

What South Africa's World Cup really means

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While excitement around South Africa's forthcoming World Cup continues to build, South Africa's poor are seeing none of the supposed economic benefits associated with hosting the tournament, argue Azad Essa and Oliver Meth.

The World Cup might be just around the corner, and excitement for the first event of its kind on African soil is rapidly gaining momentum, but ordinary South Africans are finding it increasingly difficult to ignore the darker side of playing host to the greatest show on Earth.

FIFA's (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) regulatory by-laws for the tournament outlaw – within a kilometre from each stadium – almost any economic activity that does not add value to FIFA and its sponsors.

But, because this law affects street traders, the Early Morning Market traders and small businesses around the stadium precinct more than anyone else, this ridiculous requirement has failed to capture South Africa's imagination.

It is therefore almost a good thing that the South African media now faces censorship as stipulated by FIFA rules in granting media accreditation. FIFA is allowed to withdraw accreditation to any journalist at any given point if the journalist is seen to bring the tournament into disrepute.

The South African media's right to function independently and without fear is enshrined in the constitution. This attack has unwittingly moved the struggle against draconian FIFA by-laws into the media domain, which should, by default, highlight the broader struggles ordinary South Africans face against FIFA in its quest to turn South Africa into a FIFA puppet.

Just as our economic policies are not designed for citizens but industries, so too the World Cup is engineered to cater to corporations and foreign interests using the vehicle of South Africa's much loved sport, soccer.

By now the envisioned development through sporting events is a long-past pipe dream. There is no evidence in South Korea, Japan or even France that hosting a World Cup would usher in tangible economic prosperity, even though the event was sold as such.

Most analysts agree that the World Cup is bound to address Afro-pessimism, create a feel-good factor

and not much else.

But it is not all doom and gloom. The World Cup represents a unique opportunity for ordinary South Africans to reconsider the viability of selling their hard-earned democratic rights for one moment of history. To avert being trampled by FIFA is almost unavoidable. But to stand up and voice discontent is incumbent on the nation; the South African state is not about to do it. For some, even the unthinkable has become an option.

With World Cup preparations continuing to wreak significant havoc in South African cities, and coupled rampant corruption and unacceptable levels of crime, there have already been calls for a boycott of the premier event.

On Facebook, the 'Boycott 2010 World Cup Campaign in South Africa' fan page has drawn significant criticism from the presidency as well as national and international media. Even civil society organisations and representations of the poor are among those who have responded and voiced strong criticism of the Boycott 2010 Campaign.

On the other end of the scale, the World Class Cities for all Campaign (WCCA) has worked towards finding humane solutions to the quest by FIFA and municipalities to rid the CBDs (central business districts) of informal traders, street children, sex workers and other beings considered undesirable.

Borne out of the 2002 World Cup in South Korea and Japan, the WCCA is about reminding the government that people deserved to be engaged before being forcibly removed in the cities' attempts to create 'world class cities'.

South Africans love soccer, not only because of the beauty and art of the sport, but because one ball and some tarmac is affordable, unlike many other sports. The FIFA 2010 South Africa World Cup is seen as a great heist of lies, in taking what is beloved – soccer – and manipulating it to suit the interests of a capitalist system and marginalising the working class.

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