

World Cup can get the ball rolling on service delivery

FOURTEEN years into its new, democratic dispensation, SA continues to face a critical lag in service delivery. While the situation can be attributed to a range of extenuating circumstances (from the political economy and geopolitics, to practical challenges around delivery capacity and inter-governmental relations), there remain very clear and urgent moral, social, economic and political imperatives for the country to make the systems of service delivery work for all.

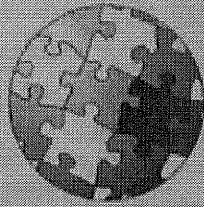
While the government has demonstrated a clear commitment to improving services, there continues to be a growing challenge in the pace, adequacy, efficiency and sustainability of service delivery. Protests over delivery in water, sanitation, electricity and housing have highlighted continuing backlogs, differences in service levels, poor planning and management, and the disparity between rural and urban areas.

In this context there is significant potential for 2010 to act as a fillip to the impetus behind service delivery. In the developmental ideal, surplus accommodation after the event could be converted into stock which addresses the housing backlog. In addition, the maintenance and extension of water, sanitation and energy infrastructure could be fast-tracked, albeit mostly in urban areas.

In practice, concerns about 2010 and service provision coalesce around two key (and interrelated) questions – first, will the requisite services be available to support the matches and other associated events? And, second, will the World Cup leave a legacy of improved service delivery behind?

According to the HSRC's 2010 annual longitudinal survey, public attitudes to these issues are mixed. Over three rounds there has been a slight increase, from 4% to 7%, in the number of respondents who believe that improved service delivery will be the main benefit accruing to their city from 2010.

A greater increase, from 9% to 14%, is seen in the number of respondents who believe that improved service delivery will



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neighbourhood level. More remarkable, of the benefits cited last year, improved service delivery was the highest-ranked category at the neighbourhood scale. Notwithstanding this, it must also be noted that the low percentages – while not insignificant – do point to a fair degree of caution among people in anticipating this benefit.

No doubt lack of confidence in the energy sector will reinforce this cautionary trend. The electricity crisis, and its implications for 2010, have been well documented. Both the government and Eskom have promised uninterrupted electricity supply to key 2010 venues. This is not in doubt. More to the point, however, is that this commitment may impair power delivery in residential areas, with potential load-shedding consequences. If this is the case, residents may become rather sceptical about 2010 service delivery benefits. They could worsen if tariff increases occur.

One must also be wary of 2010 related investments displacing regular spending.

Despite official assertions to the contrary, civil society has long maintained that these resources could be better allocated to housing provision or addressing backlogs in maintenance across services.

Compromise is the most likely reality and perhaps Johannesburg's example offers some viable pointers in this regard. Johannesburg Water has reportedly allocated about R120m to support Gautrain and World Cup projects.

Additionally, match prepara-



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sanitation and water services improved. This budget is reportedly part of a much larger five-year R5bn upgrading and rehabilitation plan.

Thus, the 2010 approach is contained within broader maintenance, improvement and extension plans and underscores the kind of thinking that is required if the World Cup is to make a practical and sustained difference. Other host cities may have left it too late, however.

It is thus insufficient to focus merely on extremes; either emphasising the provision of services to match venues, or promising widespread improvements in service delivery as conventionally understood. It is far more useful to frame the debate on service delivery responsively.

Responsively articulating a legacy allows one to adjust objectively to the shifting landscape – in other words, while the hoped-for large-scale advances will probably not be achieved, there will be confidence that the event will produce some improvements.

In order better to address related issues, the HSRC has recently launched a Centre for Service Delivery – a multi-layered, action research centre that aims to produce evidence-based knowledge and demonstration projects leading to local interventions. These should have a significant effect on service delivery; 2010 offers the opportunity to ramp up such strategies, not only to provide serviced venues, but also to assist in the creation of a sustainable service delivery context, especially among poor and marginalised groups.

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