

the sexes

Girls united in freedom and football

In a society where girls are punished for refusing sex and HIV is endemic, football has become an educational tool.

Karen Bartlett reports from Kenya

The Ukunda Queens collected their trophy in the dark. It had been a great afternoon of football, with 22 young women from the rural province of Kwale in Kenya slugging it out on a rain-drenched pitch to become district champions of the women's league, undeterred by a herd of goats that occasionally wandered into the action, displaced from their usual home on the terraces by the crowd which had gathered to cheer, buy cashew nuts and argue the merits of each team.

"The Ukunda Queens are good but look — the other side don't even have shoes," said an elderly man. It was true. Ukunda's barefoot opponents, the Dar Queens, slid helplessly in the mud. But Dar's supporters had travelled for hours on minibuses to reach the ground and were unwilling to concede defeat. "God willing, they will score," said three teenage girls dressed in traditional headscarves.

But it was not to be. The rain continued, the final whistle blew and the players listened patiently while a series of local dignitaries and politicians addressed them long into the night.

In one of the country's poorest provinces, where few buildings have electricity or water, the ceremony ended in complete

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darkness as the Ukunda Queens, 5-0 winners, were handed the cup. "I told you we would win," said star striker Riziki Juma, with a shrug.

The Ukunda Queens are the Manchester United of Kenyan women's football. As the original team in the league — and still the best — they have a certain swagger. "If we had lost I would have cried," said Riziki, "but I didn't think that would happen."

Now 22, Riziki has been playing for the team for four years. In a conservative country, and an Islamic province, to hear a girl openly expressing her views is unusual, but her confidence has grown.

"Starting a girls' football league seemed like a crazy idea at first," says Roselyn Mutemi-Wangahu, the co-ordinator from Unicef, the United Nations children's fund, which launched the Ukunda Queens six years ago as part of an effort to encourage more women to attend HIV awareness sessions. She called the project Kick Aids and, with backing from the Vodafone Foundation, it has expanded rapidly. There are now thousands of Kenyan women's teams.

"We had to reach those girls. They don't stay in school or go to organised groups. Their parents keep them at home," says Mutemi-Wangahu. "We had to bring them together to raise their confidence and teach them about HIV. Here, the one thing that brings everyone together is soccer."

Even so, football was a surprising choice. Emblems of the English Premier League are everywhere in Kenya, with cars, buses and T-shirts bearing the badges of Arsenal, Manchester United and others. But that is the men's game, and the notion of a girls' league was met with hostility. A local imam, Sheikh Omari Fumbwe, explains that the main objection was to girls wearing football strips. "A woman needs to cover her whole body and we were concerned that some of their bodies were bare. We suggested that they adjust the shorts to cover more of their legs."

Anisa Kombo, 23, a petite, outspoken midfielder player with the Ukunda Queens, says that the atmosphere at the team's early matches was intimidating. "Older men use the terraces as a place to meet and chat," she says. "When they saw us playing they cursed us. Some Muslim leaders said that we were being led into prostitution. Other boys and girls called us lesbians. Here the idea is that the woman stays in the kitchen. A girl may never set foot in school and can be married off at 12."

Kwale has one of the lowest proportions of girls in education in the country. According to tradition, girls are not allowed to speak to their fathers directly and are taught to respect male authority in all circumstances. Once married, women fear being sent back to their parents if they refuse sex, and are often beaten.

"There has been a change in our community in letting the girls play football — and it gives me hope," says the football league's



And they complain about the turf at Wembley ... on a quagmire surface, in between pitch invasions by goats, the barefoot Dar Queens play Ukunda Queens in Kwale province, Kenya. The Ukunda players, who won 5-0, act as "peer educators" in the battle against the spread of the HIV virus

district chairman and team coach, Mohamed Said Mwakulola. He remembers going from door to door, trying to persuade parents to let their daughters join the team.

"It took three years, one step at a time," he says. "Originally, the girls wanted to play wearing their headscarves. Now we have persuaded them not to." The first teams formed slowly, in some cases taking more than a year to build up to a full squad.

Anisa's grandfather is a senior Muslim elder. Sitting in his living room, beneath a gold football trophy, he beams proudly as he says: "In the beginning it was thought very unusual, but I've seen the benefits and I told other parents to let their children join the programme. Minds have changed because we can see that it keeps the girls busy and they learn important things."

