

## Female Footballers Matter: Timeslive Coverage of South Africa's Women's Football Team Performance At 2023 FIFA World Cup

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### Abstract

*South Africa's national women's football team, as in many countries, has for many years been overshadowed by their male counterparts in terms of remuneration and recognition despite enjoying more success. This paper analysed eleven articles on South Africa's national women's football team performance at the Women's World Cup which appeared in TimesLIVE e-newspaper between 15 June 2023 and 17 August 2023 which was a period before, during and after the tournament. These reports were purposively sampled and analysed to understand their success in exposing differential treatment of women in relation to men's football. Intersectionality, a theory which recognizes women's different experiences based on race, class, education, sexuality among other categorizations, was employed as a lens through which to conduct the study. Critical discourse analysis was a methodology used to analyse the use of language in the selected articles. Findings revealed that TimesLIVE provided the team with a positive coverage which, even though biased, augured well for the recognition and empowerment of women. The team's media coverage also exposed differential treatment of women's football in relation to men's football which resulted in a positive response from the government and businesses to address the raised issues.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Equality, Change Agents, Linguistics, Media, Women Football.*

### Introduction

The development of sport is intrinsically linked to its history. Globally, the growth of women's football was, for many years, stifled by patriarchal societies which strengthened male supremacy (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). In the 1970s, the sport became more visible in western countries but gained global popularity in the early 1990s. Women's national football teams have fared better than their male counterparts though they continue to earn less in 'developed' countries like the United States (Wambach, 2017) and England (Mead, 2022) as well as in 'developing' countries like South Africa (Engh and Potgieter, 2018) and Nigeria (Okeleji, 2023). Women's relentless quest for recognition is, however, finally yielding positive results. Media coverage has improved in slant and frequency; advertisers are increasingly engaging female footballers for endorsements and corporates and governments are more forthcoming with funding (Nsibande, 2021). The media reflect society's perceptions which explains the shift from sexist and underrepresentation of women's football in the early years to a more positive framing in recent times. This becomes evident when viewed through the field of linguistics to assess the use of language and gender representation in the media (Hussain et al., 2023). The media have proved to be a transformational agent in portraying female footballers as role models and a force to be reckoned with. In this manner, journalists contribute to the exposure of gender inequality and thereby convincing the public on the importance of female sports persons (Lulu, Racman and Manabilang, 2022).

Though black women were not barred when South Africa's first women's football association, the South African Women's Football Association (SAWFA) was established by white women in 1974, their participation was curtailed by other challenges which they grappled with during apartheid (Pelak, 2010; Engh and Potgieter, 2018). Sikes (2016) notes that female soccer players had slim chances of pursuing professional careers and only male footballers could aspire to play overseas. Towards the end of apartheid, the South African Women's National Football team, "Banyana Banyana", (the girls), hereafter Banyana, was established in 1993 consisting of players from different races (Engh, 2010). Two decades into the post-

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apartheid era, South African women's football endured challenges like structural marginalization, inadequate human and financial resources and media stereotypes. Misconceptions about female footballers were manifested through homophobia, sexual abuse, differential treatment from men's teams among others. This poor treatment of women footballers is typical of gender inequalities women suffer in many aspects of their lives (Tovmasyan and Minasyan, 2019).

However, Banyana have consistently registered impressive achievements which include qualification to the Olympics and the FIFA Women's World Cup twice, winning the Cosafa Cup a record seven times and WAFCON once (South African Football Association, SAFA, 2023a). In addition, several Banyana players have achieved numerous accolades. Noko Matlou won the African Women's Player of the Year in 2008, a feat which was emulated by Thembi Kgatlana a decade later. Kgatlana also won the top goal scorer and player of the tournament awards at WAFCON 2018 (de Villiers, 2023). In October 2014, Portia Modise became the first African player, male or female, to score 100 goals (Solms, 2021).

