

The challenge of women's football

Established as the Strategic Plan for the Development of Women's Football, for the period between 2014 and 2020, the study has as main objective to define the development options which, through an identified and analysed reality, aspire to a sustained evolution of women's football, both at national and international level.

The construction of the strategic process outlined is made through the analysis of the context around the practice, the creation of a development strategic intention and the presentation of conditions to deploy it.

The study is predominately based on the involvement of the stakeholders and uses a multi-triangulation of sources, collection tools and different methods of data processing.

The report is structured in three parts, related respectively to the diagnosis and strategic analysis, construction of the strategy, planning and deployment.

The study had the following objectives: 1) To carry out a diagnosis of the sports situation; 2) To identify, analyse and validate the main development problems and opportunities; 3) To define goals and strategic options; 4) To build a development strategic plan itself and 5) To present plans for the areas identified as primary. To achieve those objectives, the following key research questions were identified and agreed: Question 1 – What are the main indicators on the characterisation of women's football?; Question 2 – Which factors affect its development?; Question 3 – How can women's football be improved? Question 4 – Which development options can be implemented? And Question 5 – What are the strategies for the implementation of the development options? These questions guided the study and determined the methodological options implemented.

At all stages of the study, as far the methodological procedures are concerned, there has been a special concern about the following aspects: a) reduction of bias; b) error control; c) limitation of cause and effect relationship; d) guarantee of the internal validity, reducing ambiguity and contradiction of interpretation; e) guarantee of the instrumental validity, concerns about the construction of the procedures through comparison and compatibility of the methods and the triangulation of sources and data analysis tools; f) guarantee of reliability, the consistency of data and the possibility of repeatability of the results have been ensured g) possibility of validity of advisory opinions, guaranteed by the possibility of direct contact with all the elements and supports involved in the research.

The basis was the diagnosis of the general environment which may affect, positively or negatively, the development of women's football, through the analysis of the factors of a political, economic, social and technological nature (*PEST analysis*). Interviews to the main social partners were conducted: School Sport;

University Sport; Union of the Football Professional Players; National Association of Football Coaches; Women and Sport Association; Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality; Media and National and International Experts on women's football. At the same time we conducted a collection of secondary qualitative and quantitative data existing in the FPF and in official entities (INE; IPDJ; UEFA; FIFA) from 2000 to 2012 and the review of documents of the main FPF management tools (activity plans, activity reports, accounts report from the last three years). Players, coaches, referees, parents, presidents from clubs and from district associations, national and regional coordinators, national head coaches and main officials of the Portuguese Football Federation with responsibilities in women's football were inquired.

13 research activities were carried out and 898 people involved directly or indirectly in women's football were inquired, through interview or questionnaire or through the participation in discussion groups (*focus group*).

From the diagnosis to the analysis stage, the following 11 points were identified as key aspects to be examined more deeply: Recruitment / players' development; Relationship with school sport and university sport; Training / coaches' knowledge; sports facilities / fields / time availability; Adequacy of the competition schedules; Refereeing; Intervention of the Clubs; Financing of the activity; Intervention of District Associations in the promotion of women's football; Attitude, perception of the notoriety and image and intervention of the Portuguese Football Federation.

Through the use of a SWOT evaluation matrix (*strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats*), we identified the possibility to:

Maximise the main strengths: a good part of the coaches are higher-educated and are the main

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responsible for the maintenance of players in the sport, the Regional Technical Coordinators are young and have adequate qualification and experience; the majority of the parents actively supports the clubs and their daughters. As far as the FPF is concerned, the growing of actual investments in women's football and the amounts involved, in relation to the countries of comparison, show strengths to be considered. The sports facilities where the training sessions and matches take place are of good quality and have turf surface; other positive factors which may be controlled and which establish the basis for the development strategy of women's football are the facts that the sports clubs play an essential role for the development system of women's football and that the communication and the news are transmitted predominately in the Internet, the channel used by the majority of the stakeholders.