The issue important enough to sweep aside entrenched cultural beliefs remains unspoken but it is everywhere: Aids. Two thirds of young people infected with HIV are girls; a fact now identified as key to tackling the epidemic in Unicef's HIV prevention campaign that was launched last month. One local man watching the foot-

ball final said simply: "According to our traditions, what they are doing is wrong but if it's about HIV, it's acceptable."

In Kenya, girls aged between 15 and 19 are seven times more likely to contract the virus than boys of the same age. Some girls are married off early to much older men who already have other wives and many casual sexual partners. Others are encouraged by their families to exchange sex for food money. Teenage boredom in areas with little entertainment only adds to the problem.

When Pamela Mwanza became a single mother at 22, she thought her life was over. "I cried all the time," she says. "The father said he was going out to buy baby clothes but he never came back." Pamela's mother encouraged her to join the Young Stars, then a struggling team with only six players. "Now we are turning women away. We can beat anyone, but not the Ukunda Queens," she says. Pamela turned her newfound confidence to advantage, first becoming a Kick Aids peer educator, then operating a mobile HIV testing service.

On the road to her village, she points out

A league of their own

The league consists of 72 teams.

Each season lasts for two and a half months, with each team playing an average of 35 matches.

Some 9,800 girls and women are now playing football in Kwale.

Three players have been selected for the Kenya women's national team.

the bushes behind the general store that were once a meeting point for schoolgirls and men wanting to pay for sex. "The girls told me that they charged 20p for sex with a condom and 25p without. I persuaded them that 5p was not worth dying for."

Pamela's village, high in the Shimba Hills, is in an area that appears to be a lush rural backwater, with women tilling crops by hand, small boys herding animals under the mango trees and a goat sleeping peacefully on a gravestone. In fact, HIV education in such places has serious obstacles to overcome, including witchdoctors whose "treatment" involves having sex with HIV-infected patients, and a belief in some families that girls should sleep with their fathers and uncles to "make them fat and strong" and "open the door to other men".

In the clearing outside Pamela's house, her brother chops a pile of coconuts while a group of women chatter near by, waiting for their HIV test. Some are widows waiting to see what their husband's legacy will be, others are teenagers with babies strapped to their backs — the second and third wives of older men. Another group

waits farther down the road: the women who have already tested positive for HIV.

Pamela puts on a white coat and ushers the women one by one into her house. While her daughter bounces happily on the bed, she counsels Beatrice, a 69-year-old widow, then takes a drop of blood for the test. After five minutes they look at the result. Beatrice is negative. "I'm relieved," says Pamela. "It is hard to deliver bad news. I've been trained not to cry but sometimes I do. When I tested someone in my extended family and the result was positive, I cried more than they did."

Some women in the more remote villages ask repeatedly where Aids came from. "If you find a snake under your bed, do you say 'Hello, where have you come from?'" asks Pamela in frustration. "No. You just kill it." Still, they all want to play football, leaving behind their children and hitching up their skirts to practise on dusty pitches. They range from teenagers to grandmothers.

These women are a world away from the Ukunda Queens, who have the youthful cockiness that comes from better education and proximity to Mombasa. Anisa Kombo has already announced that she will not be marrying in the near future and that, when she does, it must be to a man "who likes a challenge and can accept me as my own person". She is learning Hindi to understand her idol, Gandhi, better, and is reading *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*.

Riziki Juma runs her own sewing business but her heart is in football. Nicknamed Wayne Rooney by her team-mates, she hopes that the Ukunda Queens' victory impressed the selectors from the national women's team. Riziki looks around the now empty Ukunda ground, with its goats, chickens and mud. The game has already transformed her life but she, and the rest of them, hope that it can take them farther. "It is not an impossible dream," she says.

The Vodafone Foundation supports disaster relief and helps disadvantaged children through sport and music. To donate to Unicef's We Want to Live Free from HIV campaign, visit www.unicef.org.uk/unite

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Football has given Pamela a status in her community. Running on the pitch, she can demonstrate something that everyone wants: health. But while younger girls gather to listen to her advice on HIV, she wonders how many men are paying attention. In one village Evelyn, 30, reports that her husband has been very supportive of the football team, yet he refused to use contraception after the birth of their seventh child and she is now pregnant with the eighth. This time, she says, "I'm going to get my tubes cut".

