

## **Report on a DDP Public Forum**

### **The 2010 FIFA World Cup and its impact on South Africans**

July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, 10-12am at Southern Sun Elangeni Hotel

#### ***Introduction***

Three weeks into the tournament, DDP hosted a public forum on the 2010 FIFA World Cup to critically examine the costs and benefits that the event was expected to yield and has yielded for South Africa and its people. Three speakers who have publicized on different issues around the World Cup were invited and gave inputs for subsequent discussion. They were Sam Sole, an investigative journalist for the Mail & Guardian, Dr. Orli Bass, who is with UKZN's Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity and Prof. Brij Maharaj, from the Department of Geography at UKZN. The forum was attended by 65 participants.

#### ***Presentations***

Focusing his presentation on Durban's Moses Mabhida Stadium, Sam Sole argued that there was never any real assessment of costs and benefits or even a business plan before the decision to build the new stadium was taken. To him, this exemplified that planning in the municipality was non-transparent and did not meet basic standards of citizen participation. He said that while there was no evidence from previous events that hosting mega-events amounts to any economic benefits for host countries and cities, the successful South African bid for the 2010 World Cup had sparked a rat-race for legacy projects that ended up inflating the initially modest bid. Citing FIFA's assessment of South Africa's original bid, he pointed out that FIFA considered the existing King's Park Stadium suitable for hosting World Cup matches. Furthermore, unlike in the case of Cape Town, FIFA had also not exerted pressure on the city of Durban to build a new venue. Sole thus concluded that the money spent on the Moses Mabhida stadium should rather have gone into other, strategically more important issues, as the new stadium was not a FIFA requirement, but merely a "nice to have". The journalist also criticized the role of FIFA who he accused of abusing their powerful monopoly position and of being rife with corruption, nepotism and secrecy.

Dr. Orli Bass, having co-edited a publication of the HSRC on the World Cup, delivered the second presentation of the forum. Concentrating on more intangible impacts the World Cup has on South Africa and its people, she maintained that mega-events, though seldom profitable in an economic sense, were a great opportunity to change images that are held about the host country and cities. Concerning the current World Cup in South Africa, it presents an opportunity to change stereotypes and negative perceptions that are commonly held about the country and the continent as a whole. Bass identified two predominant themes that make up the image of Africa that are widespread in the rest of the world. On the one hand, Africa was being perceived as a "ahistoric" place, associated with nature and wildness.

On the other hand, issues of poverty, conflict or disease form the second theme of that image. Both internally and externally, the successful hosting of a FIFA World Cup according to Bass serves as an opportunity to change these attitudes through a shared lived experience. The World Cup is thus used to tell different and more positive stories about Africa and South Africa. However, Bass also pointed out that there are some tensions within the attempt of redefining images of Africa: While the World Cup seemed to have triggered a growing sense of Pan-African excitement there was also the feeling in other African countries that South Africa had used them –by positioning itself as the representative of the whole of Africa – to advance its own aim of hosting the event. Despite those tensions and the lack of economic gains from hosting the World Cup, Bass maintained that intangible benefits might be the more relevant outcome of the World Cup experience.

Prof. Brij Maharaj took a critical stance towards South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Examining the relationship between sports and local economic development he argued that in the contemporary environment, cities are forced to competing with other cities around the world for investment. Increasingly, hosting large-scale sports events was being used as a strategy to attract attention and investment and for marketing the city. This had contributed to sports changing from merely being a form of entertainment into a political, economic and social force. Maharaj questioned the viability of these strategies pointing out that most host cities of mega-events in sports had come out losing money. At the same time the widespread reliance on public-private partnerships often led to the exclusion of large sections of the population from the planning process. Turning to the role of FIFA, Maharaj criticized the organization's legacy, which among others included long-lasting toleration of the racist Apartheid-time South African Football Association. Citing allegations of corruption and severe lacks of transparency, Maharaj went on to question the Association's present role as well. FIFA were only responsible for providing the entertainment and host countries had to shoulder all of the costs for infrastructure. The organization would once more carry away huge profits from the tournament, having earned R25bn before the tournament had even kicked off. Examining the impact of 2010 for South Africa, he argued that the costs of hosting the event had escalated significantly and would probably displace spending in other vital sectors such as housing, healthcare or education.

## **Discussion**

The discussion that followed the presentations was characterized by a high level of frustration about the inflated expenditure for stadiums. Many felt that public funds should not be spent on sporting events but rather be spent on areas like education or housing. And while many recognized improvements in the city ahead of the World Cup, like improved security in the city centre or better public transport, they also expressed concerns that those benefits were tailored to suit tourists' needs and might quickly fade away after the World Cup is over. A few inputs suggested that since South Africa has been able to manage this mega-event, there is reason for confidence in the country's ability to tackle other problems as well. Most participants however criticized that as opposed to addressing basic problems in service delivery, there was a high willingness and capability within the government to manage a once-off event that yielded little tangible improvements for disadvantaged sections of the South African population.