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Broadcasting Revenue and Equity in the Ethiopian Premier League: Trends, Performance Incentives, and Regional Comparisons

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Abstract

Broadcasting revenue has become an essential element in the financial stability and competitive structure of football leagues worldwide. However, in many African leagues, including Ethiopia, systematic evidence on how such revenue is generated, distributed, and utilized remains limited. This study aimed to examine trends in broadcasting revenue and the fairness of its distribution in the Ethiopian Premier League (EPL) from the 2020/21 to 2024/25 seasons, and to situate Ethiopia's experience within the broader East African context. A total of ***27 documents*** *including official league reports, audited financial statements, broadcasting agreements, and verified media publications were reviewed to generate the dataset for analysis. Data were sourced only from publicly available institutional records. Descriptive statistical techniques, including* ***trend analysis, percentage distribution, and comparative ratio analysis,*** *were applied to evaluate changes in annual revenue, equity of the allocation formula, and differences between Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. The findings show that EPL broadcasting revenue increased from USD 4.0 million in 2020/21 to USD 5.0 million in 2024/25. The league's allocation framework 50% equal share, 25% merit-based distribution, and 10% facility-related payments has contributed to more predictable and equitable financial flows, while still rewarding on-field performance and broadcast-related infrastructure improvements. Per-club allocations ranged from USD 132,800 to USD 156,250, and top-performing clubs earned up to USD 700,000. Compared with the Kenyan and Ugandan leagues, Ethiopia provides higher per-club funding and stronger merit incentives. Overall, the study demonstrates that a clear revenue-sharing structure and stable broadcasting partnerships can enhance financial sustainability and competitive balance in emerging football markets, offering practical lessons for similar leagues in the region.*

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Introduction

Broadcasting revenue has become a critical factor in shaping the financial landscape and competitive equity of football leagues worldwide. As media rights increasingly dominate professional clubs' income streams, the structure and fairness of revenue distribution directly affect club sustainability, performance, and league-wide balance (Bergantiños& Moreno-Ternero, 2022). In developed football markets, particularly in Europe, disparities in broadcasting revenue allocation have reinforced the dominance of elite clubs, undermining competitive integrity and limiting opportunities for smaller teams to compete equitably (Özaydın&Donduran, 2019; Csató, 2022). Revenue-sharing models based on historical performance or merit-based rankings, such as those employed in UEFA competitions and La Liga, continue to prompt debate regarding fairness and the long-term viability of competitive balance (Pinilla et al., 2019; Landang, 2024).

Simultaneously, the digitization of broadcasting and the emergence of direct-to-consumer platforms have transformed traditional media models, disrupting financial structures while creating new opportunities for monetization and fan engagement (Evens &Marez, 2009; Lu & Li, 2013). These global shifts necessitate a reevaluation of revenue distribution frameworks, particularly in emerging football markets. In Africa and East Africa more specifically underdeveloped commercial infrastructures, weak regulatory mechanisms, and limited media penetration constrain football clubs' access to stable and equitable financial resources (Chiweshe&Dandah, 2024; Deb, 2021).

In the Ethiopian Premier League (EPL), these challenges are particularly pronounced. Although football is the country's most popular sport, empirical understanding of how broadcasting revenues are generated, allocated, and utilized remains limited. The current revenue model lacks standardized allocation criteria and effective oversight mechanisms to ensure fairness among clubs. Consequently, disparities in financial capacity have negatively affected talent retention, infrastructure development, and club performance (Getnet et al., 2025). Additionally, Ethiopia's federal political system introduces complexities; without coherent policy alignment, fiscal decentralization risks exacerbating resource imbalances across regions (Belay, 2014).

Comparative insights from neighboring East African leagues reveal that countries such as Kenya and Uganda have begun implementing performance-based or hybrid broadcasting revenue systems to improve league competitiveness. By contrast, the Ethiopian Premier League continues to operate with limited transparency and strategic guidance in this domain (Hirai, 2006). Despite the growing recognition of sports economics in national development discourse, Ethiopia's financial surveys and statistical reports provide minimal detail on sports-sector dynamics, leaving a critical gap in understanding the relationship between broadcasting revenue, financial equity, and football club viability (Kosec, 2019; Muthuri et al., 2012).

Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Equity Theory, this study conceptualizes broadcasting revenue as a strategic asset that influences financial sustainability and competitive equity. According to RBV, clubs achieve competitive advantage by mobilizing valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources, including broadcasting rights, loyal fan bases, and strategic leadership (Barney, 1991). Simultaneously, Equity Theory emphasizes that stakeholders players, fans, and managers respond to perceived fairness in resource distribution (Adams, 1963). These theoretical perspectives guide the present investigation, which explores how broadcasting revenue distribution shapes financial equity, club performance, and overall league competitiveness in Ethiopia, while offering comparative insights from neighboring East African leagues.

Research Objectives

1. To examine longitudinal trends in broadcasting revenue and its allocation across the Ethiopian Premier League (EPL) during the 2020/21–2024/25 seasons.
2. To evaluate the equity and effectiveness of the EPL's revenue distribution mechanisms among member clubs.
3. To compare Ethiopia's broadcasting revenue model with those of Kenya and Uganda in terms of structure, fairness, and financial scale.

Research Questions

1. What patterns and changes have emerged in broadcasting revenue allocations among EPL clubs over the past five seasons?
2. To what extent is the current distribution framework comprising equal-share, merit-based, and facility pools equitable and effective across all EPL clubs?
3. How does Ethiopia's broadcasting revenue distribution model differ from those of Kenya and Uganda with respect to financial value, fairness, and per-club allocations?

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a**retrospective research design** to investigate the distribution of broadcasting revenue in the Ethiopian Premier League (EPL) over five consecutive seasons (2020/21–2024/25) and to compare these trends with selected East African leagues, specifically Kenya and Uganda. The design enables both longitudinal trend analysis within Ethiopia and cross-national comparisons, providing insights into revenue equity, financial sustainability, and league competitiveness. Such a design is suitable for under-researched contexts where primary peer-reviewed sources are limited, and verified financial records and credible media reports are used as the primary evidence base (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Sources

Secondary data were exclusively utilized and sourced from official, credible, and publicly accessible institutions, including annual broadcasting revenue reports jointly released by the Ethiopian Premier League Share Company (EPLSC) and MultiChoice Ethiopia (2020–2024); broadcasting revenue allocation frameworks issued by the EPLSC (2020–2025); audited financial statements published by the Ethiopian Football Federation (EFF) (2021, 2023); verified media reports from SuperSport Africa and Soccer Ethiopia; and national television interviews with EPLSC and football club officials. All sources were selected based on their institutional credibility, accessibility, and relevance to the study's policy context.

Study Population and Sampling

The study focused on **all EPL clubs** participating between 2020/21 and 2024/25 (n = 16). Comparative data included the top-flight clubs of Kenya (n = 16) and Uganda (n = 16). **Purposive inclusion** of these clubs was based on their participation in officially recognized national leagues and availability of financial data related to broadcasting revenue.

Variables and Measures

The primary variables examined include:

1. **Total Broadcasting Revenue (USD):** Annual gross revenue generated from domestic and regional broadcasting contracts.
2. **Revenue Allocation Components:**
   - **Equal-share pool:** Revenue distributed equally among all clubs.
   - **Merit-based pool:** Performance-dependent allocations based on league rankings.
   - **Facility or infrastructure pool:** Allocations linked to stadium readiness and broadcast facilitation.
   - **League-retained share:** Portion retained by the league for operational purposes.
3. **Per-club Distribution:** Derived by dividing applicable pools among clubs according to the EPLSC formula.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** to identify longitudinal trends and comparative patterns:

1. **Trend Analysis:** Yearly broadcasting revenue allocations in Ethiopia were charted to examine growth patterns, fluctuations in per-club allocations, and the stability of the distribution model.
2. **Equity Assessment:** Percentage contributions of equal-share, merit-based, and facility pools were calculated to evaluate financial fairness across clubs.
3. **Cross-National Comparison:** Ethiopian data were compared with Kenyan and Ugandan leagues in terms of **total TV deal values, per-club allocations, and top-club earnings,** highlighting regional disparities.
4. **Visualization:** Tables, figures, and bar charts were constructed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS to illustrate trends, equity distribution, and comparative metrics.

All financial figures were **standardized to USD** to enable accurate cross-national comparison, adjusting for currency fluctuations and reporting inconsistencies.

