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Financial Challenges and Survival Strategies of Regional Football Clubs Empirical Evidence from Northern Uganda

Henry Omara
PhD Student, Department of Environmental Management, Selinus University of Science and Literature, Rome, Italy
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***Abstract*—Regional football clubs in the developing world occupy a peculiar space in the sporting economy: socially indispensable, providing platforms for youth engagement, community identity and post-conflict healing, yet financially precarious in ways that threaten their existence. This study examines the financial challenges and survival strategies facing regional football clubs in Northern Uganda, using a mixed-methods approach that carefully analysed 200 questionnaire responses and 22 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with players, coaches, club officials and other football stakeholders across the region. Clubs generally operate within a survival-oriented financial system, leaning heavily on community contributions, owners' support and fundraising, while sponsorship and other commercial revenue remain limited. Key informants identified inadequate government support, unmet player welfare needs, transportation costs and low sponsorship as the major financial problems. These difficulties are not confined to one area of club activity; they spread across player motivation, match attendance, facility development, competition participation and overall club performance. In response, clubs have relied on volunteer support, community contributions and financial assistance from owners or management, while some have begun exploring local income sources such as poultry keeping, farming and small businesses, modest supplements rather than solutions on their own. The findings clearly show the core problem is not simply a lack of money but the absence of regular, diversified income capable of sustaining club activities over time; dependence on sponsorship, government support or occasional contributions leaves clubs financially weak and uncertain. Clubs therefore need genuinely diversified income-generating activities, stronger ties to government and private business, improved facilities and projects suited to the local environment. The study concludes that the central challenge is not simply the absence of money but the absence of predictable, diversified and institutionally supported revenue, a structural fragility demanding deliberate, multi-level intervention, and study proposes evidence-based recommendations for clubs, governing bodies, government and development partners.**

***Index Terms*—Regional football clubs; Financial challenges; Financial sustainability; Survival strategies; Northern Uganda; Revenue diversification**

I. INTRODUCTION

Football in Africa is evolving into a financially important and socially embedded sport across the continent, supported by an increasing number of clubs and an increasing awareness of the game's economic potential (Machela, 2025). At the continental level, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) has committed over USD 48 million per season to African club football, a figure that, while historically significant, remains almost entirely concentrated in elite continental competitions and carries almost no redistributive benefit to the regional clubs that constitute the vast majority of the African football ecosystem (CAF, 2026; Mabunda, 2025). Below the elite level, in the regional and community leagues where most African footballers play and where football's social functions, namely youth development, community cohesion, and cultural identity, are most immediately expressed, the financial reality is one of chronic scarcity, institutional neglect, and structural vulnerability (Oner et al., 2024).

In Uganda, this dynamic takes a particularly sharp form. Ugandan football is, as one commentator has accurately observed, more passion than business: an observation that captures both the genuine popular commitment to the sport and the persistent failure to convert that commitment into sustainable commercial and institutional structures (Drabe, 2025). National resource concentration at the elite level has left regional and lower-tier clubs structurally dependent on uncertain gate receipts, inconsistent community donations, and the personal financial commitment of club owners. This is a pattern that the federation's own governance reforms have done little to correct and that Uganda's National Sports Act (2023) and National Sports Regulations (2025) have heightened the registration, governance, financial accountability and compliance requirements for sports organisations and have increased the burden on under-resourced regional club (Kizza, 2025; Kuteesa, 2025; Krieger et al., 2020).

The global literature on football finance has developed substantially in the post-COVID period, with systematic reviews of European football financial regulation (Martin-Magdalena et al., 2024), assessments of the financial sustainability of English football leagues (Maguire and Philippou, 2023; Philippou and Maguire, 2022), and bibliometric analyses of financial management in sports clubs (Tabuk, 2024) providing increasingly sophisticated frameworks for understanding the mechanisms of football's financial health. Yet the vast majority of this literature addresses elite professional leagues, primarily in Europe and, to a lesser extent, urban South Africa, South America, and Australia. The financial mechanics of survival in lower-tier African regional football clubs, characterised by informal revenue structures, community-based solidarity mechanisms, and what might be described as survivalist management, remain almost entirely unaddressed in the peer-reviewed literature (Boya, 2016; Giampiccoli and Nauright, 2019).

Northern Uganda provides both an empirically urgent and theoretically distinctive context for addressing this gap. The Acholi and Lango sub-regions, encompassing districts including Gulu,

Lira, Kitgum, Pader, Kole, and Agago, continue to recover from the socio-economic devastation of the LRA conflict (1986 to 2008), which displaced approximately 1.8 million people, dismantled livelihoods and infrastructure, and profoundly disrupted the social fabric of communities across the north (Marshak et al., 2019). In this post-conflict landscape, grassroots football has emerged as a critical platform for youth engagement, psychological healing, and community reconciliation. These are functions that assign it social significance far beyond what its financial resources might suggest (Marshak et al., 2019; Giampiccoli and Nauright, 2019). The clubs that sustain this football ecosystem do so through improvisation, volunteerism, and community solidarity that formal financial management frameworks are not designed to capture or support.

This study is theoretically anchored in Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), which explains organisational behaviour and vulnerability through the dependence of organisations on external actors who control critical resources (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003; Malatesta and Smith, 2014). For regional football clubs in Northern Uganda, RDT's core propositions map directly onto their operational reality. They are highly dependent on a narrow and uncertain resource base dominated by community goodwill and individual patronage. This dependence produces vulnerability because resources are controlled by actors whose priorities and capacities are themselves volatile. Sustainability therefore requires either reducing dependence through internal resource development or managing dependence through strategic relationships that provide more predictable external support (Jiang et al., 2023; Mrkonjic, 2023; Choi et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the full cost of this structural fragility for grassroots sport globally, when the disruption of community-based funding mechanisms exposed the absence of alternative revenue infrastructure and forced many clubs toward institutional collapse (ICSS, 2021).

