

HOME > THE MEDIA > OPINIONS > COLUMNISTS > ASSORTED COLUMNS

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### Outlook 2010

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**Wadim Schreiner** analyses reporting in the run-up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, and finds a shift in local coverage and an international media that does not seem to budge.

With a little over a year and a half to go until the World Cup, international visitors will probably be more sceptical than most South Africans about the country's progress in achieving infrastructure and safety goals: International media continue to doubt South Africa's ability to host the World Cup.

Granted, South Africa did not have it easy last year. In January and February, Eskom's power cuts dominated international coverage of the country. Fuelled by some large corporates, particularly from the mining industry, a picture was created of a country in darkness, without a plan and just about to retrench thousands of workers.

May and June posed the next threats: The world watched in disbelief as African migrants were killed and chased out of townships during weeks of xenophobic violence. There was extensive coverage of the Zimbabwean crisis and South Africa's "quiet diplomacy" towards Robert Mugabe. And an internal political upheaval topped the list: One president out, another one in, coupled with reporting on divisions within the ruling party, with a splinter party in the making.

All of these events accelerated international media's fear that South Africa is an unstable country.

#### Rather patronising

In the third quarter (2008), coverage of the 2010 FIFA World Cup (dominated by German newspapers) was generally highly sensitive to specific events in South Africa. The Confederations Cup draw in November, for example, attracted widespread approval, mostly because Sepp Blatter was heavily quoted as saying that South Africa will host a successful Cup – a first for the continent. In fact, coverage in Western international media can be perceived as rather patronising when compared to African media.

Reporting is built around FIFA "milestones", such as the official visits by Blatter and his team to inspect the "status", as well as events related to the Confederations Cup.

Outside of these FIFA events, little coverage emerges, unless it can be connected to other stereotypical coverage: people being killed in accidents (road infrastructure) or metro police giving "discounts" to traffic offenders (corruption). Then, it is rather convenient to make reference to South Africa as "the country hosting the next World Cup".

Aside from the "voice of trust" (FIFA's Blatter), very few local voices are given an opportunity to give their opinions on World Cup progress. And when they do (as in the case of the now frequent coverage on safety and security issues), the coverage is supported by statements from FIFA officials. In other words: Unless the progress is qualified by a Western source, it is considered to be "local spin".

It might help for international media to utilise our own media as a point of reference. Here, a large turnaround in the type of media coverage can be seen. Initially our own media were largely critical of South Africa's ability to meet the 2010 FIFA World Cup goals; however, coverage lately has been exponentially positive. Local sources get extensive coverage and journalists take interest in progress reports, particularly around the stadiums and rail infrastructure.

#### Local turnaround

Surprisingly, considering local media's generally negative coverage of anything linked to government, reporting on the World Cup preparations has turned the corner.

Whether this has an impact on people's perceptions remains to be seen. It is nevertheless an important development. It will be a challenge for local communicators of the World Cup to convince and excite the international media. It seems the bar is considerably higher than in previous World Cups. Not so much in terms of the actual infrastructure and "event experience", but more in terms of the entrenched expectations that the World Cup simply cannot be a success because it is taking place in a Third World country.

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