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# Checkland's Subsystem Methodology: Problems and Solutions to Nigerian Premier Football League

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### Abstract

This study is a simple application of Checkland soft system methodology to identify and proffer solutions to Nigerian premier football league to make it a world-class league. The soft system is a seven-stage tool in Management Information System for identifying, analyzing and proffering solution in Management. The study identified five main problems and each problem broken down into its root causes and proffer solutions in order to have a major improvement and more investment in football and allied businesses in Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

The Nigeria Premier League is the highest level of domestic Nigerian football. It is fed into by the Nigeria National League (NNL). It is organized by the League Management Company.

On May 2013, a Nigerian telecommunications company - Globacom signed a three-year contract with the league to become its title sponsor. Thus, the league is now officially known as the Glo Premier League. In 2012, the NPL was ranked as the best in Africa and 24th best in the world by the IFFHS, the rating puts it in a spot above the Scottish Premier League for the year.

The league was founded in 1972 with six teams. On 12 May 1990 at the Onikan Stadium Lagos, the league was rechristened the "Professional League" with a goal to modernize the game and make clubs self-sufficient (Macaulay, 2012).

"The League Management Company was formed in 2012 following the collapse of the Nigeria Premier League organized by the Nigeria Football League (NFL). The Nigerian Football Association now Nigerian Football Federation, owner of the Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL) issued the League Management Company the license to organize and regulate the top tier league to meet global technical and commercial standards" (Walker, 2008).

"The League Management Company instituted match indemnities for match officials, sanctions on clubs who fail to pay salaries and allowances to their players" (Supersport, 2013).

In 2015, the League Management Company solicited financial support from the government in order to "upgrade existing grounds and provision of required broadcast equipment and facilities in the stadiums".

“From 1999–2007, there was an end of season Championship called the "Super Four". The top four teams would play a round-robin mini-league at a neutral site to determine the league champion. The Super Four is now a pre-season tournament featuring the top four teams of the prior year” (Complete sport, 2008).

“After the 2006 competition, the league changed its calendar to more closely match the common European regular season structure (starting around August and ending around May)” (Complete sport, 2008).

The beautiful football league is one that creates some form of entertainment to football lovers. Various clubs are duly registered in the league and compete on a seasonal basis for the ultimate top spot on the league with a price. The league comprises of 20 clubs in each season (year), competing for the ultimate title.

The league has the potential to create entertainment, fun, engage the youths and distract them from all forms of social vices, projects the image of the country internationally, attract investors into the sports, create employment via all its activities, develop football in Nigeria and many other benefits there on.

However, contrary to the enormous potential benefits in the game of football and specifically the Nigerian people. There seems to be a total decay, stagnation and underdevelopment of the league. The sports is not effectively promoted, projected and programmed in Nigeria. This explains the awful performance of Nigerian clubs in continental and other mundials, poor transition of players from the league to the National teams, foreign clubs, etc., poor revenue accruing to the league, inability to attract top flight players like Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, etc., to the league and numerous other negative outcomes from the league, due to its abysmal performance.

In this study therefore, we will use the Checkland's Sub system methodology to analyze and evaluate the problems in the Nigerian Football League in view of proffering solution to the problems and actualizing a sustainable development for the league.

## 2. Checkland Soft System Methodology

Soft System Methodology (SSM) is an approach to organizational process modeling (business process modeling) and it can be used both for general problem solving and in the management of change. It was developed in England by academics at the University of Lancaster Systems Department through a ten year action research program (Patching, 1990).

The methodology was developed from earlier systems engineering approaches, primarily by Peter Checkland in the year 1960 and colleagues such as Brian Wilson. The primary use of SSM is in the analysis of complex situations where there are divergent views about the definition of the problem.

These situations are "soft problems" such as: How to improve health services delivery? How to manage disaster planning? How to manage the scarce resources of the country? What to do about joblessness amongst young people?

In such situations even the actual problem to be addressed may not be easy to agree upon. To intervene in such situations the soft systems approach uses the notion of a "system" as an interrogative device that will enable debate amongst concerned parties. In its 'classic' form the methodology consists of seven steps, with initial appreciation of the problem situation leading to the modeling of several human activity systems that might be thought relevant to the problem situation. By discussions and exploration of these, the decision makers will arrive at accommodations (or, exceptionally, at consensus) over what kind of changes may be systemically desirable and feasible in the situation ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft\\_systems\\_methodology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_systems_methodology)).

In the view of Checkland (2001), the seven steps/stages of the soft system methodology includes:

1. Problem situation unstructured: Here the problem is there but the root cause of the problem is not known. Simply put, the symptoms of the problems are felt.
2. Problem situation analyzed: Here the cause of the problem is known but the rich picture is not known
3. Root definition/Relevant system: This is where we define the root cause of the problem
4. Conceptual skill: Here we develop the model
5. Compare stage 2 and 4 to know if it can be used
6. Feasible change(s)
7. Implementation

### 2.1. Stage 1: Problem Situation Unstructured

The following are the pointers and symptoms of the decay in the Nigerian Premier League.