The intersection of digital innovation and community-based sport financing offers one important avenue for the development of more resilient revenue structures. Atlantic Council analysis (Bonsundy-O'Bryan, 2026) documents the growing relevance of digital platforms, merchandise, and social media fundraising for African football clubs, while Alonso et al. (2024) demonstrates how social entrepreneurship frameworks can support community development through sport even in resource-constrained environments. At the same time, Getnet et al. (2025) demonstrate that revenue diversification and broadcasting income remain structurally underdeveloped even in more established African leagues like the Ethiopian Premier League. The emerging Ugandan sports governance framework, including the National Sports Act (2023), creates regulatory structures that could either support or further constrain regional clubs depending on how they are implemented and resourced (Kizza, 2025; Garmamo et al., 2024).

The resource-based perspective on sport organisation sustainability, developed and applied by Choi et al. (2023) in the context of sport-for-development organisations, argues that sustainability depends not only on available financial resources but on the organisational assets, capabilities, and governance structures that determine whether resources can generate value over time. This perspective explains why identical resource constraints can produce different sustainability outcomes in different clubs: governance quality, management capacity, community embeddedness, and the ability to develop and manage strategic relationships all mediate the

relationship between resource scarcity and organisational survival (Mrkonjic, 2023; Garmamo et al., 2024).

Against this theoretical background, this study employs a convergent mixed-methods design, integrating 200 questionnaire responses with 22 Key Informant Interviews, to produce a comprehensive and empirically grounded account of the financial challenges and survival strategies of regional football clubs in Northern Uganda. The study makes four principal contributions. First, it provides the first systematic empirical analysis of the financial mechanics of regional football club survival in a post-conflict African context. Second, it documents the prevalence, severity, and operational consequences of specific financial challenges across a representative multi-district sample. Third, it identifies and characterises the locally adapted survival strategies that clubs have developed in the absence of formal financial support. Fourth, it proposes actionable recommendations grounded in the study's empirical findings and theoretically informed by the RDT framework.

Problem Statement

Regional football clubs in Northern Uganda operate under conditions of acute financial precarity, with little institutional support from state authorities or national football governing bodies. Despite the critical social role that these clubs play in post-conflict youth engagement and community rebuilding, they are forced to rely on ad hoc community donations and the personal financial commitment of individual club owners. This dependence produces multiple operational failures: inability to pay player allowances, accumulating transport debts, repeated fixture postponements, and difficulty retaining talented players. Without a systematic understanding of the financial dynamics driving these challenges and the survival strategies that clubs have developed in response, the broader project of building a sustainable football ecosystem in Northern Uganda, one capable of supporting talent development, community resilience, and social integration, will remain structurally compromised.

Research Gap

The academic literature on football finance is heavily concentrated on European elite leagues and, to a lesser extent, urban professional clubs in South Africa, Ethiopia, and other established African football markets. While some scholarship addresses African sport development, it has generally focused on social outcomes such as cohesion, identity, and post-conflict healing, rather than the financial mechanics of organisational survival in resource-constrained environments. The specific financial challenges, informal survival strategies, and locally adapted income-generation approaches of grassroots clubs in post-conflict, rural African contexts represent a substantial and consequential empirical gap that this study addresses.

Research Objectives

- To identify the primary sources of funding and revenue available to regional football clubs in Northern Uganda.
- To examine the most critical financial challenges facing these clubs and their cascading effects on operational stability and sporting performance.

- To assess the effectiveness of survival strategies currently adopted by clubs to mitigate financial scarcity, distinguishing between short-term coping mechanisms and longer-term sustainability approaches.
- To recommend actionable measures for improving the financial sustainability and professionalisation of regional football clubs and leagues in Northern Uganda.

Research Questions

- What are the major sources of funding for regional football clubs in Northern Uganda, and how adequate and predictable are these sources?
- What are the most serious financial challenges hindering club operations and performance, and through what mechanisms do they affect sporting and administrative functions?
- How do regional clubs utilise community-based assets, volunteer networks, and informal income-generating activities to remain operational, and how effective are these mechanisms?
- What structural, institutional, and managerial measures would most effectively support the transition from financial survival to financial sustainability in Northern Uganda's regional football clubs?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell and Creswell, 2020), integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative Key Informant Interview evidence to produce a comprehensive understanding of regional football clubs' financial dynamics. The convergent design allows quantitative and qualitative strands to be developed independently and then merged at the interpretation stage, enabling the researcher to assess where findings confirm, extend, or contradict one another, thereby producing a more robust and nuanced account than either method alone could generate (Kawar et al., 2024). The quantitative strand establishes the prevalence and severity of financial challenges across the study population, while the qualitative strand explains the mechanisms, meanings, and institutional dynamics behind those patterns. The mixed-methods approach is particularly well suited to this research context because the financial challenges of regional football clubs operate simultaneously at the statistical level, where quantitative data on revenue sources, challenge ratings, and survival strategies are needed, and at the experiential and institutional level, where they lived perspectives of club managers, coaches, and administrators reveal dimensions that survey data cannot capture. The post-conflict and resource-constrained setting further supports methodological plurality, as locally adapted survival mechanisms and informal management practices require the interpretive depth of qualitative inquiry to be adequately documented (ICSS, 2021).

Study Area

The study was conducted across 10 districts in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions of Northern Uganda: Lira, Gulu, Kole, Pader, Alebtong, Kwania, Agago, Otuke, Amolatar and Amuru. These

districts were selected to represent the geographic diversity of the Northern Uganda football landscape while concentrating on sub-regions where the LRA conflict's impact on social institutions, including grassroots football, was most severe and where the post-conflict recovery process provides the most instructive context for studying sport sustainability under resource constraints. Lira and Gulu, as the largest urban centres of the Lango and Acholi sub-regions respectively, provide the institutional anchor for regional football administration, while the smaller districts contribute the rural and peri-urban contexts where financial challenges are most acute (Marshak et al., 2019).