Ethical Considerations

The Bahir Dar University Sport Academy Research Ethics Committee reviewed the study and confirmed that it did not involve human participants, interventions, or the collection of personal or sensitive data. All information utilized was derived exclusively from publicly accessible institutional documents, official reports, and verified media sources. In view of this, the Committee determined that formal ethical approval was not required. Nonetheless, the research was conducted in full compliance with established principles of academic integrity, transparency, and responsible data usage. All sources were accurately acknowledged, and the study adhered to Bahir Dar University's research ethics guidelines as well as the broader ethical principles articulated in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Rigor and Limitations

To ensure **methodological rigor,** the study triangulated multiple data sources and applied standardized calculations for per-club allocations. Limitations include:

- Dependence on secondary and grey literature due to the lack of peer-reviewed studies on Ethiopian broadcasting revenue.
- Potential discrepancies in reported figures across media outlets.
- Limited availability of detailed contractual terms for Kenyan and Ugandan leagues, which may affect the precision of cross-national comparisons.

These limitations are acknowledged and addressed through careful validation and transparent reporting.

Results

The results are organized according to the study's objectives and research questions:

1. To analyze longitudinal trends in Ethiopian Premier League (EPL) broadcasting revenue and its allocation from 2020/21 to 2024/25.
2. To evaluate the equity of revenue distribution among EPL clubs.
3. To compare Ethiopia's broadcasting revenue model with those of Kenya and Uganda.

Longitudinal Trends in Ethiopian Premier League Broadcasting Revenue

Figure 1. Trends in Ethiopian Premier League broadcasting revenue distribution, 2020–2025

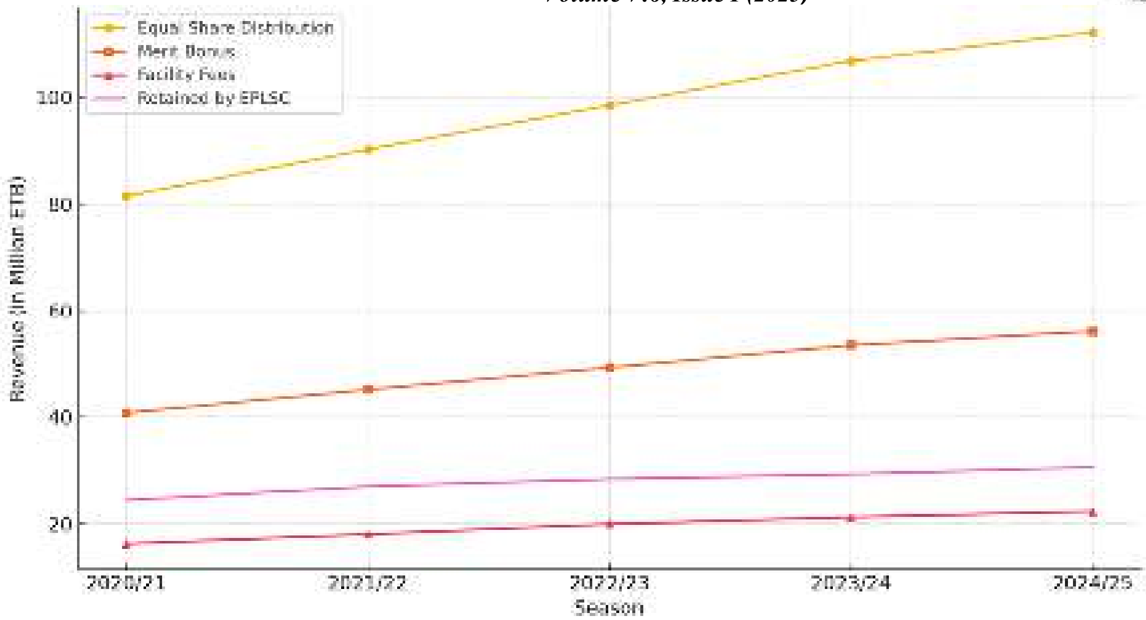

Figure 1 illustrates the consistent growth of broadcasting revenue across all major components during the five-season period (2020/21–2024/25). The equal-share allocation, distributed equally among clubs, rose from ETB 81.5 million in 2020/21 to ETB 112 million in 2024/25, demonstrating strengthened financial equity and institutional support. Merit-based incentives, which reward league performance, increased from ETB 40.75 million to ETB 56 million, while facility fees linked to televised matches and stadium readiness expanded from ETB 16.3 million to ETB 22.4 million. The Ethiopian Premier League Share Company's (EPLSC) retained share also climbed steadily, from ETB 24.45 million to ETB 30.6 million, indicating deliberate reinvestment in league governance and operations. Collectively, these upward trends reflect a strategic maturation of the league's financial model and its broader commitment to professionalization and commercial sustainability.

Equity of the Revenue Distribution Mechanism

Table 3. Ethiopian Premier League broadcasting revenue and allocation, 2020/21–2024/25.