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Share your secret recipes

Our recipe exchange continues with a writer and a reader sharing old favourites

Writer Recipe: Summer risotto

Tim Teeman, Times Arts and Entertainment Editor



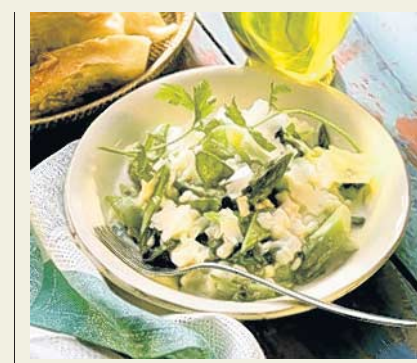
An important coda: I know that my method is wrong, I know this doesn't concur with anything approaching even the foothills of Nigel and

Thomasina, I know the measurements are lacking because I don't own proper measuring stuff ... but it works for this not very committed cook, and it really does taste good. I think it may serve four, but if two people are on a rice bender they will be in risotto heaven.

Melt some butter in a big pan on a low heat: less a knob, more a decent-sized wedge. Chop a big, big onion and a medium-sized one into little bits and put in the pan to soften. Boil the kettle and in your one useful measuring container put two chicken stock cubes or veggie ones if you're veggie. Add a litre of boiling water to the stock cubes, stir.

Take a regular-sized box of Arborio rice and put about half of the rice into the pan. Stir the rice into the onion and add a good dose of the stock until the rice and the onion is submerged and bubbling.

Making a risotto is a pleasurable race against time, taking anything from 35 to 45 minutes. The stock will eventually be absorbed and so you'll need to add more, so get more stock cubes and boiling water ready to add to the pan. You'll know when you've reached saturation point through trial and error, but basically when the rice isn't hard any more.



Add your favoured distinguishing bits and pieces near the end of cooking time. For a summer risotto, steam some peas, broccoli, broad beans and asparagus (if you're as primitive as me, use a colander resting on a pan of boiling water) then stir these into the main risotto pan.

Meat lovers could add some prosciutto to the risotto 10 to 15 minutes before finish time. Or a red and green pepper. Or a courgette. The truly licentious may add a hunk of blue cheese and fold it gloopily into the wheezing mixture. You can dust the whole lot off with shavings of Parmesan and some black pepper.

Please don't send objections. I know what I've supplied is a recipe for a great big gloopy mess of colours, textures and tastes. But that's what I love about risottos. They're as relaxing and immersive as cooking gets. It's just you, the kitchen, every utensil and pan going, loads of washing-up. And Radio 4 obviously.

Reader Recipe: Guy's potato pie

Dr Nicholas Reidy

Guy was a much-loved uncle, born in Toulouse, who trained as a pastry chef and worked in Paris, Boston and London. He died in 1995. This was one of his great recipes, very simple but perfect if cooked exactly as he explained. It can be eaten as a vegetarian dish with a mixed salad or accompany simply cooked meat.

Ingredients
8 large potatoes
1kg shallots, preferably Griselle (French greys)
3 whole garlic heads
Large bunch fresh parsley
6oz butter
2 large sheets of ready rolled puff pastry
1 egg, beaten for glazing
1pt single cream

Method
 Cut the potatoes into 1/4 in slices and the shallots into 1/4 in rings. Finely slice the garlic cloves and coarsely chop the parsley. Cut the butter into 1/4 in slices and put in water to stop them sticking together.
 Heat the oven to 180C/gas mark 4. Place the first sheet of pastry on the bottom and sides of a greased ovenproof pie dish (3in deep and 10in long). Layer the ingredients in the dish starting with

overlapping potatoes on the bottom, then a layer of shallots, then two slices of butter and a generous sprinkling of garlic slices, salt, black pepper and the parsley. Repeat the layering until the dish is full and the ingredients used up, usually three layers.

Place the second pastry sheet over the top, making a double crust, brush with egg and cut a few vents. Cook for 8-10 min, until the pastry is puffed and brown, then cover with foil and cook until the potatoes are al dente, about 50 min.

Take out the pie. Separate the lid from the pie and pour in the cream. Replace the pastry top and cook for 5-10 min, until the cream bubbles. It is then ready to serve and can be cut in large thick slices.

Send us your secret recipes

Do you have a secret recipe you'd like to share? If so, send it to recipeexchange@thetimes.co.uk. Gordon Ramsay will judge the overall best and there are Waitrose vouchers to win for five lucky readers. All entries must be received by 5pm on Wednesday May 27, 2009. Full terms and conditions are available online at timesonline.co.uk/foodanddrink.

For more recipe-sharing ideas, see Saturday's Weekend section