Banyana boast several players attached to top international clubs in its fold. The duo of Noko Matlou and Ode Fulutudilu plays for SD Eibar and Real Betis, respectively in the Spanish Primera Division (SAFA, 2023b). Former Spanish champions Atlético Madrid player, Thembi Kgatlana is attached to Racing Louisville in the United States (de Villiers, 2023), Jermaine Seoposenwe, plies her trade in the Portuguese league for Sporting Braga, former AC Milan player Refiloe Jane turns out for Italian Serie A club US Sassuolo (Mollo, 2023) and Linda Motlhalo is attached to Djurgardens in Sweden. Nonetheless, "lurking behind these favourable statistics and the pretence of new developmental strategies sits football's cultural millstone, weighing down social progression and limiting the credibility afforded to the game (Pielichaty, 2020, p.788). Modise exemplified the paradox of women's football as she revealed that at the time that she reached a milestone 100th goal, she was living in a shack (Ndhlovu, 2020).

It is problematic that women's national football teams, the world over, have a history of racial and/or gender discrimination. The salaries and recognition of female players is still a concern as it became evident in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup when, especially African teams protested low and non-payment of their salaries that had been going on for months. This happens despite female players tending to perform better than their male counterparts who even get paid for not playing, as long as they are in the travelling team. These factors expose what Vyas-Doorgapersad (2023) refers to as 'gender gap', 'gender discrimination', and 'the politics of gender' that are used in society to treat men and women separately. In recognition of the role of language and gender in exposing differences and inequalities in society (Hussain et al. 2023), there is a need to employ linguistics in the form of critical discourse analysis to examine the extent to which the media contributes towards redress. The media can influence the public's perceptions by presenting information in a certain manner through their manipulation of linguistics (Roya & Ngcobo, 2023; Hasan & Dutta, 2019; Dutta et al., 2020). Newspapers can deliberately structure or frame news in a manner that influences public perceptions and culture (Wood et al., 2018), such as contributing to the elimination of gender discrimination (Hussain et al., 2023).

Hence, the objectives of the study are: To analyse the presentation of female football players in the TimesLIVE e-newspaper in South Africa before, during and after the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. The purpose is to examine the impact made by the media in transforming gender bias.

### *Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality*

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework which is credited to Crenshaw' (1989) article, where she dismisses the notion that women can only be discriminated because of race or sex. She illustrates this using intersection as a metaphor for the convergence of two or more factors which reinforce marginalization of certain groups. Crenshaw (1989, p. 40) argues that focusing on privileged members of groups "marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination". Like white women, Crenshaw (1989, p.149) further argues, black women are discriminated against based on gender and, like black men, they are segregated along racial lines. Nonetheless, unlike their counterparts who suffer one form of marginalization in the main, women experience a combination of discrimination based on race and sex. In the same vein, Hooks (2015) argues

that black women are peculiar because they are oppressed yet they are not oppressors. They are unlike white women who are oppressed as women, but they are oppressors as whites, just as black men are oppressed due to race but are oppressors because of their gender.

In addition, Crenshaw (1989) avers that, despite feminism's bias towards white women, it relies on experiences of groups which it marginalizes. She cites an example of Sojourner Truth's "Aint I a woman" which has been appropriated by feminists. Yet, when Truth uttered these words at the Women's Rights Conference in Akron, Ohio in 1851 in response to white chauvinists, white women sought to silence her fearing that she could inspire a shift from suffrage to emancipation of slaves. Crenshaw (1989) bemoans the fact that feminism not only facilitates oppression of black women but claims to represent interests of all women. In her other publication, Crenshaw (1991) clarifies that her reference to gender and race does not mean these are the only factors that affect women but there are others and there are cases in which the two may be excluded. She adds that people who experience exclusion because of a combination of many forms of segregation are better placed to offer solutions to segregation. As in the US, differences based on race and class in South Africa means female footballers "do not necessarily share the same experiences or form a homogenous grouping" (Pelak, 2010, p.63).

Though Crenshaw (1989) initially applied intersectionality to legal matters, such as workplace-related and domestic abuse, it is applicable to any social context. In this regard, Atewologun (2020, p1) states that intersectionality:

"...enhances analytical sophistication and offers theoretical explanations of the ways in which heterogeneous members of specific groups (such as women) might experience the workplace differently depending on their ethnicity, sexual orientation, and/or class and other social locations."

