

Getting into shape for 2010

I WROTE on these pages a few months ago that hosting the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup presented SA with a unique opportunity to fast-track the urban development impetus I stand by that assertion.

The more familiar I become with international literature on hosting the mega-events, especially that portion of the literature that is cautionary in its tone and vocal about the benefits that may accrue to host nations, the more confident I feel about my hypothesis.

The reason for this is simple. I am hopeful all major stakeholders involved in the formidable work that comes before this event are reading the literature and experiences of former host cities.

And as development plans roll out, I hope they are sufficiently cognizant of the pitfalls associated with pre-event programmes of action that are not well conceptualised and formulated, and robustly implemented.

It does, however, seem that encouraging progress is being made in this regard.

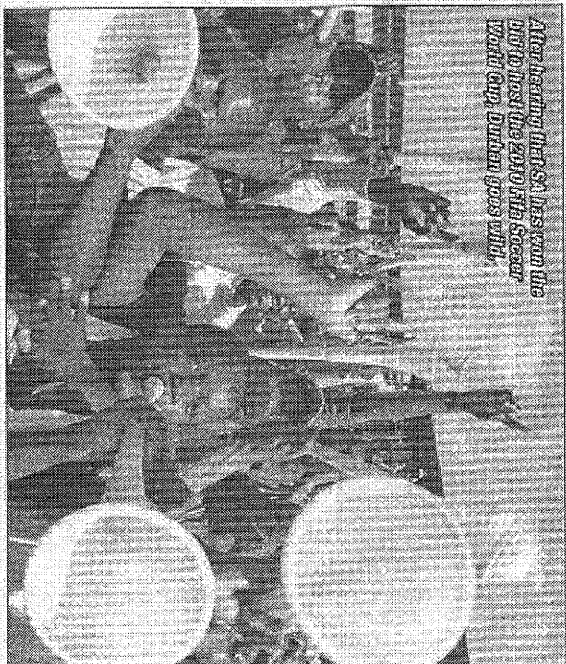
Having said that, I now pose some cautionary reminders — especially for those directly responsible for getting our cities ready to host the event. They include local government practitioners, property developers, members of the construction industry, and others involved in the service sector.

First, a development framework must resonate with key development objectives spelled out in the bid blueprint for which the local organising committee in collaboration with the relevant line ministries in government, must take direct responsibility for overseeing and enforcing.

While individual cities may well decide on the specific mechanics of implementing development plans, a core, non-negotiable set of development principles — that correspond with those enshrined in the blueprint — need to be subscribed to.

This is one way of ensuring that the necessary synergy is realised. By building this into the terms of reference for the many tenders that are about to be advertised, the adjudicators can ensure that the bidders have complied with the development criteria.

As the saying that SA has from the bid to host the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup, Durban goes wild.



Second, it is important that cities modulate and revise pre-existing development strategies to align with development imperatives outlined in the bid book. This may not be too difficult since our larger cities have, in the recent past, developed regeneration strategies that in most cases correspond with (city-based) development principles in the bid.

Indeed, bid drafters argued that hosting the world cup would give renewed expression to a holistically grounded set of urban renewal and regeneration plans.

But some of our cities seem to do other things as well, such as becoming world-class and globally competitive. Unfortunately (most proponents of this idea have subscribed to a formalistic, economic, growth-centred model of development for our cities, in which benefits to the poor and marginalised will accrue through a "trickle-down" effect.

Embracing an almost exclusively neo-liberal, market-orientated approach, the idea here is to position cities such as Johannesburg among a global hierarchy of competitive metropolitan areas.

What has to happen now, though, is that a balance needs to be struck between the development imperatives that have evolved as a result of our winning the bid, and the important need to make our cities globally competitive — but with new ideologies of development at the core of this strategy.

Third, our cities need to start co-operating, and the impulse to compete needs to give way to an understanding that the benefits that accrue should be seen as national public goods. In other words, job creation, economic growth, improved service delivery and infra-structure development, and the forging of a collective identity, must be realised and felt throughout the country, and not just in particular locales.

While cities are growth engines (65% of gross domestic product is generated here), and the cup presents unique opportunities to fast-track urban development, it is a glorious chance to rebuild underdeveloped and peripheral areas.

The development framework needs to incorporate this. The South African

Cities Network could play a useful brokering role among overzealous cities. Fourth, one needs to tease out the nature of relations between Fifa and the local organising committee more carefully and with greater scrutiny. As representative of SA's interests, the committee needs clarity from Fifa on its role, what it is mandated and entrusted to do on whose behalf such a mandate is being undertaken, and how much autonomy it has in making decisions.

As event "owner" and with profit generation much in mind, Fifa could well dictate, in particular, the nature of business arrangements, commercial partnerships and other economic transactions, which could have consequences for the kind of development agenda pursued.

While Fifa president Sepp Blatter's no-nonsense intervention in setting out the local organising committee leadership crisis is welcome, the committee would do well to sketch out the parameters of its role with Fifa. As we were recently reminded by Jürgen Rohmann, co-ordinator of the 2006 World Cup in Germany "Fifa has all the rights ... they control the ticket sales, ticket availability, media rights, signage and so on".

Finally, while public participation in the decision-making process is important, its effect is best realised if one understands what the public is thinking. Public perceptions vis-à-vis a range of world cup issues need to be consistently measured and analysed, and must then directly inform the development agenda — particularly that part which speaks to the benefits that could accrue to the poor and marginalised.

The list of what needs to be done will grow as we, as a nation, get to grips with preparing to host this mighty event. The issues outlined here, however, are some of the more immediate cautionary pointers in an otherwise exciting and challenging time. Vigorous public debate is essential, and good scholarly analysis of what is happening out there is crucial.

Dr Pillay is executive director at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and an urban geographer under the auspices of the urban renewal unit, the HSRC, with other partners, recently begun research analysis.