Minimise the main weaknesses: Reduced number of registered players (1974 in season 2012/2013), reduced proportion of young women and strong district asymmetry, reduced offer by the clubs and weak demand by the girls are internal negative elements which may be controlled. The reduced workload (matches, duration of the competitions) of the players and the fact that Portugal went down in FIFA and UEFA rankings are negative factors which should be improved. The lack of gatherings and festivals for the promotion of football among the young women, the lack of knowledge of the guidelines and recruitment policies by the Football District Associations (FDA), the difficulties of association strategic coordination – FPF, FDA, clubs, the difficulty of relationship with School Sport (SS) and University Sport (US) and the lack of promotion in the schools are negative elements likely to be controlled. The lack of information on the places/clubs of offer of women's football, the insufficient incentives, the registration costs, the clubs with financial difficulties, which do not see benefits and do not show priority in the offer of women's football, are factors to be improved. The training offer for coaches was not considered sufficient and accessible. Finally, the communication and visibility elements of women's football are limited and the general attitude is negative, which are factors considered negative, but which may be controlled and improved.

Maximise the main opportunities: The proportion of women in the country has been growing, including higher-educated women, the economic environment through the increase of the GDP, the access of the families to the computer and of the young people to the Internet and the lack of programmes, national and European, for the promotion of gender equality are

generic external possibilities from which women's football can benefit.

The growing participation of women in sport, including organised sport; in the university context, the identification of the more dynamic areas of cooperation with the Higher Education Institutions; in the school context, the existence of common objectives increases the possibility to accomplish projects with the schools of the municipalities identified as being the most dynamic. The existence of potential for a wider media coverage and UEFA programme for the promotion of the development of women's football are positive external elements from which women's football should take advantage.

Minimise the main threats: The actual reduction of the number of women in the younger age categories, the reduction of the families' expenses, the reduction of the investments of the municipalities in matches and sports and the global reduction of the Portuguese advertising market are general external difficulties and limitations which may affect the development of women's football. The sedentariness of the Portuguese population, the reduced level of physical activity of the young women and the loss of share of women's football in the framework of organised sport, aggravated by the feminisation rate inferior than other collective sports make the environment adverse. Besides, the fact that the SS does not cover 7-a-side football in its plan and the disconnection of the FDA and the US are elements to be considered. The media show difficulties in obtaining information on women's football, there is a shortage of supporters and spectators and people do not know the main teams and players; the absence of the main national clubs and the poor promotion of the national teams does not make the sport visible to the Portuguese society, which shows a prejudice associated with the woman's role and her sports participation in football; these are the main specific external obstacles which may affect the development of women's football.

The following relationships result from the analysis made:

- **Core growth:** To promote the access of girls to the practice in any place; To invest in the search for practitioners in grassroots; To penetrate in young age categories; To invest in the relationship with schools; To invest in communication and the image of women's football.
- **To diversify the intervention:** To introduce the activity in new geographic areas; To offer the practice of

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new branches of the game – 3, 5, 7 and 11-a-side football, *skills* in formal and informal spaces; To stimulate the FDA for the purposes and the clubs for a full offer; To stimulate the access of women to management bodies; To create a women's league.

- **To focus on sports performance:** To invest in talent's district representative teams; To improve the preparation and performance of national teams; To invest in human resources to achieve results.

- **To maintain the position:** To maintain the current clubs and teams; To adopt flexible competition schedules and To ensure the continuity of officials and coaches.

As a result of the previous relationships, the following strategic choices were proposed:

I) To increase the number of girls involved in the practice of football with a special focus on the younger age categories, up to 15 years old. To teach the foundations of the sport and to provide less formal ways of competition. To reduce the circumstances that may lead to the abandonment of the current practitioners.

II) To offer challenging activities for the evolution of the players, in terms of training and competition. To improve the quality of the technical framework in training and competition. To provide adequate progress opportunities in terms of the players' physical, technical, tactic and psychological development. To improve the possibilities and the quality of organisation of the competition's schedules.

III) To improve the conditions to reach high performance in the senior age categories at the level of national teams. Through the creation of synergies, to use competitions and sports results to increase the notoriety and social importance of the sport. To improve the quality of organisation of the national seniors competitions. To make the main senior division the reference competition at national level in terms of organisation, promotion, quality of the competitions and unpredictability of the results.