Figure 1. Map Showing the Regional Football Club Study Districts in Northern Uganda.

Sampling

The study participants comprised of all active stakeholders in regional football clubs across the 10 study districts, including players, coaches, club administrators, volunteers, and other associated stakeholders. A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants with direct experience of the financial realities and management practices of regional clubs. For the questionnaire component, a systematic approach was used to identify 200 participants across the 10 districts, in approximate proportion to the size and football activity of each district. The questionnaire link was shared across various football clubs' WhatsApp platforms, along with guidance on how to complete it. While for the Key Informant Interview (KII) component, purposive criterion sampling, supported by the regional league administrator, was used to identify 22 participants with

authoritative knowledge of football administration. These included club CEOs, managers, chairpersons, head coaches, technical directors, team doctors, league administrators, and match officials from the Northern Regional Football Association.

Data Collection Methods

Structured Questionnaire: Structured questionnaires were administered to 200 participants across the 10 study districts. The questionnaire was designed in four thematic sections: first, participant profile covering role, district, and years of football experience; second, revenue and financial structure covering identification of major, minor, and non-revenue sources across ten categories; third, financial challenge severity covering rating of twelve specific financial challenges on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Not Serious) to 5 (Very Serious), with a supplementary item identifying the single biggest financial challenge; and fourth, survival strategies and sustainability covering rating of the most effective survival strategies, patterns of income-generating activity adoption, and identification of priority measures for financial sustainability. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with five club officials in Lira and Kole before deployment to ensure clarity and face validity.

Key Informant Interviews: 22 semi-structured Key Informant Interviews were conducted with authoritative stakeholders selected to provide institutional and operational perspectives on the financial management of regional football clubs. KII participants included club CEOs (n = 3), managers (n = 4), chairpersons (n = 4), head coaches (n = 4), technical directors (n = 2), a team doctor, a match official, a competition statistician, a government sports official, and a league administrator from the Northern Regional Football Association. Interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes and were conducted online using Kobo Collect link shared in different football WhatsApp forums with clear instructions on how to complete the study. A semi-flexible guide was used, covering five thematic domains: funding sources and adequacy; financial challenge severity and operational effects; survival strategies and their effectiveness; barriers to commercial development; and stakeholder recommendations for financial sustainability. All interviews were complete with consent by all the participating individuals.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the 200 questionnaires were processed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and means, were computed for all Likert-scale and categorical items. Mean seriousness scores for financial challenges were calculated by assigning numerical values (1 to 5) to Likert responses and computing the weighted arithmetic mean across the 200 valid responses per item. Results are presented in ranked order by mean score to enable direct comparison of challenge severity. The two-part sponsorship analysis, presenting both the seriousness rating and the biggest challenge item, was designed to capture the full dimensionality of the sponsorship problem rather than reducing it to a single metric. Qualitative data from the 22 KII transcripts were analysed using a data-driven reflexive thematic analysis

approach following Braun and Clarke's (2024) updated guidance. This involved transcribing audio recordings, conducting first-cycle descriptive coding to identify recurring themes across the dataset, and second-cycle pattern coding to develop sub-categories, particularly around survival typologies, institutional relationships, and locally adapted income-generation mechanisms. The coding process was iterative, with themes reviewed against the full dataset to ensure their grounding in the evidence. At the integration stage, a convergence matrix was constructed to systematically compare questionnaire findings and KII themes for each analytical domain, identifying areas of confirmation, extension, and apparent divergence between the two data sources.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards appropriate for community-based research in a post-conflict setting. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including questionnaire respondents and key informant interview (KII) participants, prior to their participation in the study. The purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the consent statement were clearly explained in the introductory sections of the questionnaires and KII guides. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. KII participants were identified only by their professional role and district, and no personally identifying information was included in research records or publications. All completed questionnaires and research data were stored on an encrypted, password-protected server accessible only to the researcher and will be securely deleted upon completion of the study in accordance with applicable data protection requirements. Given the history of conflict and its implications for social trust in Northern Uganda, particular care was taken to ensure that participation was not perceived as surveillance, mandatory reporting, or an activity associated with government authorities, security agencies, or football association functions. Participants were reassured that the information they provided would be used solely for academic research and would not affect their access to services, relationships with authorities, or participation in football-related activities (Ataullahjan et al., 2022). Finally, all secondary sources used in the study were appropriately acknowledged, accurately represented, and referenced in accordance with accepted academic and research integrity standards.

Limitations of the Study

Four limitations shape the scope and confidence of this study's findings. First, the study's coverage of nine districts in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions, while providing a representative Northern Uganda sample, does not extend to West Nile or other northern sub-regions, meaning that findings cannot be extrapolated to all of Northern Uganda's diverse football contexts. Second, the mixed-methods design produces rich and internally consistent evidence, but the cross-sectional nature of the data collection means that the study documents financial conditions at a specific moment rather than tracking how financial challenges or survival strategies evolve over time. Longitudinal

follow-up research would be needed to assess the durability of the emerging income-generating activities identified in the KII evidence. Third, survey responses on financial challenge severity are subjective assessments rather than objective financial measurements. The absence of club-level financial records, which most clubs do not maintain in accessible or complete form, means that the study documents perceptions of financial challenges rather than their quantitative magnitude. Fourth, social desirability effects may have led some KII participants to emphasise positive survival strategies and understate the degree of financial fragility, particularly where clubs have governance relationships with regional football associations whose support they value. The consistency of evidence across multiple independent KII participants and the convergence between questionnaire and KII findings provide some mitigation for this risk.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Profile of Study Participants

Table 1 presents the geographic, experiential, and role profile of the 200 questionnaire respondents. Players constituted the largest group (97; 48.5%), followed by club officials (60; 30.0%), providing perspectives from both the sporting and administrative dimensions of regional football. The majority of respondents had substantial football experience: 86 (43.0%) had six to ten years of involvement, and a further 70 (35.0%) had more than ten years. Only 2 respondents (1.0%) had less than two years of experience, confirming that the sample provided grounded, experience-based perspectives.