Season	Total TV Revenue (USD)	Equal Share (50%)	Merit Pool (25%)	Facility Pool (10%)	Clubs (Number)	Equal per club (USD)
2020/21	4.00 M	2.00 M	1.00 M	0.40 M	13*	≈ 153,800
2021/22	4.25 M	2.125 M	1.0625 M	0.425 M	16	≈ 132,800
2022/23	4.50 M	2.25 M	1.125 M	0.45 M	16	≈ 140,625
2023/24	4.75 M	2.375 M	1.1875 M	0.475 M	16	≈ 148,438
2024/25	5.00 M	2.50 M	1.25 M	0.50 M	16	≈ 156,250

Table 3 presents the annual broadcasting revenue and its allocation across the equal-share, merit, and facility pools. Total television revenue grew from USD 4.00 million in 2020/21 to USD 5.00 million in 2024/25, while the allocation formula 50 % equal share, 25 % merit pool, and 10 % facility pool remained unchanged, underscoring stable governance.

The equal-share amount per club fluctuated with league size. In 2020/21, when 13 clubs participated, the equal per-club distribution was approximately USD 153,800, the highest of the five-year period. Following expansion to 16 clubs in 2021/22, the per-club amount declined to USD 132,800 but rebounded steadily, reaching USD 156,250 by 2024/25 as overall revenues increased. Merit and facility pools expanded proportionally, affirming the EPLSC's commitment to rewarding performance and incentivizing infrastructural investment while maintaining equitable financial support.

Comparative Analysis with Other East African Leagues

To contextualize Ethiopia's broadcasting revenue model, a comparative analysis was conducted using publicly reported contracts, official league statements, and regional media sources.

Table 2 Comparison of East African leagues by annual broadcasting revenue distribution.

League	Annual TV Deal Value (USD)	Total Clubs	Equal-Share per Club (USD)	Top Club Estimate (USD)
Ethiopia	2.7M	16	130K–160K	550K–700K
Kenya	2.6M (combined)	16	≈70K	≈110K+
Uganda	724K	16	≈37K	40K–50K

Ethiopia

The EPLSC entered a five-year broadcasting agreement with MultiChoice (SuperSport) in 2020, valued at approximately USD 2.7 million annually. Revenue is distributed as 60 % equal share, 25 % merit, and 15 % retained by the EPLSC. Equal-share distributions range from about USD 130,000 to 160,000 per club annually, and top clubs such as Saint George and Fasil Kenema have earned up to USD 700,000 when merit payments are included.

Kenya

Kenya's FKF Premier League secured a seven-year contract with Azam TV worth roughly USD 9.1 million, complemented by a free-to-air deal with the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) that provides approximately USD 1.6 million per year. Each club receives around KES 10 million (≈ USD 70,000) annually, while league champions receive an additional KES 5 million (≈ USD 35,000) plus other merit-based bonuses.

Uganda

The Uganda Premier League signed a ten-year broadcasting partnership with StarTimes valued at USD 7.24 million (≈ USD 724,000 per year). Clubs receive about USD 37,000 annually, and the 2024/25 champions are projected to earn approximately USD 16,000 in prize money.

Table 2 summarizes these comparisons. Ethiopia's annual contract value of USD 2.7 million provides each of its 16 clubs with an estimated USD 130,000–160,000 in equal-share payments and allows top performers to earn USD 550,000–700,000. Kenya follows with a combined annual value of USD 2.6 million, distributing roughly USD 70,000 per club and enabling top clubs to approach USD 110,000. Uganda lags considerably, with per-club distributions of approximately USD 37,000.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a steady and consistent increase in broadcasting revenues within the Ethiopian Premier League (EPL) over the 2020/21–2024/25 seasons, alongside a progressively structured distribution framework. This pattern reflects an intentional effort by league administrators to enhance financial equity, strengthen performance-based incentives, and encourage club-level infrastructural development. Such progress is consistent with global transitions toward more professionalized media-rights systems observed in emerging football economies (Deloitte, 2024; FIFPRO, 2023). Although the Ethiopian football industry operates in a resource-constrained environment, the clear allocation formula comprising equal-share, merit-based, and facility componentsdemonstrates how even developing markets can leverage broadcasting agreements to support competitive balance and long-term commercial sustainability.

