

Why Africa Teams Didn't Do Well in the World Cup

By Mwangi Wanjumbi

Africa teams didn't do well in the World Cup in South Africa. Nevertheless, it was football galore at best on the Africa soil. Even those who have no attachment to the game found themselves either infected or affected by the football burg that had temporarily conquered the global community.

As the majority fans especially in Africa enjoyed the final moments of the football feast, the Nigerian football team has been red-carded by their own Government and condemned for the next two years. The team's performance like that of the other African representatives was below expectations, in this great football party. Is it not surprising that the African teams have faired badly on their own soil?

Even where the teams displayed great football, they were goal shy most of the time. Yet, what ultimately counts in football is the goals bagged into the net. The rest is only entertainment which may count for nothing. That therefore leads to many questions especially on the football standards in the continent. Why in particular is this consistent goal shyness?

Whereas there are seemingly no straight forward answers, it is clear that competition is not entrenched amongst the Africans. Excellence in football calls for not only talents but also wits and endurance as well as ability to score goals. It is complicated more by the fact that it is a team game. Therefore, no matter the expertise, no single player can excel without support from the others. This makes the game even more competitive. Were our footballers prepared enough for competition? Are they directly to blame for the poor showing?

Perhaps we need to realize that there are two common types of cultures which are globally predominant. That is individualism and collectivism. The former relates to me or "I" concept. The latter is about the "we" concept. In individualism, which is more synonymous with the western culture, competition is the order of life. Children are encouraged to be competitive about everything as they grow up. That includes in sports, education, drama, music amongst others.

In the African as well as Oriental cultures, the story has been slightly different. Our collectivist culture has hindered competition especially in the earlier generations. Children are encouraged to be conformists and therefore less aggressive, a situation that inhibits competition. Eventually, people rarely achieve their potential or pursue extraordinary achievements.

Conversely, the westerners have perfected the science of competition. In other situations Africans still believe in chance and occult (magic) or supernatural powers. Many others embrace shortcuts and nepotism. Does this explain the occurrence of almost uncontrolled corruption in the African continent?

It follows therefore that we need to critically and holistically address the root causes of poor competitiveness rather than just wait for luck to strike.

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