We identify the main purposes and the general goals which we want to reach, what we intend to achieve, what we idealise with the strategic plan for women's football. Simultaneously, the values that must be the mobilising factor of all stakeholders that may in any way intervene, contributing for an increase in the number of young women practicing the sports for whom it may

have a significance in terms of personal development. Thus, the main principles proposed to guide the strategy are:

Mission – To widen the basis of practitioners, to consolidate the training and to maximise sports performance; **Vision** - To duplicate the number of players of women's football and to be among the twenty first positions of UEFA ranking until 2020; and as guiding principle for the **Values** – To guarantee equality of conditions for a larger number of girls and women to have access to the practice of women's football.

In relation to the achievement of the Vision, three strategic objectives were proposed: **Strategic objective (SO1)** To enlarge the Basis of Practitioners, starting with the number of players registered at the FPF, having as reference season 2012/2013, 1974 players, we intend, as first objective, to have in 2020 approximately 4000 players regularly practicing women's football in Portugal.

Strategic objective (SO2) To consolidate the Training, To improve the quality of the technical framework in training and competition. To provide progress opportunities in terms of the players' physical, technical, tactic and psychological development. To provide the organisation of competitions in terms of associations and inter-associations in at least 12 district associations, in a stable, appealing manner and with quality. **Strategic objective (SO3)** To maximise High Performance, To offer the conditions for the national teams to participate in the main European competition, in their respective age categories, going beyond the qualifying stages and to be among the twenty first position in UEFA ranking until 2020. To make the senior main division the reference competition at national level in terms of organisation, to create conditions allowing the qualification of a Portuguese team for the group stage of the main UEFA competition.

In order to achieve the strategic objectives 6 Programmes were created: **Programme (P1)** To improve the intervention of the Clubs; **Programme (P2)** to inject dynamism to the District Associations; **Programme (P3)** To potentiate Performance; **Programme (P4)** Municipalities Promoting Women's football; **Programme (P5)** To promote Women's football in the Elementary Schools; **Programme (P6)** To involve School and University Sport.

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DEFINITION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

VISION

TO DUPLICATE THE NUMBER OF FEMALE FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND TO BE AMONG THE TWENTY FIRST POSITIONS OF UEFA RANKING UNTIL 2020

Strategic
Objective (OB3)
**Maximise
the High
Performance**

To maximise High Performance, To offer the conditions for the national teams to participate in the main European competition, in their respective age categories, going beyond the qualifying stages and to be among the twenty first position in UEFA ranking until 2020.

To make the senior main division the reference competition at national level in terms of organisation, to create conditions allowing the qualification of a Portuguese team for the group stage of the main UEFA competition.

Strategic
Objective (OB2)
**Consolidate
Training**

To consolidate the Training, To improve the quality of the technical framework in training and competition. To provide progress opportunities in terms of the players' physical, technical, tactic and psychological development. To provide the organisation of competitions in terms of associations and inter-associations in at least 12 district associations, in a stable, appealing manner and with quality.

Strategic
Objective (OB1)
**Enlarge the
Basis of
Practitioners**

To enlarge the Basis of Practitioners, starting with the number of players registered at the FPF, having as reference season 2012/2013, 1974 players, we intend, as first objective, to have in 2020 approximately 4000 players regularly practicing women's football in Portugal.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

VISION

TO DUPLICATE THE NUMBER OF FEMALE FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND TO BE AMONG THE TWENTY FIRST POSITIONS OF UEFA RANKING UNTIL 2020