Table 1: Geographic and Demographic Profile of Questionnaire Respondents (N = 200).

District	Lira	Gulu	Kole	Pader	Alebtong	Kwania	Agago	Otuke	Amuru	Total
Number (N)	71	41	27	18	11	10	9	8	5	200
Percent (%)	35.5	20.5	13.5	9.0	5.5	5.0	4.5	4.0	2.5	100.0

Football Experience	Under 2 years	2 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	Over 10 years	Total
Number N)	2	42	86	70	200
Percent (%)	1.0	21.0	43.0	35.0	100.0

Role / Position	Player	Club Official	Coach	Other	Volunteer	Total
Number (N)	97	60	19	21	3	200
Percent (%)	48.5	30.0	9.5	10.5	1.5	100.0

Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026).

The 22 KII participants brought substantial institutional experience. Thirteen of the 22 informants had at least six years of direct involvement in football administration, with individual experience levels ranging from 6 to 20 years. This depth of institutional knowledge strengthened the qualitative evidence considerably, ensuring that KII accounts reflected sustained exposure to the financial realities of regional football rather than short-term or limited operational perspective.

Financial Structure and Revenue Sources

Table 2 presents the revenue structure of regional football clubs as reported by the 200 questionnaire respondents. The data reveal a funding ecosystem characterised by extreme reliance on informal, community-based, and owner-dependent sources, with commercial, institutional, and diversified revenues playing marginal or negligible roles.

Table 2: Major, Minor, and Non-Revenue Sources of Regional Football Clubs (N = 200).

Revenue Source	Major Source – N (%)	Minor Source – N (%)	Not a Source - N (%)
Community contributions	79 (39.5)	86 (43.0)	35 (17.5)
Fundraising events	40 (20.0)	79 (39.5)	81 (40.5)
Gate collections	29 (14.5)	75 (37.5)	96 (48.0)
Donations	27 (13.5)	72 (36.0)	101 (50.5)
FUFA support	26 (13.0)	69 (34.5)	105 (52.5)
Sponsorship	23 (11.5)	67 (33.5)	110 (55.0)
Player transfers	23 (11.5)	55 (27.5)	122 (61.0)
Membership fees	19 (9.5)	72 (36.0)	109 (54.5)
Merchandise sales	18 (9.0)	56 (28.0)	126 (63.0)
Government support	12 (6.0)	18 (9.0)	170 (85.0)

Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026).

Community contributions were the most prominent major source, identified by 79 respondents (39.5%): a finding that reflects the centrality of community solidarity in sustaining clubs whose formal revenue mechanisms are weak or absent. Fundraising events were the second-ranked major source (40; 20.0%). By contrast, government support was identified as a major source by only 12 respondents (6.0%), and 170 (85.0%) classified it as not a source at all, the starkest single indicator of institutional neglect in the study's quantitative data. Sponsorship, despite being the most urgently desired revenue source as Section 7.4 demonstrates, was identified as a major source by

only 23 respondents (11.5%), with 110 (55.0%) reporting it as not a source. The KII evidence strongly reinforces these patterns. Club-owner contributions were cited by 14 of the 22 informants, while community fundraising was identified by 10. Sponsorship from local businesses was cited by only six informants, and FUFA support by just one: a finding that challenges the assumption that national federation structures provide meaningful financial support to the clubs in their base pyramid.

"The funding is completely inadequate. Clubs depend entirely on what owners can give and what the community can contribute. When neither is available, they simply cannot function. There is no clear system for generating club revenue - just goodwill." KII-03, League Administrator, Lira

Financial Challenge Severity

Table 3 presents the twelve financial challenges ranked by their mean seriousness score across the 200 respondents. All twelve challenges recorded means above 3.0 out of 5.0, indicating that respondents assessed all identified challenges as at least moderately serious. The top four challenges all produced means above 4.10, indicating that inadequate government support, player welfare expenses, transportation costs, and lack of sponsorship are each perceived as serious to very serious across the majority of the study population.

Table 3: Ranking of Financial Challenges by Mean Seriousness Score (N = 200).

Financial Challenge	Mean /5.0	Most Frequent Response (N and %)	Rank
Inadequate government support	4.14	Very Serious: 142 (71.0%)	1
Player welfare expenses	4.13	Very Serious: 116 (58.0%)	2
Transportation costs	4.12	Very Serious: 119 (59.5%)	3
Lack of sponsorship	4.10	Very Serious: 123 (61.5%)	4
Medical expenses	3.96	Very Serious: 90 (45.0%)	5
Low gate collections	3.92	Very Serious: 112 (56.0%)	6
Low merchandise sales	3.91	Very Serious: 116 (58.0%)	7
Equipment costs	3.84	Very Serious: 87 (43.5%)	8
Poor infrastructure	3.81	Very Serious: 82 (41.0%)	9
Inadequate FUFA support	3.77	Very Serious: 95 (47.5%)	10
Limited media coverage	3.75	Very Serious: 99 (49.5%)	11
Refereeing costs	3.29	Moderately Serious: 67 (33.5%)	12

Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026).

