

Beautiful game open to women

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A new non-profit organisation, Girls and Football South Africa (GFSA), promises to kick down gender barriers in the beautiful game and give more South African women the opportunity to participate in Africa's biggest sport.



The organisation conducts workshops that combine life skills training and football at a grassroots level, to empower girls between the ages of nine and 18. (Images: Girls and Football South Africa)

Founded in April 2012, GFSA encourages the development of girls in South Africa through sport, media and education.

GFSA involves both the local and global community by encouraging sport as a developmental tool for girls and by raising awareness about important issues that influence the lives of girls in South Africa.

"We believe football is a source of empowerment for girls, equipping them with a strong sense of body ownership and promoting self-esteem," said director and founder of GFSA, Jos Dirkx.

Frequently, leadership qualities highlighted by access to sport are allocated solely to the development of boys, explained Dirkx.

"This significantly impedes the development of girls, resulting in an imbalance in South African society."

The organisation conducts workshops that combine life skills training and football at a grassroots level, to empower girls between the ages of nine and 18.

"By linking our participants with strong role models such as the players of the South African national women's team, we inspire the young girls to build a better future," said Dirkx.

The GFSA has five different programmes including drills and skills for coaches; One Day girls programming, safe spaces

and making media work. These programmes are based on resources from leading health, sport and gender equality organisations such as Women Win, the UN, Filles d'Action and the World Health Organisation.

Getting women into football stadiums

The initiative was partly inspired by the hype surrounding men's football leading up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, which was held in South Africa. Following the football extravaganza, GFSA decided to conduct research on women's football on the continent and South Africa in particular.

Through informal key informant interviews with female football players, the organisation investigated reasons behind the exclusion of women from the sporting arena.

Its research findings revealed that, across the board, female footballers shared similarly worrisome stories such as lack of access to funds and limited resources for women's sports. The organisation also learned that women faced stigma as players and were discouraged to play football because it is seen as a "man's game".

Disappointed but undaunted by its findings, GFSA contacted Banyana Banyana, the South African national women's team, to gain deeper understanding of their position on the field as female footballers and to learn more about the challenges female football players face.

In addition to interviewing professional footballers, the organisation also conducted an evaluation in two Western Cape communities, Kayamandi and Lynedoch, inquiring of principals, teachers and girls about the state of football and their access to the sport.

Raising awareness

Since its launch in April, GFSA has used various media channels and social media networks to raise awareness nationally and internationally on women's sports in South Africa.

In 2011, the organisation produced a documentary *Can I Kick It?*, which won Best Documentary at the international Festival du TV et Cinema in Beirut, Lebanon.

Produced by Dirkx, the documentary tells the untold story of women's football in South Africa, and features interviews with amateur and professional female and male footballers in the country. It highlights the challenges faced by the female footballers, particularly those in Banyana Banyana.

GFSA has also produced a variety of short videos on other topics important to women's football - including its video on corrective rape - where the role of football in creating a safe space for girls and women in South Africa is explored with a specific focus on the prevalence of corrective rape in the country.

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