

Real legacy of World Cup

SA sees few benefits

The Soccer World Cup has vanished but the mainstream media has lost interest and is not concerned to examine its longer-term impact. **Dale T McKinley** notes that this impact has been considerable and, sadly, most of it negative.

In the years leading up to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, the main sales pitch from the government was that this was a 'special' event that would light up a country with a dark and divided past and leave a lasting 'developmental legacy' that would benefit people.

Such a beneficial legacy would:

- promote economic growth;
- stimulate urban re-development;
- generate infrastructural development;
- advance soccer development;
- engender 'nation-building' and 'social cohesion'.

Fifa could not have asked for better propaganda. The same propaganda also served South Africa's political and economic elites and helped them to convince most South Africans that the World Cup was going to be the best thing since the fall of apartheid.

After securing the right to host, soccer supremos, Irwin Khoza and Danny Jordaan proclaimed, 'We have developed a plan to present Fifa with a risk-free opportunity on African soil... the 2010 Fifa World Cup to South Africa will be the greatest gift to the people of our country and our continent.'

Sepp Blatter and his Fifa executive basking in their publicly affirmed self-importance, were no doubt licking their lips at the prospect of how much political mileage and money they could make from the first World Cup on the African continent. Fifa, South

Africa, the African continent and the world would all benefit – how could ordinary South Africans resist?

Now that the World Cup is over we are able to critically reflect on its legacy for South Africa. The question is: do such claims have any truth to them?

REALITIES

In economic terms, the World Cup benefited an elite. Besides private South African construction firms and their black economic empowerment components, which made record profits out of stadium construction alongside a few local high-end hospitality businesses, most profits went to Fifa and its multinational corporate partners.

We still do not know the exact amount of public money spent on everything associated with the Cup but it probably exceeds the R40-billion figure that government recently made public. The original estimate in 2003 for the cost to government to host the Cup was R2.3-billion. We now also know that Fifa took an incredible R25 to 30 billion (tax-free) World Cup booty out of the country.

A June 2010 opinion poll showed that a whopping 78% of people said that the World Cup was too expensive, with 65% in 23 other countries saying the same. National Council of Trade Unions general secretary, Manene Samela probably summed up the feelings of most in the

country when he said before the Cup: 'It's daylight robbery in the name of sport and development'.

As far as its contribution to economic growth is concerned, the event produced a deficit.

While the government and Fifa have been crowing about the 1 to 2% contribution to South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP), they do not tell South Africans that public expenditure on the Cup will probably account for almost 6.5% of the 2010-2011 GDP.

The developmental benefits of World Cup infrastructure will not, as President Zuma declared, 'benefit all South Africans in years to come and enable all citizens to have improved access to services and infrastructure'. Rather, most of the stadiums will become white elephants due to massive costs associated with maintenance and the lack of sporting or other events to fill and pay for them.

Fifa's host city and stadium 'agreements', protected from scrutiny by confidentiality clauses like national government guarantees to Fifa, were forced on every city and stadium owner where games were played. At a closed 2006 parliamentary briefing, the executive manager of the Department of Provincial and Local Government, Dr PJ Bouwer told representatives that each city had been required by Fifa to sign agreements on a 'take it or leave it

basis' and that 'many of the terms in the contracts had been framed in an undetermined fashion'.

These 'agreements' in the nine 'host' cities were loaded with outrageous demands for additional and costly expenditure on stadiums and training grounds, special medical services, one-sided stadium leases, official 'fan parks' and city beautification schemes.

Crucially, a large portion of these costs was paid for by diverting municipal monies meant for other services, as well as through an expanded national government municipal subsidy. Host cities such as Mbombela are now in deep debt and are having to cut back on basic services across the board.

In relation to the transport infrastructure associated with the World Cup, mainly in Gauteng Province, plans are in place for their full or partial privatisation. As of next year, anyone travelling on Gauteng's revamped highways will have to fork out anything up to 50c a kilometre in tolls.

Meanwhile, the high-speed 'Gautrain' which continues to eat billions of taxpayer's rands, will be beyond the means of most South Africans and will end up servicing tourists and those with disposable incomes from higher-income suburbia.

Other World Cup transport projects such as Johannesburg's Rea Vaya bus service have the potential to give longer-term benefits to poor and working people. But it is uncertain whether financial resources and administrative capacity will be sufficient to sustain it.

SOCCER DEVELOPMENT?

One of Fifa's claims about the 'social legacy' of the Cup was that a large portion of funds derived would go towards the development of soccer in South Africa and the continent. Yet, Fifa's 2009 financial report shows that only 15% of total annual income went to its soccer development programme.

Further, it has recently been announced that the hundreds of millions from Fifa which Safa (South

African Football Association) claimed it would use for soccer development, will simply be a 'repayment' for the money Safa spent on tickets for the public in order to fill empty stadium seats.

However, the most energetic claim around the 'legacy' of the Cup, especially from South Africa's politicians, was its immediate and longer-term contribution to 'nation building', 'social cohesion' and 'patriotism'. Again, President Zuma expressed it clearly when he said that the Cup 'is an expression of the possibilities brought by our freedom'. The argument is that the 'success' of the Cup will live on as a social and political unifier of a nation suffering from racial and socio-economic division and massive inequality.

Such claims were undermined by the way the World Cup impacted on the economically marginalised in South Africa. The eviction of the poor from key urban 'development' sites associated with the Cup exacerbated the already divided racial and spatial landscape of South Africa.

Like the false promises of South Africa's neo-liberal policies, the immediate and longer-term socio-economic benefits of the Cup have not, and will not, trickle-down to the majority because the 'game' is one where a domestic and international elite are the players, the referee and the owner.

If South Africans have learnt anything since 1994 it is that patriotism is a tool of a short-lived populism and that there can be no meaningful unity when inequality of ownership and opportunity reproduces the system.

LEGACY AND BEYOND

The World Cup represented above all the conquest of South Africa by an elite-led, capitalist branding and image-making exercise. Elite and corporate interests were conflated with the 'common' and 'national' interest. The World Cup will never be a metaphor for the triumph over adversity of South Africa's or Africa's 'renaissance' or 'developmental legacy'. Rather, it

was a hugely costly and short-lived exercise in image and myth-making.

As Chris Webb argues, 'In South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy to global capitalism, image is key in pursuing the dominant economic rationalisations of neoliberalism... [it] perfectly serves the ruling ANC's redistribution through growth policy [and] effectively opens the economic and political spaces necessary to pursue neoliberal policies and development.'

No wonder that the elites of Brazil set to host the next World Cup in 2014 are following South Africa in using the event as a global image-cover for the socio-economic inequalities and class oppression that is the reality of Brazil's majority. The greatest gift that South Africans can give to Brazil is to share the realities of our World Cup experience and legacy.

At home we must do everything to halt the same elites from engaging in another round of smoke-and-mirrors propaganda and populist plunder. Already, there are plans underway to bid for the 2020 Olympic Games.

In the longer-term however, the best way to forge a lasting alternative is to reclaim the human and public nature of soccer at the point where the majority of people live, work and play in urban and rural communities, in workplaces, in social and sports collectives.

This is the base of society where people and their humanity are strongest and where the tentacles of neo-liberal capitalism are most vulnerable. It is this base that can radically change the ways in which the sport is organised, played and enjoyed and where people can create solidarity and passion as well as exercise collective power. Who knows, maybe a truly beautiful legacy can be constructed. ■

Dale T McKinley is a writer, lecturer and activist. Some of this article is taken from his chapter: 'Fifa and the sports accumulation complex' in a book on the World Cup to be published by the Labour Research Service.