The distinction between seriousness rating and biggest single challenge produced analytically important results. Although inadequate government support recorded the highest mean seriousness (4.14 out of 5.0), lack of sponsorship was identified by 143 respondents (71.5%) as the biggest financial challenge facing their club. This suggests that while government failure is perceived as the most structurally damaging problem, sponsorship deficit is experienced as the most operationally urgent and practically addressable constraint. Table 4 presents this distribution.

Table 4: Biggest Single Financial Challenge Reported by Respondents (N = 200).

Biggest Financial Challenge	Lack of Sponsorship	Transportation Costs	Player Welfare Expenses	Low Attendance	Equipment Shortages	Total
Number (N)	143	33	13	7	4	200
Percent (%)	71.5	16.5	6.5	3.5	2.0	100.0

Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026).

Transportation as a Strategic Constraint

Transportation recorded a mean seriousness of 4.12 out of 5.0, with 119 respondents (59.5%) rating it Very Serious. What distinguishes transportation from other financial challenges is its direct operational consequence: 162 respondents (81.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that financial constraints affect away-match participation, a finding that makes transportation not merely an administrative cost but a determinant of competitive participation. Table 5 presents the KII evidence on transportation's specific operational effects.

Table 5: KII Evidence on Transportation and Its Operational Effects (N = 22).

KII Finding on Transportation	N out of 22 Informants
Transportation reduces away-match participation	15
Transportation increases club debt	12
Clubs forced to travel on match day due to lack of overnight funds	10
Costs limit participation in distant competitions	9
Transportation reduces training budgets	8
Transportation reduces player-welfare spending	8
Costs contribute to fixture postponements	5

Source: Key Informant Interviews (2026).

The convergence of questionnaire and KII evidence on transportation reveals it as a mechanism through which financial scarcity translates directly into competitive disadvantage. Clubs that cannot afford away travel must reduce competition participation, which reduces gate receipts, weakens competitive development, reduces player motivation, and diminishes the club's profile, making it less attractive to potential sponsors. Transportation cost is therefore not a single operational challenge but an entry point into a cycle of financial and sporting decline.

Player Welfare, Morale, and Retention

Table 6 documents the breadth of operational effects attributable to financial constraints across player welfare, training, and competitive domains. The consistency of high agreement rates across all seven indicators, ranging from 71.0% to 82.5%, establishes that financial pressure affects virtually every dimension of club operations.

Table 6: Operational Effects of Financial Constraints on Club Operations (N = 200).

Operational Effect	Agree (N)	Strongly Agree (N)	Total N (%)
Financial challenges affect player performance	52	113	165 (82.5)
Financial constraints affect away-match participation	23	139	162 (81.0)
Financial problems affect league competitiveness	24	136	160 (80.0)
Failure to pay allowances affects operations	63	91	154 (77.0)
Financial constraints reduce training quality or frequency	70	79	149 (74.5)
Difficulty retaining talented players	47	101	148 (74.0)
Financial constraints cause match postponements	56	86	142 (71.0)

Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026).

"The players are committed but they see how we struggle. When we cannot pay allowances and cannot afford keeping players at the training camp, the best ones begin to look elsewhere. We are developing talent for other clubs because we cannot keep them." KII-16, Club Mobilizer, Kole

Infrastructure Constraints

Poor infrastructure received a mean seriousness rating of 3.81 out of 5.0, with 82 respondents (43.9% of valid responses) rating it Very Serious and a further 43 (23.0%) rating it Serious. Table 7 integrates questionnaire and KII evidence to document the multiple financial pathways through which infrastructure weakness affects club sustainability.

Table 7: Integrated Questionnaire and KII Evidence on Infrastructure Constraints.

Infrastructure Issue	Questionnaire Evidence (N=200)	KII Evidence (N=22)	Interpretation
Poor infrastructure overall	Mean 3.81/5; 82 (43.9%) Very Serious	22 of 22 informants reported at least one infrastructure-finance problem	Substantial financial constraint, though not the highest-ranked
Poor pitches and injury risk	Not directly measured	15 of 22 informants reported that poor pitches increase injuries	Indirect cost through player welfare and medical expenses
Ground and stadium rental	Not directly measured	7 of 22 informants reported heavy spending on rented facilities	Recurring participation costs from absence of owned facilities
Effect on attendance and revenue	127 of 200 (63.5%) reported that financial constraints affect fan attendance	8 of 22 reported reduced attendance; 9 of 22 reported reduced commercial activity	Infrastructure weakness reduces match-day income
Effect on sponsorship attraction	Sponsorship was the biggest challenge for 143 of 200 (71.5%)	6 of 22 informants specifically identified poor infrastructure as discouraging sponsors	Infrastructure links to the wider commercialisation problem
Infrastructure investment recommended	75 of 200 (37.5%) recommended improvement	6 of 22 informants called for infrastructure development	Stakeholders view infrastructure improvement as part of the long-term solution

Source: Questionnaire Survey and Key Informant Interviews (2026).

The most analytically important insight from Table 7 is that infrastructure operates through multiple connected financial pathways rather than as a single cost item. Clubs pay to access facilities they do not own; poor pitches generate additional injury and medical costs; inadequate venues reduce spectator attendance and commercial activity; and poor infrastructure weakens the club's profile for potential sponsors. Infrastructure is therefore a strategic financial issue rather than simply an operational facility problem.

Institutional and Governing-Body Support

The data on institutional support reveal a fundamental disconnect between the regulatory presence of governing bodies and their financial contribution to club sustainability. Inadequate government

support recorded the highest seriousness mean (4.14 out of 5.0), with 142 respondents (71.0%) classifying it Very Serious. Yet only 12 respondents (6.0%) identified government support as an actual funding source and 170 (85.0%) reported it as not a source. Tables 8 and 9 present the quantitative and qualitative evidence on this institutional gap.