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

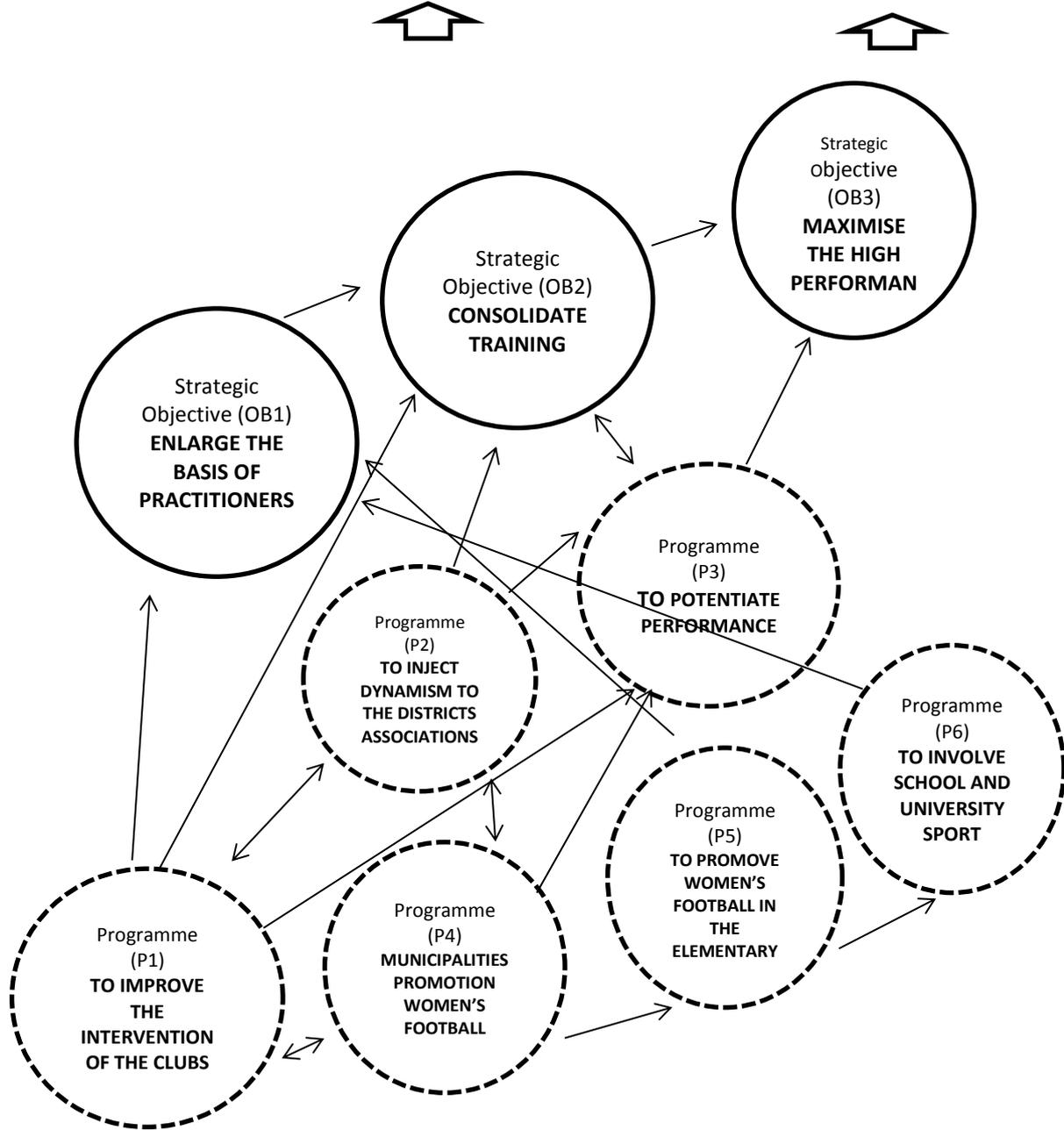
LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
Who leads and is responsible for executing activities

FORMATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES
To whom and what kind of training is needed

COMMUNICATION
Targets and communication supports to promotion activities

FINANCING
Contribute to the sustainability of clubs

SPORTS FACILITIES
Provide conditions to train and play



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WHAT ARE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE ACTIVITIES AND THE POSSIBLE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS?

PROGRAMME (P1): TO IMPROVE THE INTERVENTION OF THE CLUBS

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: PUTTING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN SPORTS OFFERS FROM CLUBS

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Promote the creation of a Sports Project for the development of the Women's Football club;
- Create a structure within the club for the technical operation of the female football manager and giving priority to the recruitment of coaches;
- Have information to facilitate the access of girls to women's football, through the promotion and dissemination of activities, aimed at attracting and retaining players;
- Prepare and implement a monthly plan visits to schools (5-9 years old) with the participation of coaches and ambassador of football;
- Co-organize with local City Council a football festival for children;
- Set with equity timetables and training and game spaces between the male and female teams;
- Involve, attracting and selecting mothers of players to join the club's governing bodies, or actively participate in the women's football department;
- Provide improvements to athletic facilities, including the locker room.

