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# Golden chance for SA's cities to score from 2010

**T**HE decision last year by soccer world body Fifa to award SA the right to host the 2010 World Cup has shifted the spotlight to our cities, and their ability and readiness to cope. Although the event is still more than five years away, preliminary analysis of infrastructure and the ability to provide services has begun.

While opinion suggests that South African cities will be in a position to host the tournament successfully, consensus also suggests that much needs to be done.

SA is the first African nation to host such a big sporting event, prompting President Thabo Mbeki to pronounce that this is not a South African event, but an African one.

Much is expected from a host nation, and global attention has already started to focus on the opportunities and threats in such an ambitious undertaking, especially for a transitional democracy recovering from years of spatial, racial and political fragmentation.

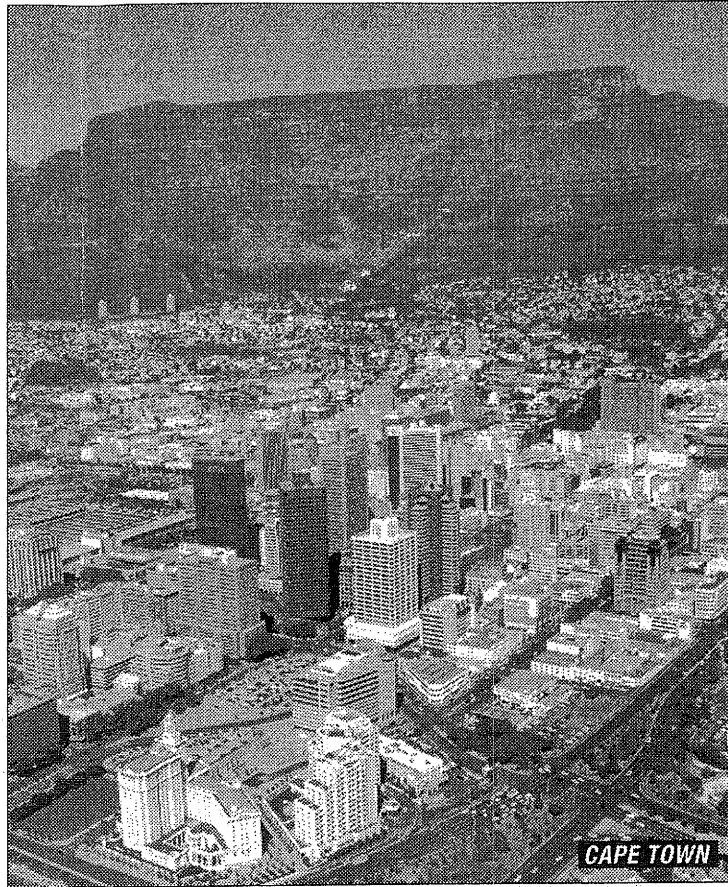
Urban development and renewal have been identified by government as a key national imperative. As such, assessing the development implications of hosting the world cup, especially at a time when government's urban renewal strategy is (eventually) being finalised, becomes critical.

With urbanisation rates projected at 65% in five years, with the six big metropolitan economies currently contributing 63% of gross domestic product, and with service, infrastructure and income disparities widening in urban areas, any initiative aimed at stimulating economic growth and job creation needs to be carefully nurtured.

Hosting the 2010 World Cup has the potential to do precisely this.

It is surmised here that the next five-and-a-half years present SA with a unique opportunity to fast-track development in our cities and large towns. If a programme of action is well conceptualised and formulated, the spin-offs for our cities could be immeasurable. Major role players in development have recently recognised this opportunity, with the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) leading the way by securing a \$50m loan from the African Development Bank to "start boosting SA's (urban) infrastructure ahead of the 2010 World Cup".

The IDC has created a business



unit catering specifically for the tournament and, together with the Development Bank of Southern Africa, has begun a thorough assessment of what infrastructure needs to be in place for the tournament, and how this can be sustained with maximum utility value.

Poorly conceptualised proposals — in which decision-making is not democratically based, and in which growth, equity and sustainability principles are not seen as mutually reinforcing — could have harmful consequences for our cities and their long-term future.

Mega events are often used as "spectacles" and, as such, are often seen as no more than public relations ventures far removed from the realities of urban problems.

"Welfarist" and equity-based considerations tend to be conspicuously absent.

Fortunately, drawing on the experience of countries in which there was opposition from marginalised communities who saw little material benefit from such events, and taking lessons from Cape Town's

Olympic bid into account, SA's planners considered two elements to be vital.

First, the tournament has been conceived as a catalyst for improving the lives of the historically disadvantaged (this is meticulously spelt out in the bid blueprint); second, redesigning apartheid cities to create new functional links has become a central thrust.

Despite there being a very comprehensive and well-grounded bid plan which, in essence, lays the foundation for a substantial development agenda, it remains no more than a blueprint at present.

What is required among scholars and practitioners is the start of a robust debate that ensures that the work of the about-to-be-established local organising committee starts and is sustained on the basis on which the bid was conceived. The questions that are vital in informing such debate include the following:

■ What are the current capabilities of South African cities to host this event, and what is their state of readiness to do so?

■ In the run-up to the event, can urban development and renewal — especially in the six major urban conurbations — be fast-tracked and how?

■ Is it possible that growth and equity issues become reinforcing concepts in a sustainable programme of urban development and renewal preceding the event?

■ How can a well-grounded programme of urban development (initiated before the event) take root and be sustained well into the future, with multiple spin-offs for all city dwellers, in particular the poor and marginalised?

■ What are the public's perceptions of the effect that hosting the World Cup is likely to have on people's livelihoods?

■ How do we measure the potential of the Soccer World Cup to place South African cities in a global hierarchy of competitive metropolitan economies?

This list is not exhaustive, but as committed South Africans we need to start a process of constructive and responsible engagement at some level. Vigorous public debate and informed scholarly analysis will provide direct insight and a nuanced understanding of the development consequences of hosting a massive sporting event.

As such, the basis for proactive planning to ensure maximum benefit for all South Africans, especially the poor and marginalised, is likely to take root.

Unique opportunities to fast-track urban development in our cities and large towns are likely to ensue, with significant policy implications for how government starts thinking about city-wide renewal, development and regeneration strategies.

If this all comes together as planned, we may well see 400 000 visitors in SA in 2010, a boost to the economy to the tune of R25bn, and the creation of 150 000 jobs. The boost to national pride, and the potential to nurture a true South African identity, are also likely to be intangible but significant benefits.

■ Pillay is an executive director at the Human Sciences Research Council and an urban geographer by training. Under the auspices of the Urban Renewal and Development Unit, the HSRC, in collaboration with other partners, will begin such analysis in the coming months.