Table 8: Questionnaire Evidence on Institutional Support Challenges (N = 200).

Institutional Challenge	Very Serious n (%)	Mean /5.0
Inadequate government support	142 (71.0)	4.14
Inadequate FUFA support	95 (47.5)	3.77
Limited media coverage	99 (49.5)	3.75

Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026).

Table 9: Types of Governing-Body Support Reported by KII Informants (N = 22).

Type of Support Provided by Governing Bodies	KII (N) out of 22
Technical guidance	13
Club licensing and registration support	10
Competition organisation	8
Capacity-building workshops	8
Referee services	7
Youth football programmes	6
Equipment donations	3
Direct financial support	1

Source: Key Informant Interviews (2026).

The KII evidence makes the institutional resource mismatch explicit. Governing-body support is concentrated in technical, regulatory, and organisational functions, including competition management, licensing, and workshops, while direct financial or material support is almost entirely absent. Only one of 22 informants reported receiving direct financial support from a governing body. This creates a situation in which clubs bear increasing regulatory compliance burdens without receiving the financial resources that compliance requires: a dynamic that several KII informants characterised as more regulations than resources.

The Sponsorship and Commercialisation Gap

The sponsorship findings represent one of the study's most analytically consequential patterns. Sponsorship was simultaneously the biggest financial challenge (identified by 143; 71.5% of

respondents) and one of the least frequently occurring funding sources (major source for only 23; 11.5%). This gap between sponsorship needs and sponsorship reality reflects not merely the absence of willing sponsors but the absence of the organisational capabilities that would make clubs attractive to potential sponsors. Table 10 identifies the specific barriers reported by KII informants.

Table 10: KII-Identified Barriers to Sponsorship Attraction (N = 22).

Barrier to Sponsorship Attraction	KII (N) out of 22
Low media exposure	15
Poor marketing skills	12
Weak club branding	11
Poor financial accountability and reporting	9
Absence of formal sponsorship proposals	9
Limited digital presence	9
Small fan base	9
Economic hardship of potential local sponsors	8
Competition from larger and higher-profile clubs	4

Source: Key Informant Interviews (2026).

The barrier profile reveals that clubs face a commercialisation gap: they need sponsorship more urgently than almost any other financial intervention, but they lack the media visibility, marketing capacity, professional branding, financial transparency, and commercial propositions that would make them credible investment partners for corporate or business sponsors. Low media exposure (15 out of 22 informants) and poor marketing skills (12 out of 22) indicate that this is not primarily a supply problem where willing sponsors are absent, but a visibility and presentation problem where clubs cannot effectively communicate their value to potential partners.

Survival Strategies in Practice

Table 11 presents the most effective survival strategies reported by questionnaire respondents. Three strategies, namely volunteer services, club-owner support, and community fundraising, account for 179 responses (89.5%) of the total, establishing the near-complete dominance of informal, relationship-based survival mechanisms over formal commercial approaches.

Table 11: Most Effective Survival Strategies Reported by Respondents (N = 200).

Survival Strategy	Number	% of 200
Volunteer services	63	31.5

Survival Strategy	Number	% of 200
Club-owner financial support	58	29.0
Community fundraising	58	29.0
Youth player development	8	4.0
Merchandise sales	8	4.0
Business partnerships	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026).

The KII evidence confirms this reliance while critically assessing its adequacy. Community fundraising was identified as an adopted strategy by 13 informants, membership contributions by 14, and volunteer labour by 12. However, informants were consistent in characterising these mechanisms as temporary and insufficient for long-term organisational development.
"We use what is available. Community support, our own money as management, and volunteers. It keeps us alive. But alive is not the same as developing. We need to reach a point where we can plan for next season, not just survive to next month." KII-01, Head Coach, Kole.

Emerging Alternative Income-Generating Activities
A particularly noteworthy finding from the KII data is the emergence of small-scale, locally adapted income-generating activities among a minority of clubs. Nine of the 22 informants (40.9%) reported that their clubs had developed at least one alternative income-generating activity. Table 12 presents the distribution of these activities.

Table 12: Alternative Income-Generating Activities Identified by KII Informants (N = 22).

Income-Generating Activity	KII (N) out of 22
Farming projects (crops and vegetables)	5
Merchandise sales	4
Academy fees	1
Event management	1
Facility rentals	1
Betting partnerships	1

Source: Key Informant Interviews (2026).

Farming projects, reported by five informants from different districts, represent the most geographically distributed and culturally embedded form of income diversification in the dataset.

The appearance of farming across multiple, independent KII accounts from distinct districts, including Amolatar, Lamwo, Nwoya, and Apac, suggests that agricultural income generation reflects a genuine, locally adapted strategy rather than an isolated or idiosyncratic practice. This finding is analytically significant because it demonstrates that diversification in this context does not follow the commercial model that dominates the football finance literature. Instead, it takes forms that are commensurate with local economic realities and available resources.

Financial Risk Management

The KII evidence on financial risk management reveals a significant imbalance. Clubs are substantially more likely to manage financial scarcity by controlling expenditure than by creating new revenue. Table 13 presents the distribution of risk management measures.

Table 13: Financial Risk Management Measures Reported by KII Informants (N = 22).

Financial Risk Management Measure	KII (N) out of 22
Budget controls	14
Financial audits	7
Cost reduction measures	7
Financial planning	7
Emergency reserves	5
Debt-control mechanisms	5
Sponsorship agreements	2
Revenue diversification	1

Source: Key Informant Interviews (2026).

The contrast between budget control (adopted by 14 of 22 informants) and revenue diversification (adopted by only 1 of 22) is the most analytically revealing finding in this section. It documents a financial management orientation that prioritises limiting outgoings over expanding income. This is rational in acute resource scarcity but insufficient as a basis for organisational sustainability. Cost reduction can protect short-term survival but cannot by itself generate the surplus needed for infrastructure investment, staff development, commercial visibility, or the improvement of the club's financial attractiveness to external partners.

