

# Glorious event will need African fusion

**T**HERE has been much talk about the potential of the 2010 World Cup to leave behind a lasting legacy for Africa. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that this will be the most meaningful effect of the event, without necessarily substantiating the claim. The situation, however, is not as simple as this exciting picture suggests, and bears further scrutiny.

Africa is at a crossroads. On one hand, the continent seems mired in problems; on the other, there seems to be much to celebrate.

On the negative side, there is a vast amount of political conflict, some of which seems, distressingly, to be escalating.

Fighting in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe and Uganda has caused great regional instability, requiring at different times the intervention of the international community.

Add to this Africa's poverty and underdevelopment, large trade and balance of payment deficits, a lack of progress on trade liberalisation, high rates of HIV/AIDS, as well as the environmental effects of global climate change, and prospects for the consolidation of democracy, economic growth and sustainability look bleak.

On the positive side, Africa is growing economically at an average of 7% (albeit driven by the performance of a few nations) and foreign direct investment has been considerable over the past five years.

Debt cancellation and trade concessions — despite the failure of the post-Doha talks — have also resulted in economic gains. Then there's the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), which has the potential to revive the ailing fortunes of the continent.

In this regard, the African Union (AU) has done commendable work in the past year, especially in Sudan, and the African peer-review mechanism is working effectively. Also, there are all the positive spin-offs for the continent that may result should SA's request for a nonpermanent seat on the United Nations Security Council bear fruit. Encouragingly, too, regional bodies have been transformed to meet the objectives of

Nepad, and regional trading blocs have been established, notably in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

So can Africa celebrate and hope to benefit from the 2010 World Cup as a truly continental event?

The aforementioned concerns and challenges for Africa, in addition to time constraints and a host of technical specifications from Fifa, seem to mitigate against widespread collaboration and a true sense of partnership.

But on the plus side, drawing on the strengths of the continent, prospects for positioning the event as a continental one look promising, provided SA begins a dialogue immediately with African heads of state. This should be initiated by government in partnership with the AU, and be succeeded by the 2010 Local Organising Committee (LOC) and the National Communication Partnership (NCP), with Fifa's support critical throughout.

The agenda for the first of such meetings should focus on certain questions, some of which are: what are the likely tourism (and other positive economic) spin-offs from the World Cup, especially for neighbouring states?

What are the benefits likely to accrue to Africa from successfully staging a mega sporting event such as the World Cup? Does the event have the potential to drive the perceptions and realities of an African renaissance, including a celebration of the continent's cultures and diversity? Do prospects exist through the World Cup to enhance the integration of the continent into the global economy? What is the relationship between event-based economic growth and development, and good governance arrangements?

This first meeting must conclude with the establishment of pan-African co-ordination entrusted with making sure that, through constant debate, dialogue and intervention, the prospects for the World Cup to deliver positive results across Africa will be realised. The South African government, in partnership with the LOC and Africa's newly restructured regional bodies, must drive such a process and assume ownership of it. The global community must also play

a supportive role.

Time constraints suggest that this formative summit should occur in the first quarter of next year, and that the co-ordinating committee tasked with driving the initiative immediately develop a programme of action, with a specific set of time-bound deliverables. The co-ordinating committee and its many sub-committees must meet regularly and liaise with the South African government, the LOC, the regional bodies and, of course, Fifa.

If this happens, we could be well on our way to seeing a world cup that truly benefits the continent. It is time that Africa makes its mark, consolidating and celebrating its position internationally, and 2010 represents a real opportunity to do so. The event must be embraced and nurtured by the continent with spirited determination and enthusiasm, and unfailing belief. Talk alone will not suffice. A programme of action grounded in what is realistically achievable requires hasty formulation and uncompromising commitment.

While we may be tempted to base such a plan on the recent experience of Germany — and there is much to be learnt from the 2006 event — the African initiative must be locally grounded while at the same time globally relevant and marketable.

Drawing on the continent's strengths, while positioning the initiative to maximise the opportunities presented by a formula-based culture of global consumption, is not easy. That is why I believe the international community must support the African stakeholders that come together to drive this process.

An additional but no less important spin-off for SA would be the opportunity such partnerships create to change African perceptions of South Africans as the moral custodians of the continent. An Africa-wide dialogue will also help to repair relationships with Egypt and Morocco, still smarting after losing out to SA in the bid to host the 2010 World Cup.

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