

Traders protest exclusion from World Cup

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By Laura Lopez Gonzalez

Facing what they say is economic exclusion from South Africa's upcoming World Cup, informal traders marched on FIFA's South African headquarters in hopes of securing their place at the games, and their livelihoods.

Armed with placards bearing slogans like "Will my children eat soccer balls?" and "Is FIFA my new government?" about 100 informal traders descended on the headquarters of FIFA's local organising committee (LOC) yesterday [12 May] to demand greater access to economic opportunities generated by the World Cup.



Organised by the South African Informal Traders Forum, a consortium of 33 informal trader associations from Gauteng, the march aimed to deliver a list of demands to LOC CEO, Danny Jordaan. The demands include a stop to forced removals of informal traders in the run-up to the World Cup, employment opportunities for traders among FIFA affiliates such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola, as well as that vending areas be allocated to traders within match venues and fan parks.

According to Cecelia Dube, an informal trader working at Soccer City and vice chairperson of the Soccer City Traders Association, Soccer City traders were told as early as 28 February to move off stadium property. They refused and have remained to cater to construction workers putting the finishing touches on the Cup's flagship stadium.

Fellow Soccer City trader Sophie Tlhagale said that promises to integrate traders into the World Cup have not materialised and catering contracts that associations like hers had been eyeing have been given to other companies from outside the area.

"We even went to Pretoria to register as a company [in order to bid,]" Tlhagale said. "We've been thrown away."

Traders in cities like Cape Town and Durban have also voiced complaints that South Africa's huge informal economy has been marginalised by World Cup officials, according to Forum secretary general Siphso Twala who pointed the finger at harsh by-laws that he said have been mandated by FIFA but are imposed by municipalities.

According to the Forum's memorandum, FIFA has seven days to respond to the memorandum.

Strike a woman, strike a family

In the meantime, the livelihoods of many traders - the majority of whom are women - hang in the balance, said Dube.

According to the International Labour Office, about 70% of South Africa's informal traders are women. The informal economy fuelled by these women is estimated to account for about 7% of the country's Gross Domestic Product, according to the Human Sciences Research Council.

"You feel like they are taking away your job," said Dube, who is a widowed, single mother of four, who also provides for her sister's children and parents. "This is the only way I am getting bread on my table."

To Dube, who used to work at Steers, the informal sector has provided economic opportunities for her and her family that the formal sector has not, including better wages and independence, but a day - or a month in the case of the World Cup - without work still hurts.

Sam Tharaka is a member on South African Informal Traders Forum's executive committee and said that Dube is representative of a lot of women in the forum and in associations across the country.

With unemployment at around 25%, according to the latest Statistics South Africa figures, women like these continue to support families that have struggle to make ends meet with old age and child grants, he said. Increases in food prices have only exacerbated these families' vulnerably, he added.

FIFA LOC declined to comment on the issue while Sibongile Mazibuko, executive director of 2010 for the city of Johannesburg could not be reached for comment at the time of publication.