profit.

2.2 Importance of Sponsorship

Sponsorship has helped most of the sports codes to survive and others to flourish thereby increasing potential for more employment and recreation for the people [4]. In this regard, sport has become a major employer, employing sports persons as well as support staff. [4] Assert that, because of big sponsorship, some sport codes like basketball have transformed from being an insignificant spectator sport to an expanding billion dollar sport industry.

Sport sponsorship has contributed tremendously to the growth and success of many sporting organizations in the last 20 years [5]. Cases in point include the American Basketball League, the International Cricket Council, the English Premier League (EPL), the German Bundesliga, the Spanish league (Laliga), the Italian league (Serie A), the French league (League One) just to mention a few.

Literature show that sponsorship is essential as the staging of major sport events is enormously expensive. The reduction of the number of disciplines in the 1976 Montreal Olympics is a case in point. The Olympic Committee is reported to almost have gone bankrupt after the event.

2.3 Challenges of Corporate Sponsorship

Challenges encountered by individuals/organizations when sourcing corporate sponsorship may be due to lack of knowledge on the procedures/approach to follow. When

sourcing sponsorship it is essential to know and understand the marketing needs of the sponsor and his product [6]. This means that one has to understand the basic principles of marketing especially added value marketing thus, giving a competitive advantage. The following critical elements must add up [6]:

Image Compatibility: There is need to identify the specific profile of spectators and participants and then segments them into specific market categories. Once this is done there is need to match products or companies that fit.

Cost Efficiency: Every sponsor that is approached starts off with what is a zero based budget. This means that he has no figure in mind when he is being presented with the event. One needs to be convinced that the proposal is worth the price placed on it. Sports organizations seeking sponsorship have to do their home work and answer the following questions [6]: is it cost efficient? Can the company brand the event? How good is the administration? Who is going to run the event? Who pays for what? Is there a guarantee that media will actually cover the event? What about naming rights? And will the media call the event by its sponsor's name? Does the event have quality? Why should the sponsor pay for the event and its support instead of using direct advertising? Sponsorship, even with a lot of media exposure gives an equation with 3 A's ie AWARENESS = AWARENESS = AWARENESS. How can sponsorship of the event change the equation from $A = A = A$ to $A = A = S$ i.e. AWARENESS = AWARENESS = SALES? The above homework (considerations) is critical before sponsorship deal can be sealed [6].

2.4 Does the sponsorship opportunity translate into value for money?

Having tackled the above questions, it is critical to evaluate why an event or programme is being sponsored. Sponsorship objectives are the first step in evaluating its success [7]. Many orchestras, ballet, opera or theatre companies, museums and art galleries would not have survived in the face of declining government subsidies for arts had it not been for corporate sponsorship [8]. Sponsors believe that there are two key benefits to the company and its products [8]. First and foremost, media coverage is unbridled, the company barriers, logos are displayed at tournaments. Brands are advertised during tournaments. All this must eventually translate into value for money [8].

2.5 Overcoming challenges of securing corporate sponsorship.

2.5.1 Strategic positioning

Strategic positioning means a prospective sponsor being associated with your project can increase their sales. If one cannot, odds they probably won't become a partner [9].

2.5.2 What one needs to know?

Do sponsorship arrangements have to be exclusive?, Clarify why you need sponsorship, Understand sponsor's needs, assess your value to sponsor, identify a suitable sponsor, prepare a proposal, purpose of sponsorship, benefits to the sponsor, operation of sponsorship, write a personalized

cover letter, follow up the proposal, announce the successful sponsorship, encourage networking and provide feedback to your sponsor [9].

3. Methodology

This study was informed by the constructivist paradigm/philosophy. The paradigm within which we work determines what we look for, the way in which we construct what we observe, and how we solve emerging problems [10]. The study adopted a qualitative case study design. Qualitative Methodology refers to the research that produces descriptive data, people's own written or spoken words or observable behavior [10]. The population consisted of personnel from ZIFA, SRC, football coaches and football fans. A sample of 45 respondents was purposively sampled for focus group discussions, interviews and questionnaire distribution. Some of the relevant data was extracted from ZIFA records.

