South Africans believe 2010 can lift them, but how high?

For the third consecutive year South Africans’ attitudes remain positive towards the 2010 World Cup, concludes UDesh Pillay and Orli Bass in a comparison between the 2007 data to that of previous years. But given the recent spate of load-shedding, rising interest rates and stadium strike action, policy-makers and 2010 stakeholders should eschew complacency and pay attention to managing expectations in the lead-up to 2010.

Perceptions of national benefits from the 2010 World Cup have begun to stabilise. Much like the previous round, 74% of respondents perceive economic growth, job creation and putting South Africa on the international map as the three main benefits.

Over three survey rounds, approximately a third of the population indicated that they expect to personally benefit from job opportunities.

**Ready and Steady?**

Perceptions of national readiness, while fluctuating within a small band, have been consistently high. In 2007 80% of respondents indicated that South Africa would be ready to host the World Cup in 2010 and public assessment of local authority readiness shows an imperceptible change from 2006; 56% believe that their local authority will be able to meet the needs of 2010.

However, this is coupled with the perception of 41% of respondents who said benefits would be ‘short term’. Beliefs remained steady at 50% from 2006 that expected benefits would be ‘lasting’. This split points to ambivalence surrounding notions of legacy and suggests the need to create more public awareness around legacy issues.

**Upping the Downers**

Such perceptions are perhaps explained by the consistently perceived main disadvantages of hosting the event. Given rate hikes, fuel increases and the rising cost of food in 2007, price increases are, as in the 2005 survey round, perceived as the main disadvantage of hosting the World Cup. This concern has demonstrated some volatility – from 25% in 2005, this decreased to 22% in 2006 and then increased appreciably to 30% in 2007.

Concern over the potential of increased crime resulting from hosting the event has also vacillated from 20% to 29% to 27% worries significantly outrank other perceived disadvantages. In 2007, the next main category of concern – at an appreciably lower 10% – is that of congestion or blocking of the roads.

As in the previous two survey rounds, 81% of respondents believe that small business will benefit from 2010. While 2006 marked an increase in the number of respondents who broadly agreed with the sentiment that hosting the event would improve black economic empowerment, this figure has dropped to 76% – its lowest level thus recorded. Continuing a declining trend, 79% of respondents in 2007 ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ with the perception that hosting the mega-event would make South African cities more competitive internationally, as compared to 82% in 2006 and 85% in 2005.

It is vital that these expectations are addressed by policy-makers, government and 2010 stakeholders in planning for the event, as the downward trend in the latter two categories could be indicative of a growing sense of realism regarding 2010. While inflated expectations should not be perpetuated, there is a fine line between realism and disillusionment and it is crucial that the public does not become disenchanted with the event. To prevent this from happening, it is important that relevant information about planned legacy projects is shared and disseminated to the public.

And while on an aggregate scale 2007 represents a stabilising of opinion, it will be crucial to assess whether this plateau is maintained in the event of potential future anxiety over fuel increases, power failures, rising interest rates and construction/infrastructure delays as 2010 approaches.

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