Stakeholder Priorities for Financial Sustainability

Tables 14 and 15 present the convergent evidence on what stakeholders believe is needed to move clubs from financial survival to financial sustainability. The combined evidence points toward a multi-intervention model rather than any single solution.

Table 14: Priority Measures for Financial Sustainability as Ranked by KII Informants (N = 22).

Priority Measure	KII (N) out of 22
Improve sponsorship attraction	15
Connect clubs to sponsors through institutional facilitation	14
Increase governing-body financial support	14
Increase fan engagement and attendance	11
Diversify revenue sources	11
Professionalise club administration	10
Develop youth academies	9
Improve financial management capacity	9
Enhance media coverage	8
Strengthen governance structures	7

Source: Key Informant Interviews (2026).

Table 15: Priority Forms of External Support Identified by Questionnaire Respondents (N = 200).

Priority Form of External Support Needed	Number	% of 200
Direct financial assistance	102	51.0
Sponsorship facilitation	61	30.5
Infrastructure development	37	18.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Questionnaire Survey (2026).

The convergence is instructive. Stakeholders identify sponsorship improvement, revenue diversification, institutional support, professionalisation, governance, media visibility, and fan engagement as complementary priorities rather than sequential ones. This reflects the systemic character of the financial sustainability challenge: it cannot be resolved by addressing any single lever while leaving others unchanged. A club that receives direct financial assistance without improving governance or commercial presentation will not attract sustainable sponsorship. A club that improves its commercial presentation without infrastructure cannot retain sponsors or generate fan revenue.

IV. DISCUSSION

The evidence assembled across 200 questionnaire responses and 22 Key Informant Interviews produces a picture of regional football club financial management in Northern Uganda that is internally consistent, analytically coherent, and practically urgent. Across instruments, geographic districts, and respondent types, the findings converge on the same central conclusion: regional football clubs in Northern Uganda are financially alive but not financially sustainable, and the mechanisms that keep them alive are systematically insufficient to create the conditions for long-term organisational development.

The Distinction Between Survival and Sustainability

The most important analytical contribution of this study is the empirical substantiation of the distinction between financial survival and financial sustainability in the context of African regional football. Survival mechanisms, including volunteerism, community fundraising, and owner support, are characterised by their relationship-dependence, their informality, and their orientation toward meeting immediate obligations rather than building organisational capacity. Sustainability mechanisms, including diversified and predictable revenue, formal governance, commercial relationships, and physical assets, are characterised by their institutional embeddedness, their capacity to compound over time, and their ability to generate surplus that can be reinvested. The study's data establish that Northern Ugandan regional clubs are overwhelmingly oriented toward survival, while acknowledging both the genuine resilience this survival represents and its structural inadequacy as a foundation for long-term institutional development (Oner et al., 2024; Choi et al., 2023).

This finding extends and empirically grounds Resource Dependence Theory in a context that the original formulation, developed primarily for large organisations in advanced economies, did not anticipate (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003; Malatesta and Smith, 2014). In post-conflict Northern Uganda, the resource dependence of regional football clubs has distinctive features: the primary external resources on which clubs depend are not financial capital or market access but community social capital, namely goodwill, volunteerism, and collective identity, whose conversion into financial sustainability requires institutional bridges that currently do not exist.

The Commercialisation Gap and Its Structural Character

The sponsorship findings, where 71.5% identified lack of sponsorship as the biggest challenge but only 11.5% identified it as a major funding source, document a commercialisation gap whose structural character is clearly established by the KII evidence. This is not a gap that will close spontaneously as clubs continue to operate. It requires deliberate intervention to develop the visibility, marketing capacity, financial transparency, digital presence, and governance quality that convert commercial interest into actual partnership. The identification of low media exposure (15 out of 22 informants) and poor marketing skills (12 out of 22) as the two leading barriers to sponsorship confirms that the problem is as much about clubs' capacity to present themselves effectively as it is about the availability of willing sponsors. This finding is consistent with the broader argument that financial sustainability in football requires professional management

capabilities, not simply goodwill or community support (Martin-Magdalena et al., 2024; Machela, 2025).

Locally Adapted Diversification as an Emergent Pathway

The farming finding is the study's most theoretically innovative result. Agricultural income generation represents a form of locally adapted social entrepreneurship that does not map onto the commercial models, such as broadcasting, merchandise, and academy partnerships, that dominate the football finance literature, but is entirely appropriate to Northern Uganda's agro-ecological and economic context. It generates independent revenue that does not depend on community goodwill, commercial markets, or institutional support. It engages the club's physical assets and the labour of volunteers and players in ways that produce both financial returns and community solidarity. And it suggests a development trajectory that is organic rather than imposed, arising from clubs' own assessment of their available resources and realistic income-generation opportunities (Alonso et al., 2024; Giampiccoli and Nauright, 2019).

The Institutional Resource Mismatch

The finding that 85.0% of respondents identified government support as not a funding source, while 71.0% rated inadequate government support as Very Serious, documents an institutional abandonment that has been particularly consequential in a post-conflict recovery context where the state's social reconstruction function is most critical. The contrast between governing-body regulatory presence and financial absence creates a compliance burden without a support infrastructure, a pattern that Krieger et al. (2020) identify as a structural risk in sports governance reform across contexts where institutional capacity lags behind regulatory ambition. The implication is not that regulation should be reduced but that it should be accompanied by the financial, technical, and governance support that makes compliance feasible for under-resourced organisations.

