

Think and consult before embarking on research on the Soccer World Cup

I HAVE written extensively as a scholar and public commentator on 2010 for the past two years, and have an edited book due for publication next year that provides insight into preparation by and for cities in the run-up to the event.

I have been wondering, though, given time constraints associated with delivery and a host of stringent and unforgiving Fifa technical specifications, whether it is really practical to conduct research and engage in robust public dialogue.

I work in a research institution that conducts public-purpose, policy-relevant research, a fair amount of it commissioned by the government. I have been highly gratified, over the past few years in particular, at the extent to which the government and other important stakeholders engage the research community before proposing policy, or recommending other interventions, likely to affect the lives of millions — whether by commissioning research on HIV/AIDS, poverty, job creation, service delivery, economic growth, macro-social trends or governance arrangements.

Some of the highlights of my career as an academic and scholar have been the moments where I have seen actual “uptakes” of good empirically based and theoretically grounded research, whether in policy debate, newly effected legislation, or scenario planning.

I believe strongly that — the technical planning imperatives associated with 2010 notwithstanding — research informing aspects of the event and debate framed around the benefits of mega-event development, which has recently commenced, is important and will be taken seriously.

Good, rigorous impact-assessment research will have a formidable bearing, and leave a significant imprint, on the kind of legacy that the event is likely to leave behind. This could affect SA's further integration into the global economy, the impact on unemployment, the ability of the event to leave behind good in-



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years, and provide a necessary set of checks and balances at different discursive and representational scales, the research effort would not have been in vain.

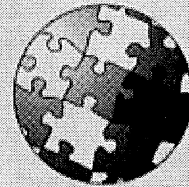
Having said this, the academic and research community has to enter into “real” partnerships with stakeholders interested in the benefits that may accrue to the 2010 cause from good research. Too often in the past, the research community has operated in a void, with a singularly minded agenda.

Conversely, the government and other important 2010 stakeholders, like the Local Organising Committee (LOC), have not engaged the research community

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sufficiently about their needs. Research projects must thus be conceived in partnership with all the major stakeholders.

I would urge the stakeholder community about to commission research to inform the 2010 planning and implementation process — and the donor community poised to fund some of



2010
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this — to do so with caution.

They should properly engage the research community about the exact nature of the research that needs to be commissioned and the precise deliverables that must emanate. A discussion must ensue on appropriate research designs and methodologies; it must be made clear who the intended beneficiaries of the research are meant to be, or which aspect of the 2010 process the research is aimed at benefiting; and the importance of short-term impact-based research, the kind that could provide useful immediate inputs into the planning process, must be emphasised. It is only through a research model based on the above points that research is likely to make any impact in the years leading up to 2010, whether commissioned or self-generated.

The research community will have its own longer-term research agenda, the kind that talks to the promises and pitfalls of hosting global games in more esoteric terms. This type of research, too, must be encouraged, as we try and leave behind a truly comprehensive and mutually inclusive 2010 legacy.

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HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS

4517

frastructure (including an integrated public transport system), or the potential 2010 has to bridge the divide between a still fractured South African population, where chasms along racial and class lines seem to be widening, and levels of inequality increasing.

If the research effort is thus able to influence legacy outcomes that inform planning and development over the next three

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