Intersectionality does not conform to conventional ways of making sense of the world as it is able to accommodate even seemingly divergent identities (Simpkins, 2019). Hooks (2015) avers that feminism can only be optimized if it recognises differences between experiences of women from different groups. In other words, a theory should transform people into agents of social transformation (Hooks, 2015). Davis (1990, p.3) opines that successful people, such as journalists, have an obligation to uplift others: "We must always attempt to lift as we climb". Even feminism, which is associated with a rejection of men, has adjusted to contemporary realities.

## Literature Review

Doehler (2023, p.2) asserts that coverage of women's football has been "consistently poor compared to men's football". Pelak (2010) avers that coverage of tournaments such as the World Cup stimulate interest in the game among young girls. However, Pannenberg (2010, p 6) opines that "football is not value-free" because it is influenced by political, religious, social, cultural and economic factors. Gender bias in soccer literature "reinforces 'men's soccer' as the standard and 'women's soccer' as the other" (Pelak, 2006, p.372). Sexually objectifying women militates against efforts to promote women's football (Pannenberg, 2010; Sikes, 2016, p.322; Randell et al., 2021). Media coverage of female footballers in Germany following the 2011 World Cup was 'gendered', with an overt emphasis on "femininity and beauty" (Pfister, 2015). Chiweshe and Choto (2022, p.1) observe that women footballers are stereotypically depicted as "ignorant girlfriends or wives of 'real' (male) fans" and "constantly have to defend their 'fan credentials' whilst navigating male-dominated spaces". Alegi (2020, p.559) calls for a shift from a "master narrative" of the history of women's football in South Africa to include other sources and dimensions.

Notwithstanding the influence of gender rights activism towards the development of women's football in the 1970s and 1980s, Taylor (2017) observes that studies remained few because historians were ridiculed in France, Germany and Italy until these countries hosted the World Cup which brought conferences and publications. In Brazil, media compared players in amateur leagues to beasts, describing them as "masculine" though players in elite leagues were treated somewhat respectably (Almeida cited in Martins, Santos Silva and Vasquez, 2021, p.6). Ngako (2022) adds that the sport's growth "is not by fluke; women football is on the rise, women football is now a force to be reckoned with". Similarly, Pope (2023) observes

that this “has not happened overnight”, underlining the arduous journey that women’s football has travelled to be where it is. Increased positive coverage of women’s football propelled women’s soccer to an upward trajectory (Rao and Rodny-Gumede, 2020). The media have covered and improved perceptions towards women’s football (Pope, 2023). Pope, Allison and Petty (2023) cite a decrease in “infantilizing terms like “girls” and “ladies” whose counterparts (“boys” and “gentlemen”) are rarely applied to men” (p.8). Similarly, Pelak (2010) observes that women’s involvement in “female typed sports” like netball were more ‘acceptable’ than their participation in “male-typed sports” like soccer. Devonport et al., (2019, p.1131) substantiate this by stating that “females in ‘masculine’ sports (e.g., soccer) are more likely to experience gender role conflict than those in ‘feminine’ appropriate (e.g., netball) sports”. This takes the form of labelling, for instance, a female player being branded “a tomboy during adolescence, but turning to terms such as butch, lesbian or dyke, all used derogatorily, upon reaching adulthood” (Devonport et al., 2019, p.1131).

In view of the contempt with which women’s football has been treated, it is not surprising that in many countries female teams are paid less than their male counterparts. Nsibande (2021) also notes the need for more funding to be directed towards development of women’s football. However, poor remuneration is a global problem for women’s footballers. The 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup exposed several football associations’ ill-treatment of their national teams. When Zambia women’s national team “Shepolopolo” players protested, some of them were still owed appearances fees from the Olympics, which were held two years earlier (Aarons and Molina, 2023). Though they honoured their fixtures, Nigeria Women’s national team, ‘The Super Falcons’ protested over outstanding salaries. By then, coach Randy Waldrum was owed seven months’ pay and some players’ outstanding salaries stretched to two years (Ransom, 2023). Madumise-Pajibo (2023) notes that SAFA only discussed payment of World Cup contracts, bonuses and aligning female players’ salaries with their male counterparts. SAFA’s national executive committee (NEC) branded Banyana players as “greedy,” “unreasonable” and “ridiculous” for demanding their due payments (Madumise-Pajibo, 2023).

