

## Who's Feeling It? Informal traders and the World Cup

*Jennifer Elle Lewis- Sangonet Newsletter*

As the whole country gears up for the quickly approaching 2010 FIFA World Cup, not everyone is happy. Informal traders are waiting for a response this week from FIFA to demands made last week at a demonstration outside 'Soccer City' protesting their exclusion from World Cup commerce. In the shadow of the Coca-Cola tower, over 100 informal traders presented a memorandum to FIFA executives, who promised a reply within seven days.

This is not the first such protest in the country. Since FIFA passed by-laws preventing informal traders from selling near stadiums during the World Cup, reserving these sites for FIFA affiliates and corporate sponsors, this marginalised group has hit the streets, literally.

Many of these individuals host their businesses and earn their livelihoods on the streets. However, on this day they transformed this space to a place of protest. These "hawkers," as they are commonly known, are trying to reclaim their basic human rights in their own way and on their own stomping ground. At the foothills of the massive state of the art soccer stadium, one wondered if these Davids could trump the FIFA Goliath that they say has hijacked what was once their South Africa.

Historically informal traders have had to be crafty, utilising unused spaces to offer convenient services and goods. Usually strategically placed near transport hubs and other attractions, from a social perspective, their services are key. They offer freshly cooked food and cold drinks appealing to people on the move for nominal fees. This would seem to fulfil the utopian ideals of community and labour power espoused by Karl Marx. However, when ideals enmesh with big business, the story changes.

Everyone wants to profit from the World Cup, from the small business owner to the taxi driver to the CEO of Vodacom. However, informal traders who have had to conduct their business informally because they do not have the means to form established businesses are even further off the grid as now FIFA has taken back the parking lots and sidelines they once occupied, to say "all mine."

Article 4.7.2. of the FIFA by-laws state: No Person may undertake any event or a Special Event at a Public Open Space or in its surrounding vicinity, which will or may be used for the purposes of the Competition unless specifically authorised by the Municipality.

A middle-aged man held a sign reading 'Informal traders support football but FIFA by-laws promotes poverty'. In this context, how could a company that profits millions of dollars be concerned about such competition?

Another sign read "Where is the government I've worked for? Is FIFA now my new government?" South Africa is a country with a tumultuous history, yet has made great strides to achieve democracy. And now, on the cusp of the largest global event to hit her shores, why is FIFA replacing the government structures that support the people of South Africa?

### **From Freedom Tours to Freedom Fries**

The South African tourism [website](#) offers catchy slogans like, "South Africa: It's Possible," and featured tours like "KwaZulu-Natal Freedom Route." Many tourists come with Hollywood dreams, and want to see the Big Five and African tribes, even if these enforce stereotypes. While FIFA does buy into some Orientalist fantasies, by attempting to promote legalised sex work, it would appear that they would rather promote brands like McDonalds to feed the masses exactly what they would get at home.

One trader at the protest questioned whether they thought such food sold on the streets was unclean, while another suggested maybe tourists would not want to eat pap, and FIFA is serving their taste buds and digestive tracts. However, many South Africans have also purchased tickets to the matches, and prefer their own local food, and surely when foreigners arrive, they too will want a taste of the local culture. In an attempt to make this country more palatable, FIFA and its affiliates are serving up a South Africa which is pre-packaged, wrapped in cellophane and arranged five to a shelf. Whether or not the public will buy it is yet to be determined.

### **Behind every strong stadium is a strong woman**

To date, the voices of informal traders, primarily female, have been all but ignored. On May 3rd, 2010 Gender Links, in partnership with ESSET and NCRF, hosted a seminar to discuss the role of community radio in "giving voice to the voiceless" during the World Cup.

During the event, an informal trader, Cecilia Dube, mentioned her role in 2010. She felt that like the construction workers who have built Soccer City, she too has had her hand in the construction. She spoke of all the female informal traders who have fed and nourished the workers who toil day in and day out. Her reasoning was mathematical.

The closest store to the stadium is a fifteen-minute walk from the construction site. By selling right next to the site, she helped FIFA with time management. If one construction worker saves thirty minutes each day during his lunch hour, multiplied by hundreds of workers and hundreds of days, it equals thousands of hours of saved people power.

Another point made by informal traders has been on the myth that their food is unclean. They buy their meat and produce fresh every day and it is never frozen and reheated, unlike fast food. These women, who are often caretakers and mothers, cannot understand why their services are considered risky.

Recently, FIFA granted tickets to the construction workers who built the stadiums, but not informal traders, and therefore, not women. Aside from the fact that women also want to see the games, this gesture is offensive to this marginalised group. It is as if their work is inconsequential, when they regard themselves as part of the backbone of the stadium.

A woman held a sign scribbled on cardboard that read, 'Will my children eat soccer balls?' This is an astute observation, grotesque, but true. Women who depend on the income of trading, who are less likely to obtain bank loans, and who require flexible working hours and the ability to nurse their children could very well suffer the most.

### **Wide open spaces**

Across the street from Soccer City is an empty field. In fact, next to the various entrances of the stadium are plenty of spaces to accommodate informal traders. There is yet no valid explanation as to why FIFA will not allow them to be present, to chance their business ventures, and then let the public decide.

Informal traders have carved away a niche for themselves as entrepreneurs, and they had hoped that the World Cup would give them the leverage to begin setting up more "formal" establishments. Counting down seven days from the day of the protest, 12 May, traders are focused on this expiration date, which may mark the final blow to their dreams.