- i. Poor turnout of football fans.
- ii. Poor performance of clubs
- iii. Absence of team from matches
- iv. Poor officiating
- v. Abysmal performance of Nigerian clubs in continental competitions.

### 2.2. Stage 2: Problem Situation Analysis

- i. Causes of poor turnout of fans
  - a. Poor publicity: There is poor publicity of the Nigerian Football league, only few local radio and television stations carry live matches and only few local stations talk about matches in the Nigerian Football league
  - b. Match Venue
    1. Proximity of match venues to fans: How close is the match venue to the fans?
    2. Safety (hooliganism; fans attacking visiting teams and sometimes home team, even injuring players and officials in the process, crowd trouble, etc) (Macaulay, 2012).

- c. Infrastructure (lack of convenience at match venues and shade for fans, poor football pitch, lack of sophisticated equipment like goal line technology).
- d. Irregular match scheduling: Shifting of match date irrationally.
- ii. Causes of poor performance of Nigerian clubs.
  - a. Poor management (underequipped coaches, inexperience coaches and players, absence of team psychologists, non-football friendly pitches, poor documentation and unguarded monitoring on players transfers and contracts with respective clubs; non or late payment of players and official salaries and bonuses, allowances and sign-on fees, lack of proper medical facilities/attention, etc).
- iii. Causes of absence of team from matches
  - a. Bad road network: This is where the team find it difficult to meet up for match because of bad road
  - b. Lack of proactive logistics planning
  - c. Insecurity on highways and certain match venues e.g. some northern parts of the country.
- iv. Causes of poor officiating
  - a. Accusations and allegations of match fixing: when the match official gets a filler that he is been accused of match fixing, it could affect his psychology, thus affecting his performance on the field of play.
  - b. Bribery of match officials: this is where the match officials are being compromised with money and other incentives.
  - c. Favouritism by match officials: This is where the match official is bias in his decision either because he favours one club more than the other or because he is interested in one or more players on the pitch.
  - d. Inadequate training of referees: The Nigerian football league does not regularly provide training for referees. This training is essential to bring them up to speed with the global standard and to increase their efficiency in the discharge of their duties.
  - e. Little or no application of modern football technology e.g. goal line technology.
- v. Causes of the abysmal performance of Nigerian clubs in continental competitions.
  - a. Inadequate preparation: Poor team preparation for the competition.
  - b. Players Fatigue: players tend to be stressed out or tired when matches are scheduled too close. Long distance travelling can also cause players fatigue.
  - c. Lack of players motivation: when players are poorly motivated. When players do not get Match bonuses and other incentives.
  - d. Spying on/scouting opponents (Prozone)
  - e. Dearth of adequate coordination between the Nigerian Premier League Clubs and other football academies scattered all around the country (Post Nigeria, 2015).

### 2.3. Stage 3: Root Definition of Relevant System

Activities under this stage will be carried out using

CATWOE (Customer, Actors, Transformation, Weltanschauung or Worldview, Owners, Environment).

Customers - Who are the beneficiaries of the highest level business process and how does the issue affect them?

Actors - Who is involved in the situation, who will be involved in implementing solutions and what will impact their success?

Transformation Process - What is the transformation that lies at the heart of the system?

World View - What is the big picture and what are the wider impacts of the issue?

Owner - Who owns the process or situation being investigated and what role will they play in the solution?

Environmental Constraints - What are the constraints and limitations that will impact the solution and its success?

Source: Wilson and Haperen (2015)

- i CUSTOMER - Fans and investors
- ii ACTORS - Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), League Management Company, football club associations, referees, footballers (players), sponsor (GLOBACOM, DSTV, N.T.A., State government)
- iii TRANSFORMATION - To use knowledge, skills and experience to prepare a competitive and entertaining football league that delivers the most appropriate solution for the premier league.
- iv WELTANSCHAUUNG OR WORLDVIEW  
This is the basis for the justification of the existence of the system (Nigeria Premier League). It justifies the heavy investment (transformation) into the system.  
In this instance, football promotes national unity, contributes to the G.D.P of Nigeria through robust investment by private investors, creates employment opportunities, reduces youth involvement in crimes and all sorts of vices, attracts other forms of investment, lays the foundation for Nigeria national teams to harvest talents from the premier league, etc.
- v OWNERS - Government and private investors
- vi ENVIRONMENT - Government policies, fans expectation, competitive nature of other leagues, confederation of African football (CAF).

### 2.4. Stage 4: Conceptual Model

See Figure 1

### 2.5. Stage 5: Comparing Stage 2 with Stage 4

Given the obvious nature of the challenges bedeviling Nigeria Premier League and the countless number of researches into them viz the success of other leagues who have implemented the suggestions proffered in stage 4 above; there is no doubt that the conceptual framework will perfectly fit into the needed solutions for the problems analysed.