#### *Methodology and Research Methods*

We deployed purposive sampling, a non-probability method which is used to exclude variables that are not related to the study. This sampling approach is informed by the premise that “given the aims and objectives of the study, specific kinds of people may hold different and important views about the ideas and issues at question and therefore need to be included in the sample” (Campbell et al., 2020, p.652). With this in mind, we typed keywords such as “TimesLIVE’s coverage/ reportage of women’s football in South Africa/Banyana Banyana’s performance at the World Cup 2023” in the Google search engine. A host of results appeared but our scope guided our selection. We excluded all results which fell outside 2023 or were published in publications other than TimesLIVE. Our choice of TimesLIVE was informed by the fact that it was South Africa’s first interactive publication because it pioneered real time collaboration between reporters on the news scene, in the newsroom and an online team in bringing regular updates to readers. Ultimately, we settled for eleven articles which we adjudged to be most appropriate to the study. These articles provide voices from stakeholders of South Africa’s senior national women’s football team which include reporters, supporters, critics, socialites, government officials, Banyana players and the coach, Desire Ellis, among others.

Linguistics runs parallel with the issues of feminism and gender equality that seek to highlight women’s profession, identity and rights (Hussain et al., 2023). In the same breath, critical discourse analysis (CDA) which facilitates analyses of texts based on presentation, choice of words and their frequency to establish implications thereof, was used as the methodology. CDA provides an in-depth analysis that is required in a qualitative study such as this. Language is a key aspect of discourse according to Foucault (1975) whose *ovre* has proved timeless. Habermas (1971), who is widely regarded as Foucault’s nemesis propounded the concept of communicative action which is premised on the notion that players in the society aim to achieve common ground through argument, agreement and collaboration instead of pursuing individual goals. From the aforesaid, one can see that, contrary to what some scholars say Habermas and Foucault concur that language is a key component of communication though they differ in that the former is more inclined to its use in reaching a compromise whereas the latter regards it as an arena for power struggles between



different classes of people. It is our submission that adoption of one view does not preclude use of the other as the two scholars' ideas can be blended to bring academically robust analysis.

For ease of presentation on our part as researchers and enhancing understanding among the readers, we used subheadings to explain in detailed form, themes that we observed. Each of these themes was explained to show implications of their inclusion and recurrence in the articles under review. Codes were ascribed to the eleven articles in a sequential format that depends on their dates of publication. For instance, since the first article was published on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2023, it assumes the tag A1 (a shortened form of Article 1). On the extreme end of the spectrum, the last article which was published on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 2023 is A11. This period was chosen because it covers stories which were published before, during and after Banyana Banyana's participation at the World Cup.

## Results

As much as we collated data into six thematic groups, we however wish to make the disclosure that, in many instances lines between some categories are blurred. Therefore, discussion of these subheadings should be read in relation to each other instead of treating them in isolation. The subheadings are as follows: Challenging stereotypes, Not just a sport or pastime, Key players, Unity, Media as a link between Banyana and its stakeholders, and Stakeholders' support.

### *Challenging Stereotypes*

Articles under study are dominated by imagery which presents Banyana as a team with a fighting spirit. A6 notes that, despite constantly facing criticism, (Banyana Banyana goalkeeper Kylin) Swart "soldiers on". In an X post, socialite, Somizi Mhlongo celebrated the team's progression to the last sixteen using words like "Mzansi warriors", "queens" and "mbokodo" (A7). Mbokodo literally refers to a rock, but Somizi seemingly alludes to its historical context of combative women who sang a war cry whose lyrics liken abusing women to hitting a rock, as they marched to the Union Buildings on the 9th of August 1956 in protesting pass laws. In the same article, Shawn Mkhize, owner of DSTV premiership side, Royal AM notes that female football personalities, "with their hard work and resilience...strength and determination continue to push boundaries". In A5, the writer waxes lyrical about the team's performances using descriptions like "gallant effort", "brave performance" and "undying spirit". Just as Banyana coach Desiree Ellis' comments in A2 that the team showed "resilience, they've shown bravery and courage" after the 2-1 defeat to Sweden, in A6, Somizi Mhlongo hails Banyana's "resilience" after a hard fought 3-2 victory over Italy which they secured through a "last-gasp goal" in their "final" group match. The goal sealed the team's passage into the last sixteen. Swart views the win as vindication of the team's hard work, "we really fought" (A6). Likewise, Magaia remarks that "we went there guns blazing" (A8).