Evidence from other African leagues reinforces this trajectory. Studies from South Africa show that predictable broadcasting contracts in the Premier Soccer League (PSL) have helped stabilize club finances and reduce revenue disparities (Ncube & Ndlovu, 2023). Similarly, improved television arrangements in Kenya have contributed to more consistent budgeting and wage stability, despite persistent administrative challenges (Onyango et al., 2024). These developments mirror Ethiopia's experience, where a fixed 50–25–10 allocation formula has offered clubs a reliable revenue base while simultaneously rewarding on-field performance and broadcast readiness.

However, the Ethiopian case also diverges from the experience of less financially resilient leagues. Research on the Uganda Premier League, for example, reveals that limited broadcasting income and weak distribution frameworks have prevented clubs from meeting basic operational needs, resulting in minimal impact on competitive balance (Ssekandi&Tumwine, 2023). The contrast Ugandan clubs receiving roughly USD 37,000 annually versus Ethiopian clubs receiving USD 130,000–160,000 underscores the importance of governance quality and strategic media-rights negotiation, themes echoed in broader African sport governance literature (Göranson & Tjønndal, 2022).

Findings from Europe provide additional context. In the English Premier League, redistribution models emphasize substantial merit-based components approximately 30% of total broadcasting revenue which have been shown to enhance competitive motivation while maintaining financial fairness (Premier League, 2024). Similarly, La Liga's 2015 reform, which centralized media rights and adopted a hybrid distribution model, significantly improved revenue stability for smaller Spanish clubs (García& Rodríguez, 2020). The EPLSC's decision to maintain a consistent 25% merit share therefore reflects a cautious but effective approach; however, increasing this proportion may further promote competitive intensity within Ethiopia.

Asia offers comparable insights. In Japan's J-League, long-term broadcasting partnerships particularly the 10-year DAZN deal have dramatically increased club investment capacity and improved competitive balance across divisions (Hara, 2018). Likewise, South Korea's K-League has demonstrated how transparent collective rights management can stabilize club finances even in markets with modest global visibility (Lee & Kim, 2021). Ethiopia's experience aligns with these examples, suggesting that predictable, centrally managed media-rights agreements are essential for developing football ecosystems.

Latin American cases present a contrasting picture. In Brazil and Argentina, historical individual-club broadcasting contracts contributed to entrenched inequalities, with dominant clubs consistently capturing the greatest share of revenue (Bortoleto et al., 2021; Rodríguez& Gómez, 2019). Recent reforms such as Brazil's 2021 "Lei do Mandante" seek to rebalance the system, but disparities remain. Ethiopia's more centralized approach therefore demonstrates a comparatively equitable model, despite operating at a much smaller financial scale.

The league's expansion from 13 to 16 clubs without reducing per-club allocations further illustrates prudent revenue management. In other contexts, league expansion has diluted club earnings; for instance, England's Football League Championship saw per-club payments decrease when the number of clubs grew faster than broadcasting income (Andrews & Wilson, 2024). By contrast, Ethiopia managed to increase overall revenue sufficiently to absorb the expansion an indication of effective negotiation and growing commercial appeal.

Despite these strengths, some issues warrant attention. While total revenue and merit incentives have increased annually, the fixed 25% proportion of merit allocation may limit the motivational effect on competitive performance. European evidence suggests that expanding the merit-based component can stimulate stronger competitive dynamics (Baroncelli& Lago, 2022). For Ethiopia, cautious adjustment of the merit share while safeguarding equitable funding could encourage clubs to invest more aggressively in sporting quality and youth development.

Conclusion

The Ethiopian Premier League has demonstrated substantial progress in financial sustainability and professional governance. The league's steady growth in broadcasting revenue, combined with equitable and strategically structured distribution mechanisms, highlights its capacity to effectively harness commercial rights. Comparisons with regional peers such as Kenya and Uganda underscore the pivotal role of institutional strength and adaptive revenue-sharing policies in fostering league development. As African football markets continue to attract international broadcasters, the EPL stands out as a compelling model for balancing competitive equity with performance-based incentives, offering valuable lessons for sustainable growth and professionalization in emerging leagues.

Between the 2020/21 and 2024/25 seasons, the Ethiopian Premier League (EPL) has achieved consistent growth in broadcasting revenue, supported by a sophisticated distribution framework that integrates equal-share, merit-based, and facility allocations. This multifaceted approach has promoted financial equity, incentivized on-field performance, and encouraged strategic investment in club infrastructure, even amid the league's expansion from 13 to 16 teams. Relative to regional peers, including Kenya and Uganda, Ethiopia's broadcasting model provides

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