### 2.6. Stage 6

Given our earlier assertion in stage 5, the framework will be implemented skipping stage 6

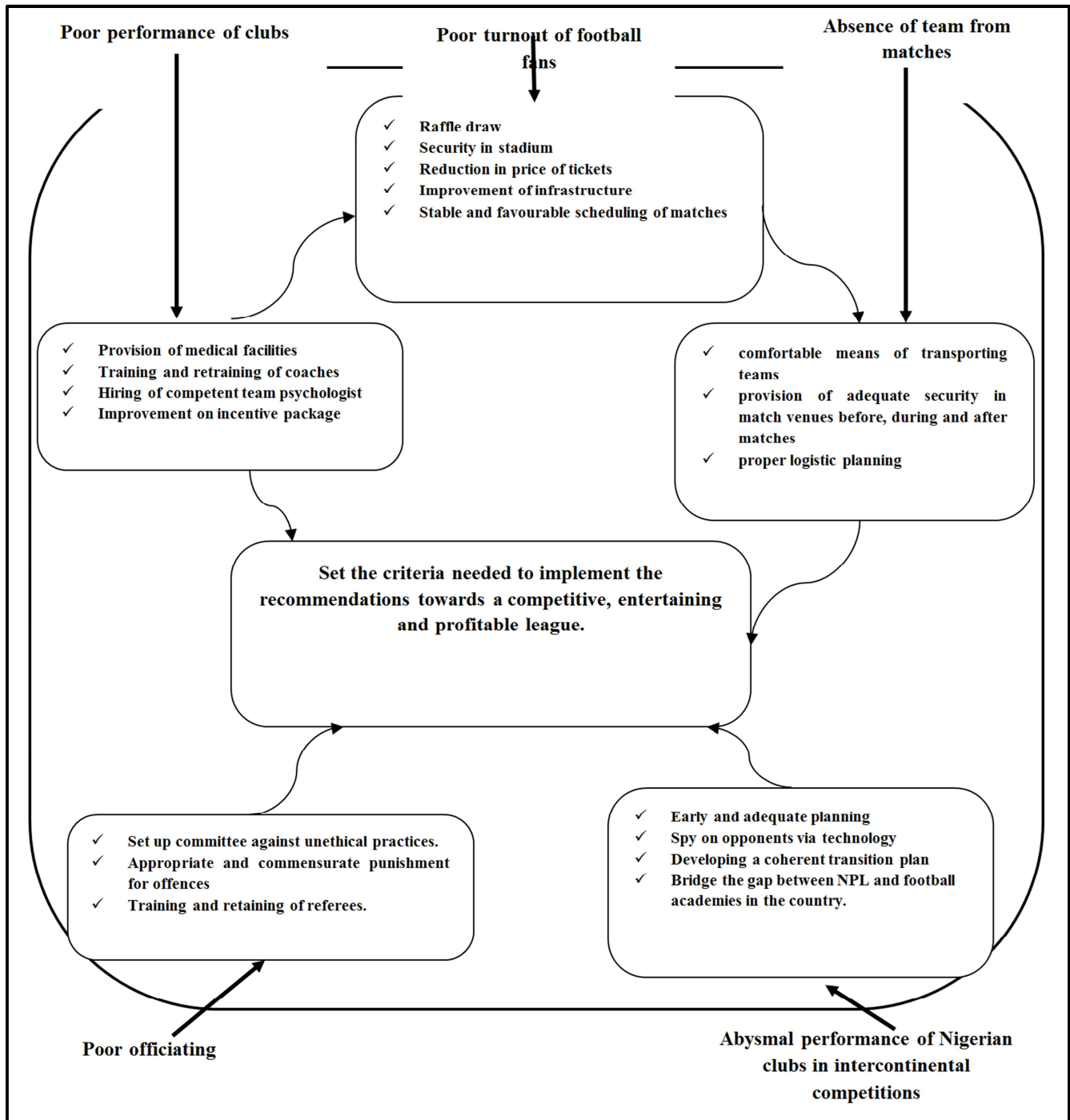


Figure 1. Conceptual model of solutions to the Nigerian Premier League.

### 3. Analysis of Results (See Stage 4)

From this study, certain problems were identified that impede the growth of Nigerian football league and as such, affect the game of football generally in Nigeria such that the rating of Nigerian football worldwide is encouraging, considering the class of great football player we have produced in Nigeria before.

The identified problems in this study as shown in

conceptual framework includes poor performance of clubs, poor turnout of football fans, absence of football team from matches, poor officiating and abysmal performance of Nigerian clubs in international competitions. All these problems put together did not encourage much investment in that area and associated business, too. Therefore, with each of the problems identified, possible solutions were suggested (see conceptual framework).

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation (See Stage 5)

With proper implementation of all the suggested solutions under each identified problem, there will be tremendous improvement in football business, more engagement of the youth in football and other allied business. This study is a one-stop approach to solving the problems of Nigerian football league and other African football league but with the understanding of the country football and other related environments.

Knowing fully well that this is a Management Information System tool it can also be applied in similar issues trying to avoid the waste of time and fund in setting up committees to look into issues that can be solved with a tap of finger.

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