Buoyed by the victory over Italy, striker Hildah Magaia said the team's approach against Holland would be to "go there with the same spirit" and "fight as a team" (A8). Despite subsequently losing the match, Ellis contends that her team "did not play like underdogs, giving the Netherlands a tougher run than the 2-0 scoreline suggested" (A9). The writer concurs that Banyana players "punched above their 54th ranking throughout the tournament", conceding a "last-gasp winner" in their 2-1 loss to "third-ranked Sweden", "blew a 2-0 lead" to draw 2-2 with "28th-ranked Argentina" and won 3-2 against "16th-ranked Italy through an injury-time winner". As "the lowest-ranked team in Group G" (A4), "from day one", goalkeeper Kaylin Swart states that the team was under pressure to prove itself, so she reveals that they are still "shocked" by their qualification to the last sixteen which she describes as "an incredible feeling... I am even stumbling my words because I can't believe it" (A6).

### *Not Just a Sport or Pastime*

For Banyana players, football is not just a sport or pastime but a form of expression. Hildah Magaia's nickname, "the Breadwinner" is a metaphoric reference to her scoring exploits (A7) and she reckons that the team relies on her to provide goals. Magaia reveals the literal meaning of her nickname when she says the R1.1m which Banyana players secured after qualifying to the last sixteen "means I'll be able to help my

family, I'll be able to do everything for my mother, because I'm the one taking care of her. I'm the breadwinner" (A5). Banyana defender Noko Matlou notes that payment of appearance fees from FIFA "will change the lives of players because we play football to make a living" (A1). Her teammate, Kaylin Swart describes qualification to the World Cup as "a huge achievement" but the FIFA incentive "is even better". A1 commends the FIFA initiative as a "huge incentive for South African based players because women's football is not yet fully professional" in the country. In A6, Swart savours Banyana's triumph at the Women's African Cup of Nations (Wafcon) in 2022 but stresses that the World Cup is more competitive which emphasizes the need for funding like the FIFA incentive.

Swart observes that "we are (still) trying to close the gap financially" so, though the FIFA incentive is commendable, "it will take a lot of progress" for gender parity to be attained (A1). She also insinuates that unlike male footballers, Bafana Bafana (Boys), for many Banyana Banyana players, travelling in an aeroplane is still a novelty which "will serve as extra motivation". Matlou asserts that African teams have improved significantly and the cash injection will spur them on. One can say this prediction was spot on because in A4, the reporter says, Nigeria, Zambia and Morocco all won at least one match at the 2023 World Cup. Incidentally, South African, Nigerian and Zambian players protested their salaries during the tournament. Despite achieving more success, women's teams lag behind their male counterparts in terms of incentives. South African and Nigerian women's national soccer teams reached knockout stages of the World Cup which their better paid male compatriots have failed to do. The Zambian national men's soccer team has never qualified to the global showpiece.

### *Key Players*

Apart from the team's collective struggles, players had their individual challenges. A6 reveals that, notwithstanding Banyana's decent performances at the World Cup, "Swart hasn't been able to fully bask in the moment because she has been the easy scapegoat of the team's shortcomings". The article claims that the goalkeeper is "used to being the face of adversity. At just 15, Swart had to carry the shame of South Africa's failure at the 2010 Under-17 Fifa Women's World Cup". The writer notes that Swart, who overcame her challenges to play in the United States "has her biggest Test to date — rising above the criticism she has endured to make more history with Banyana".

Like Swart, Thembi Kgatlana has faced personal challenges though from different circumstances. A11 reveals that, in the run up to the World Cup 2023, the striker endured "hardship", a series of bereavements but like Swart, she responded bravely. Kgatlana's father's aunt died on the first day that she returned to camp from a one-year injury layoff followed by her great grandmother a day later and her aunt who succumbed to cancer three days before the World Cup started. Kgatlana missed training two days before Banyana Banyana's match against Italy due to an emotional breakdown. She discloses that she could not celebrate her winning goal against Italy because of her triple tragedy.