V. CONCLUSION

Regional football clubs in Northern Uganda face a structural financial sustainability problem whose roots lie not in any single challenge but in the systematic absence of the institutional, commercial, and governance conditions through which sustainable sporting organisations are built. The study has established that the funding ecosystem is characterised by informal community dependence rather than formal commercial revenue; that financial challenges cascade across player welfare, transport, competitive participation, and training quality; that survival strategies, while demonstrating genuine community resilience, are by definition insufficient to generate long-term organisational capacity; and that locally adapted income-generating activities, particularly farming, represent an emergent but still embryonic pathway toward greater financial independence.

What makes Northern Uganda a particularly instructive case is the combination of its post-conflict context, its genuine community embeddedness, and its distance from the capital-centric sports infrastructure that has historically defined Ugandan football's institutional landscape. Regional

clubs here are not failing versions of Kampala clubs. They are different kinds of organisation, more socially embedded, more community-dependent, more resilient in informal terms, and less equipped for the commercial and institutional requirements of formal financial sustainability. Addressing their financial challenges requires approaches calibrated to their specific institutional reality rather than frameworks imported from contexts where commercial sports infrastructure already exists. The study argues for a deliberate, multi-level transition strategy in which clubs build more predictable internal revenue through locally adapted diversification; football governing bodies provide the institutional connections and support that convert community clubs' social assets into commercial relationships; government creates the policy and financing environment in which regional football can grow; and researchers and development partners produce the evidence and co-finance the innovations that make this transition credible and feasible.

VI. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Implications

This study makes three contributions to the theoretical literature on sport finance, resource dependence, and football sustainability. First, it extends Resource Dependence Theory to a post-conflict African grassroots sport context, demonstrating that RDT's core propositions about organisational vulnerability and the strategic management of resource dependence apply in qualitatively distinct ways when the primary resources are community social capital rather than financial capital or market access. Second, it provides empirical substantiation for the survival and sustainability distinction that the football sustainability literature has theorised but rarely documented at the level of regional club operations, establishing both the mechanisms through which survival and sustainability diverge and the transition conditions that would enable clubs to move from one to the other. Third, it demonstrates that locally adapted social entrepreneurship, in the form of agricultural income generation, represents a theoretically meaningful and practically viable form of sport organisation diversification that the existing literature's concentration on commercial models has obscured.

Policy Implications

For the Uganda government and the Ministry of Education and Sports, the study provides empirical grounds for developing a dedicated regional football development fund, specifically targeting the Acholi and Lango sub-regions as part of the broader Northern Uganda post-conflict recovery agenda. For FUFA and the Northern Regional Football Association, the study argues for a proactive sponsorship facilitation role, using the associations' institutional credibility and relationships to connect clubs with local and regional corporate partners, rather than limiting institutional engagement to regulatory and technical functions. For international development partners investing in Northern Uganda's post-conflict recovery, the study argues for including sport infrastructure and governance in development portfolios, recognising the social functions that

regional football clubs perform and the financial sustainability that dedicated investment could support.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Regional Football Clubs

1. Develop and implement locally adapted income-diversification plans that capitalise on available land, labour, and community networks, including agricultural projects, poultry keeping, venue hire, and community events, as a foundation for building more predictable internal revenue that reduces dependence on volatile external sources.
2. Establish basic financial governance systems, including simple annual budgets, income and expenditure records, quarterly reporting to club leadership, and asset registers, as prerequisites both for internal accountability and for external engagement with potential sponsors and institutional partners who require financial transparency.
3. Develop formal sponsorship documentation, including club profiles, impact statistics, fan base estimates, social media evidence, and standardised partnership proposals, to convert community clubs' genuine community embedding into credible commercial propositions for local and regional business sponsors.
4. Form inter-club cooperative structures for shared transport arrangements, bulk equipment purchasing, and joint marketing, enabling smaller clubs to achieve commercial efficiencies that individual clubs cannot generate independently.

For FUFA and Regional Football Associations

5. Establish a regional sponsorship facilitation programme that actively matches clubs with local and regional corporate partners, leveraging the association's institutional credibility, media relationships, and governance infrastructure to create commercial introductions that individual clubs cannot initiate independently.
6. Review the compliance burden imposed on community sports clubs under the National Sports Act (2023) and National Sports Regulations (2025), and develop a graduated compliance pathway that provides proportionate requirements for resource-constrained clubs alongside practical support, both financial and administrative, for meeting those requirements.
7. Invest in a digital visibility programme for regional football, including a standardised club profile database, regular match result dissemination, and social media content support, to increase the media exposure that the KII evidence identifies as the most frequently cited barrier to sponsorship attraction.

For Government and Development Partners

8. Establish a Northern Uganda Regional Football Development Fund, financed jointly by the Ministry of Education and Sports and development partners, providing matching grants for clubs that demonstrate basic financial governance, develop sustainable income-generating activities, or improve physical infrastructure in ways that increase community access and commercial potential.

9. Include regional football infrastructure, comprising playing surfaces, changing facilities, and community pitches, in the Northern Uganda post-conflict recovery investment framework, recognising that adequate infrastructure is both a precondition for sporting development and a multiplier for community health, social cohesion, and economic activity.
10. Commission a longitudinal monitoring study of regional football clubs' financial sustainability across Uganda, generating the annual comparative evidence needed to track the impact of policy and programme interventions and to adjust strategies based on emerging evidence.

For Research Institutions

11. Extend the mixed-methods framework developed in this study to West Nile and other Northern Uganda sub-regions not covered in the current study, generating the broader regional evidence base needed for a comprehensive Northern Uganda football sustainability strategy.
12. Commission comparative research across all regions in Uganda, East African regional football contexts, including rural Tanzania, Kenya, and Rwanda, to determine whether the survival and sustainability gap, the community-dependence paradox, and the agricultural income-generation strategy identified in Northern Uganda represent national, regional or continent-wide patterns in grassroots African football financing.

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