3.1 Data Collection Procedure

Having sought authority from relevant authorities the researcher scheduled time for interviews, focus groups and documentary reviews. Open-ended questionnaires were hand delivered to selected football coaches and football fans.

3.1.1 Focus group

The researcher used one focus group composed 4 males and 2 female senior and middle management from ZIFA.

3.1.2 Interviews

Senior and middle personnel at SRC were interviewed.

3.1.3 Questionnaires

Open-ended questionnaires were hand delivered by the researcher to conveniently selected football coaches and fans. The respondents were given one week to complete the questionnaire before they were collected.

3.1.4 Document reviews

Documentary reviewing was another very useful qualitative research instrument used. It provided insights in the different modes of challenges and successes on securing corporate sponsorship at ZIFA. Documents on attempts made by the ZIFA in sourcing sponsorship, documents on current sponsorship deals, documents on income and expenditure, documents on fund-raising activities and strategic marketing planning which were reviewed provided insights in the efforts, frequency and successes and failures in the process of sourcing sponsorship.

3.1.5 Triangulation

The use of multiple methods of data collection facilitated triangulation. Triangulation is a way of assuring the validity of research results through the use of a variety of research methods and approaches [10]. It is a means of overcoming the weaknesses and biases which can arise from the use of only one method of data collection [10].

3.2 Data analysis

3.2.1 Coding

Codes or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study were created and placed on a master list.

3.2.2 Enumeration

The frequency with which observations were made was noted in order to help the researcher identify and take note of important ideas and prominent themes, occurring in the research group as a whole, or between different groups.

3.2.3. Segmenting

The data was segmented by dividing it into meaningful analytic units. This was done by carefully reading the transcribed data one line at a time, taking into cognisance the following questions:

- Is there a segment of the text which is important for this study?
- Does it differ in any way from the text which precedes or
- Succeeds it?
- Where does each segment begin and end? Such segments (words, sentences or several sentences) were bracketed as a way of indicating their starting and ending points.

3.2.4 Categorization

Coded data were categorized into the following sub-themes:

- Negative publicity
- Socio economic challenges
- Ineffective marketing strategies,
- Poorly qualified staff
- Maladministration/poor corporate governance
- Lack of funding from government

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Negative publicity/bad image

Most of the respondents agreed that negative publicity contributes to the failure by ZIFA to secure corporate sponsorship. For example one informant said that the bad image was a result of negative publicity through the press or people generally commenting negatively about ZIFA. The informant lamented thus:

“Surely, how can ZIFA get Sponsorship when almost every week the various media flight the “Asia gate Scandal “or some bad comments on the Zimbabwe Football Association affairs. The Zimbabwe Football Association’s image have been spoilt by our media”

Another informant also highlighted the chaotic situations which continuously characterize ZIFA and further tainting the image of the football controlling board.

The respondents suggested renewing management team and getting rid of corrupt tendencies. Some emphasized the need for ZIFA to be professional in its activities. “It should endeavor to practice good governance so as to improve its image”. “It should be accountable and transparent in its dealings with employment and financial matters”. They said

that potential sponsors are encouraged by best practices in the management of football.

4.2 Socio Economic Challenges

Other informants made reference to the free fall of the economy. One informant said that even if ZIFA tries to do fundraising activities they do not yield much because of the general poor performance of the Zimbabwean economy. He said,

“The Zimbabwe Football Association has not been spared from the economic challenges bedeviling our country. It has been seriously affected; Companies that might be willing to sponsor are crippled and cannot spare a cent to external organizations. The current economic situation is quite disturbing”

In support of this it has been observed that in the last two decades Zimbabwe suffered severe socioeconomic and political crisis. The crisis was characterised by unprecedented rates of inflation which were exacerbated by political instability and economic sanctions [11]. Most business surveys in Zimbabwe report that most corporate organizations are operating below 40% capacity utilization. [4] cites the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) as saying “Zimbabwe’s manufacturing capacity utilization, a measure of the extent of factories’ use of their installed productive potential, is expected to fall by almost ten percentage points to around 30% in 2014” [12]. Trying to source sponsorship from Zimbabwean organisations in the current economic environment is like trying to squeeze blood out of a stone. As [6] argues “trying to get a sponsor in today’s economic environment on the basis of helping sport or on a social responsibility obligation has no chance.”