Despite Swart's seeming loss of favour among the Banyana faithful, she and defender, Noko Matlou are cited as "Banyana Banyana stars" (A1, Paragraph 1). In addition, the article refers to Swart as an "experienced" player. Kgatlana is also among Banyana's influential players as A10 describes her as the "star player". This is qualified in A11 which mentions that Kgatlana has three World Cup goals including South Africa's "lone strike" in 2019. She also scored what seemed like an insurance goal before Argentina forced a two all draw, she then scored a "last-gasp goal" (A5) against Italy to seal Banyana's first World Cup victory which also earned the team a historic last sixteen berth. A9 observes that Banyana gave spirited performances "especially Thembi Kgatlana, who ran at the Dutch like a woman possessed".

Though Kgatlana and Magaya each scored two of the team's six goals, Magaia, appears to be the most impactful Banyana player. Her nickname, "the breadwinner" suggests that she is the most dependable player. Through an extended metaphor, A8 suggests that Magaia is the team's mainstay and Kgatlana plays a supporting role: "if Magaia is the breadwinner, then Thembi Kgatlana brings the bacon, and together they ensure Banyana Banyana feasts". Although A8 recognizes the potency of Magaia and Kgatlana's combination, the former is evidently more influential: "her broad shoulders have carried Banyana in trying moments. She scored the team's first goal at the World Cup before she was substituted because of an injury.

Without the “breadwinner”, Banyana lost 2-1 to Sweden”. In addition, A8 states that Magaia provided “an assist in a moment of magic” which “was finished by Kgatlana” who atoned for her miss during training from another assist by Magaia. The headline of A7 suggests that the story is about celebrities’, Magaia’s claims to being the team’s provider which also appear in A5 are quoted. In A4, the writer, who (correctly) predicts that Magaia is the most likely player to score against Italy, remarks that “they don’t call her “Breadwinner” for nothing” before stating Magaia’s scoring exploits which have been alluded to above.

### *Unity*

Swart attributes Banyana’s success to “chemistry” between players which is facilitated by teambuilding activities (A6). In A9 and A11, Ellis emphasizes unity among players. Both Swart (A6) and Ellis (A9) are “proud” of the players’ performances. Just as they celebrate together in triumphant times, the players stick together during difficult times. Kgatlana recounts how her teammates gave her “strength” and “supported” her during her bereavement (A11). By the same token in A9, Ellis states that after Banyana Banyana’s loss to Holland, the entire team consoled Swart by reminding her of the important saves that she made before making a costly blunder. Kgatlana’s decision to remain in New Zealand instead of returning to South Africa to attend three funerals was also motivated by her realization that she, captain Refiloe Jane, Andile Dlamini and Jermaine Seoposenwe were involved in negotiations with the South African Football Association (SAFA) to solve the dispute over payment of bonuses.

### *Media As a Link Between Banyana and its Stakeholders*

The media facilitate communication between Banyana and stakeholders of women’s football. A3 covers Ellis’ digital press conference which she held in New Zealand. In A11, minister of sport, Zizi Kodwa hosts a media conference for Banyana and the South African senior women’s netball team, the Nedbank Proteas. Kgatlana exploits this opportunity to apologize for refusing to address the media when the team arrived at the OR International Airport. Her disclosure that she lost three relatives in quick succession during her stint in New Zealand mitigates her behaviour in giving the media “a cold shoulder” (A10). With Noko Matlou and Hildah Magaia being the only two players who entertained questions from the media, most of their teammates seem oblivious to importance of good media relations. Ellis, who arrived at the airport with a batch of staff which landed after the players’ arrival, acknowledged the role of the media in raising players’ profiles and exposing their challenges. In A10, the media provides Ellis with a platform to thank her staff and urge the country’s football authorities to professionalize women’s football to increase Banyana Banyana’s chances at future tournaments. To put into perspective, the importance of the media, A1 also reveals that Matlou disclosed that she and her teammates only learnt about the FIFA incentives from the media and now await official communication from SAFA.

Bonang Matheba and Somizi Mhlongo, who are separately identified by the descriptor, “media personality” in A7, are among celebrities who posted on X congratulating Banyana for qualifying to the round of sixteen. Anele Mdoda who could have been also identified as a media personality, posted an image of Banyana players superimposed on a photograph of the elevated stage which had confetti floating that was used by a political party (EFF) leader, Julius Malema at the party’s 10th anniversary celebrations in July 2023.