PROGRAMME (P2): TO INJECT DYNAMISM TO THE DISTRICT ASSOCIATIONS

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: PUTTING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL ON THE AGENDA CONCERNS THE FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT OF DISTRICT ASSOCIATIONS

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Each Football District Associations (FDA) is for a four-year horizon, a District Project for the Promotion of Women's Soccer;
- Appoint a District Ambassador to undertake to support the promotion of the sport;
- Establish an annual premium for valuing the entity or person that stands out in creating conditions for the promotion of activities for the young practitioners;
- Conduct gatherings / soccer tournaments and recovery activities of individual technique through "circuits Skills" in bands up to U15, where one party has games for girls only;
- Provides a reduction in registration fees for teams, players and coaches.

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PROGRAMME (P3): TO POTENTIATE PERFORMANCE

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF GAMES AND PROMOTE COMPETITIVE QUALITY AT YOUTH LEVEL

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Create and District Championships / or Interdistrict (for geographical convenience) at all levels of training;
- Promote interdistrict level of youth selections tournaments, by region;
- Maintain the National Tournament interassociations U16;
- Establish a National Tournament interassociations U15;
- Establishing Training Centres in Football District Associations (FDA) without offering women's football.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: TO IMPROVE THE COMPETITIVE PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL TEAMS

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Set the game model that the FPF seeks to incorporate guidance on training and playing for national teams;
- Increase the days of preparation (stages) of the national teams;
- Increase participation in games/international tournaments;
- Promote the hiring of national coaches on a full time basis;
- Establish a program of sports performance optimization aimed at the enhancement of specific dimensions of development (predominantly volitional and motor skills) of high potential players for national teams.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF GAMES AND PROMOTE COMPETITIVE QUALITY AT SENIOR LEVEL. ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Create a Super Cup Women's Football. Realization of the match between National Champion and winner of Portugal Cup (1st game of the next season);
- Create a National Football League Female. Promote inclusion through tender/call for teams from major national clubs;
- Create II League (Division II).

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PROGRAMME (P4) MUNICIPALITIES PROMOTING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: EMPOWERING MUNICIPALITIES TO PEDFF VALUES AND ESTABLISHING A NETWORK OF CITIES INTERESTED IN USING FOOTBALL AS AN EDUCATIONAL MEDIUM FOR EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN AND REDUCING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEX

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Involve the central government and the municipalities' communities for the purpose of the national plan of gender equality and the contribution that women's football can take to achieve this goal;
- Establish a premium for valuing the activity of the municipality for the development of women's football;
- Establish, in municipalities with schools/academies of sport training, women's teams in proportion to the number of male;
- Encourage the participation of coaches and mothers as responsible for girls teams;
- Regular assignment schedules, use of sporting facilities, so that there is an equal criterion in its use for boys and girls.

PROGRAMME (P5): TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (6-10 YEARS OLD)

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: ADVANCING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN SCHOOLS OF THE 1ST CYCLE OF BASIC EDUCATION

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Provide a Municipality Project dynamics of women's football in schools in the 1st cycle, with the participation of FDA and local clubs;
- Conduct football festival for children;
- Allocation of the annual premium: School + (diploma and board to school director) – To the school principal with greater dynamism and participation rate of children in festivals.

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PROGRAMME (P6) TO INVOLVE SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY SPORT

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: INCREASE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SCHOOL (10-17 YEARS OLD)

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Operationalizing a cooperation agreement with the Central Office of School Sports;
- The FPF co-organizes a National School Tournament, sponsored by a brand that identifies with the age group 10 to 15 years old;
- Each FDA encourages participation in school sports clubs in his competitive frameworks;
- The FPF and FDA produce an annual plan visits to schools with the participation of national coaches and ambassadors;
- The FPF promotes the organization of the National Women's Football Festival articulating calendar of university and school national championships with the timing of the FPF and must occur in the same city and date, making this moment a party of women's football, which must include a date annual coaches, referees, officials, etc.. (Workshops and sharing of best practices).

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES: GROWING UP IN HIGHER EDUCATION (+ 18 years old)

ACTIVITIES - what to do:

- Operationalizing a collaboration protocol with Academic Federation of University Sports (AFUS);
- The FDA respective FPF and produce an annual plan visits to centers of higher education with greater dynamism;
- The FPF directly (or via the FDA or club) launches / create women's soccer academies in higher education;
- Integrate college football teams in competitive frameworks.

Thank you for your attention and cooperation!

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