Strategies of overcoming economic challenges which emerged include the involvement of multiple funding partners so that they can contribute what they can afford in the form of joint sponsorships. In a situation where the economy is not performing many corporate will be operating below capacity and cannot afford to sponsor alone.

4.3 Ineffective Marketing Strategies

Evidence obtained from the collected data show that the Zimbabwe Football Association lacks a vibrant marketing and publicity department. The study however, established the presence of a marketing and publicity department at the Zimbabwe Football Association. However the cause of concern is probably the effectiveness of the department.

According to the informants the challenge on lack of vibrant marketing and publicity can be overcome by employing highly qualified knowledgeable and motivated marketing and publicity personnel who should market the Zimbabwe Football Association as a brand. In support of this, [6] say, “it is essential to know and understand the majority needs of the sponsor and his product”. This means that one has to understand the basic principles of marketing especially added value marketing thus, giving a competitive advantage

The general feeling among the informants was that this challenge could be alleviated by having a good marketing strategy. This should be directed at the potentials sponsors. ZIFA should sell its programmes and objectives to the corporate world so that it appreciates it. This should involve the people who have the technical know-how on marketing. [5] say that, “proper and appropriate marketing plans and strategies must be put in place.” Effective marketing strategies should be employed to ensure that the sponsor get value for their money [13].

Others emphasized the need to strike partnerships with the corporate world. This means working together in planning and implementing ideas together. The sponsors want to invest or assist where they are involved and recognized. Thus, respecting its partners and do what they will have agreed. Once that is done, sponsors will be attracted.

Other informants emphasized the idea of engaging the government especially the newly created Ministry of Sports Arts and Culture. This Ministry would assist in linking the Zimbabwe Football Association with the corporate world by issuing supporting letters.

4.4 Poorly Qualified Administrative Personnel

Data collected also point towards lack of qualified staff at ZIFA. It was generally agreed that most office bearers of the Zimbabwe Football Association were not suitably qualified for their jobs. As one informant said;

“In my own opinion , the Zimbabwe Football Association needs to employ highly qualified and knowledgeable personnel who are results oriented, for example we need people who have passion for football with previous experience as players or who have vast experience in their area of specialization”

One said that for someone to hold such a post like the ZIFA Chief Executive Officer he should have at least a Masters Degree in Sport Science or Management. He cited former players who had advanced themselves in Sports Management like Kalusha Bwala of Zambia. He is also a former captain of the National Team (Zambia) and has enough experience both as a player and manager. He said those who occupied high posts in the Zimbabwe Football Association should have football background. He said “it is not surprising that there is poor governance at the Zimbabwe Football Association because office bearers are not well qualified for the job”. “It could be that they got the positions through nepotism or bought votes during the elections”. He said because of this poor execution of duty which led to the mismanagement no sponsor may want to give ZIFA its money.

The informants suggested engaging appropriately qualified and experienced staff as a way of dealing with this challenge and changing the constitution to ensure that appropriate people are voted into the ZIFA board. The current scenario allows anyone with interest and “money” with or without sports management qualifications/experience and relevant football exposure to contest for strategic positions.

4.5 Maladministration/Poor Corporate Governance Issues

This challenge resonated from most of the individual informants and all groups surveyed. Most emphasized the issue of poor governance. One actually said:

“The Zimbabwe Football Association’s image has been dented by poor governance. On many occasions players and technical officials were not being paid their allowances and bonuses on time showing lack of good governance”

The informants also cited corruption within the organization. In their opinion, corruption was rife at the Zimbabwe Football Association because funds were not being handled well. He said that funds were being abused and not being accounted for.