### *Stakeholders’ Support*

South Africa’s participation at the World Cup received support from different stakeholders. Ahead of the World Cup, Banyana received financial boost from the Motsepe Foundation and assurances from the National Lotto Foundations and the FIFA incentive as highlighted earlier. Like A1, A5 indicates that all the players who feature at the global showpiece are guaranteed \$30,000 (R555,000); \$60,000 (R1.1m) for reaching the last 16 which is confirmed in A5 after Banyana Banyana’s 3-2 win over Italy. Banyana also received moral support. A4 predicts that the match against Italy “will surely be one of the most-viewed Banyana matches in history”. After Banyana secured their first ever victory at a World Cup tournament, Matheba, Mhlongo, Mdoda, former Bafana Bafana player Siphwe Shabalala and Shauwn “MaMkhize” Mkhize, a “wealthy businesswoman” hailed the team’s success. Desiree Ellis in A9 remarks that Banyana’s historic feat made the country proud. In line with this, A10 predicts a heart-warming reception for the

players from South African citizens when they return to the country. This is confirmed in A11 which reports that Zizi Kodwa, the sports minister hosted a media breakfast for Banyana and the Netball Proteas.

## Discussion

The study drew from intersectionality as a theoretical framework in which Crenshaw (1989) dismisses the notion that women can only be discriminated because of race but also because of gender. Hooks (2015) concurs with Crenshaw (1989) that black women experience a combination of discrimination based on race, and sex because they are oppressed yet they are not oppressors. However, articles under study reveal an element of favourable bias in their coverage of Banyana's FIFA World Cup performances. This is manifested in the writers' choice of language. For instance, in its synopsis of South Africa's performance at the World Cup, A11 downplays the team's elimination by mentioning it in passing, in a brief sentence "They lost 2-0 against the Netherlands in the last 16". The media coverage in this instance was positive towards the national women's football team that is mainly comprised of black women even though it is multiracial. Football in Africa is considered a black sport, unlike Rugby and Cricket that are mainly white in composition and supporters. The media also exposed instances where football bodies that are led by men acted poorly against women players. These included instances of not only lower salaries but non-payments that lasted for several months. In this regard, media acted as agents of social transformation through their positive coverage (Hooks, 2015; Rao and Rodny-Gumede, 2020) which contributed to the sports' growth and recognition (Ngako, 2022). Notwithstanding their tendencies towards biased reporting, articles under study included critical perspectives. A2 notes that South Africa's loss to Sweden places the team under pressure in its next games against Argentina and Italy and A3 asserts that the draw with Argentina further complicates the team's prospects of progressing to the last sixteen. Despite acknowledging the way Banyana played against Argentina for the greater part of the match, A3 laments "the manner in which the defence folded". On the whole, the media coverage of the South African women football team shows improvement (Nsibande, 2021), even though this did not happen overnight (Pope, 2023).

Literature review exposed a history in which women teams and sport women have been discriminated against through poor coverage (Chiweshe and Choto, 2022; Doehler, 2023; Pfister, 2015). The overall Banyana's media coverage also exposed differential treatment of women's football in relation to men's football which resulted in a positive response from the government and businesses to address the raised issues. Banyana's qualification to the round of sixteen at the 2023 FIFA World Cup amplified calls from the media for an improvement in players' remuneration. The President of the Republic of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, and sports minister Zizi Kodwa have come out in support of aligning remuneration of female athletes with that of males (Khoza, 2023). The media are urged to consistently maintain support for women's teams and sport women, not only during major tournaments, since this is a powerful tool to fight gender stereotypes. The positive results can also be attributed to the growing number of female sports writers in the space that was previously dominated by male writers. Media houses can in this regard be considered as transformed.

## Conclusions

South African Women's senior soccer team faced numerous challenges such as social prejudice which affected its financing and made playing conditions unfavourable. However, a combination of changing social perceptions, positive publicity from the media and, more importantly, consistent results by Banyana which culminated in qualification to the World Cup last sixteen have contributed to the sport's recognition. Stakeholders like the government, the media and businesses should continue to work together to sponsor Banyana beyond tournaments. They should also increase their visibility at grassroots level to develop players which Banyana can tap into.

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