Others said corrupt tendencies could be seen in a vote buying spree and even selection of the players and officials for the national team. They even said that at one time players from one big club dominated the national team which raised eyebrows. This they said was reflective of corrupt tendencies. There are allegations of kick backs taking centre stage and players having to bribe the coach or top officials to get selected into the national team. They also said that they were suspicious about the way the FIFA Goal Project funds had been implemented. The Zimbabwe Football Association was struggling to complete the ZIFA village in spite of receiving funding from FIFA. The informants said that “once the potential sponsor senses that there is corruption they do not want to give ZIFA their support because they fear that their money will be abused”. “Thus, the Zimbabwe Football Association lost out on sponsorship because of corruption”. One informant emphasized.

“The Zimbabwe Football Association is its own enemy. No sponsor would like to assist an association which is so rotten that everyone talks badly about it. There is very little positive about the Zimbabwe Football Association”

For example, the Zimbabwe Football Association Village that is yet to be completed, despite having been given money for the purpose. In another related matter, he cited the abuse of money earmarked for the FIFA Goal Project. Another informant lamented, thus,

“Honestly, how can any normal person or company pour money to an organization which lacks professionalism and accountability” he continued, “the Zimbabwe Football Association has to put its house in order first so that the Corporate World can gain or develop confidence to sponsor them.”

One informant pointed out that,

“No sponsor can risk his/her money by assisting an association that has such bad practices; the Zimbabwe Football Association is a very bad partner in as far as sponsorship is concerned”

Evidence from interview, questionnaires and focus group discussions support the fact that poor governance is a major challenge. In support of the above, [14] reported that the

country’s football leadership was summoned to appear before a parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Sport, Arts and Culture twice to provide oral evidence on the goings on at the debt ridden football association which has suffered a barrage of criticism over the manner it is administering the game.

The general feeling among the informants was that this challenge could be alleviated by increasing the use of Committees. There should be sub-committees responsible for the various issues, for example finance, marketing and general administration. This will ensure that work is done effectively in that respect.

Other informants emphasized the need for strategic planning. They said that ZIFA needed to do a lot of strategic planning in all respect. This should also focus on attracting corporate sponsorship. A strategic plan works as a guide on what needs to be done within a given time frame. A sound strategic plan can convince potential sponsors and give a sense of direction to the organisation.

4.6 Lack of Funding from the Government

Responses from interviewees, focus group, questionnaire responses support the fact that there was no regular funding from the government. In some cases, ad-hoc funding on request were provided for the national team. Evidence from ZIFA and SRC support the fact that there is no meaningful funding that come from the government. Only ad hoc support is given at times on request. For instance, [14] reported that ZIFA launched an application for a US \$ 300 000 grant from the Ministry of Education, Sport Arts and Culture to cover the senior national team’s trip to Egypt for their World Cup qualifying clash in Alexandria at the end of March 2013. This shows that ZIFA does not receive annual grants from the government but has to request for funding through the SRC on an ad hoc basis. In the majority of cases Government fails to make available the requested funding due to budgetary constraints.

Without funding from the government, football administration becomes a difficult task. In most countries, football is also being sponsored by respective governments. If government leads the way then it gives confidence to the corporate sector to follow suit. [14] had this to say, “There should be collaboration between government and private sector to support football and sport in general. In other words, the government alone cannot sustain the sponsorship required for football.” Football administration is very expensive hence ZIFA cannot sustain proper football management without the support from both the government and the corporate world.

Generally respondents expected optimism that the recently created Ministry of Sports, Arts and Culture would go a long way in addressing this particular challenge.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on the challenges encountered by the Zimbabwe Football Association in securing corporate sponsorship. The study employed a “constructivist’s

paradigm and a qualitative research approach were used specifically as a case study design. The following qualitative instruments were used to generate data; in depth interviews, focus groups, documentary review and open ended interview guides. The study revealed that the Zimbabwe Football Association has a number of challenges which should be addressed in order to enable it to secure corporate sponsorship. The challenges were mainly; negative publicity, poor corporate governance, lack of accountability and transparency, lack of qualified personnel, lack vibrant strategic plan, negative perceptions by corporate world and individuals, lack of adequate government funding. It emerged from the study that while the problems are pervasive they can be alleviated to a large extent by using appropriate strategies.

6. Future Scope

The study recommends further studies of a similar nature in others sport organizations in Zimbabwe since the challenges of sponsorship seem to affect all sport codes.

“The authors declare that they have no competing interests”

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