

# AFRICA REPORT



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The World Cup will help unify people. If there is one thing on this planet that has power to bind people together it is soccer

*Nelson Mandela  
Former South African President*

## For the LOVE of the GAME

Despite historical setbacks in the long road to hosting the World Cup, South Africa always kept the dream alive

By KHADIJA SHARIFE

It was said that South Africa's idea to bid for the World Cup was ridiculous. "Does Africa have the resources to stage an event of such enormity they asked?" said Chairman Irvin Khoza of the 2010 FIFA World Cup Local Organizing Committee (LOC) South Africa. South Africa's decade-long preparation - and dream to host the 2006 World Cup began in 1994: the seed was initially planted in the mind of South African Football Association (SAFA) President Stix Morewa, on his return from the 1994 World Cup hosted by the United States, followed by Morewa's letter to FIFA stating the same. But one decade of preparation appeared in vain when Oceania official Charles Dempsey abstained from voting, leading to Germany's one point victory over South Africa. According to Khoza, on returning to South Africa to the home of then-South African President Nelson Mandela, they were commanded,

"Boys, go and fight back." Mandela would know about struggle. The leader at the helm of the African National Congress (ANC) - South Africa's former liberation movement - was repeatedly branded a terrorist by the U.S. and UK governments. The regime itself was financially sustained by foreign commercial banks, described by Prime Minister Vorster as "bricks in the walls of the regime's existence." But years of prison "engaging" with apartheid officials taught Mandela the language of negotiation - a strategy used to embrace the Springboks Rugby team, a watershed moment in South Africa's history, as well as foment enthusiasm for the Cup despite lack of available funds. "The World Cup will help unify people. If there is one thing in this planet that has power to bind people together it is soccer," stated Mandela, who cried on hearing the news that South Africa had won the bid. →



## Football in Africa

The history of football in South Africa - and much of the African continent, bears testimony to sites of domination and resistance, relative to available resources and rooted in socialization issues related to class, culture, ethnicity and race.

While rugby, cricket and swimming were sports claimed by the wealthier white, and to a lesser extent, Indian, segments of the population, football - with its ability to adapt to any road, make-shift goalpost and balled up plastic packet held together with a rope, became a predominantly black sport, a recreation space that was simultaneously owned by the oppressed, almost exclusively disregarded by the oppressors of the apartheid regime - the Afrikaaner government. The acceptance of football symbolizes the legacy of Britain, the "home" country of the game, spreading globally with the expansion of the empire. In 1892, the all-white Football Association of South Africa (SAFA) was created, followed by the creation of the South African Indian Football Association (1903), South African Bantu Football Association (1933), and South African Colored Football Association (1936). From 1966 to 1992, South Africa was banned from the World Cup due to apartheid policies.

The South Africa Soccer Federation (SASF) was re-admitted into FIFA following the recommendation of FIFA President Stanley Rous in early 1960s, but the general sentiment was disapproving of FIFA's "endorsement" of apartheid policies, leading to the FIFA Congress' banning of SASF once again in 1966, despite Rous' continued support.

Brazilian head Joao Havelange, who later became FIFA president in 1974, carefully observed negativity directed toward Rous for his support of apartheid policies, successfully campaigning on the very same issue. Havelange's presidency set in motion the globalization of "native" voices by increasingly including African teams from the 1970s onward. Prior to that, Egypt had been the primary African participant.

Within apartheid South Africa, the company South African Breweries invested in the National Professional Soccer League, successfully penetrating the African consumer market, particularly in townships and amongst miners. The early 1990s, evidencing the slow deracialization of the regime, witnessed the merging of the four main football associations into SAFA, leading to membership status at the 1992 Zurich Conference. This move signified one of the earliest formal recognition of an emerging post-segregation South Africa.

## Lack of development

But despite the potential talent within townships, the South African Government failed to sufficiently address the financial needs, and infrastructural and institutional processes required to successfully develop under 21 teams, to develop professional culture of soccer in the country - already innate to the country's identity, beyond glorified matches.

By 2006, the same year South Africa hoped to win the bid, the country had dropped to 85th place in Cup ranks, alluding to the government's goal of capturing the lucrative spectacle of the game rather than its power to develop the nation's talent.



MAD HATTER: Creative headware is a big feature of World Cup 2010

South Africa's exclusionary reality differs from the overall experience of the African continent under French and British colonialists, socializing football as an outlet for colonized peoples such as in former British colony Nigeria, and former Francophone territory Cameroon, where soccer developed with a distinctly "native" identity.

France's ties to the continent is evident in the make-up of the French football team, bearing a significant percentage of players with North and West African ethnicities, as well as cross-cultural infusion of African and French identities. It is often through European teams, particularly France, that African players access the space to engage in commercial football.

Former French colonies usually occupy most, if not all, of the spaces held by African teams: In 2006, this included Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Tunisia, as well as Angola and Ghana; in 1998, Tunisia, Morocco, Cameroon, Nigeria and South Africa; in 1994, Morocco, Cameroon and Nigeria; in 1990, Cameroon and Egypt; and in 1986, 1982 and 1978, this included Algeria and Morocco; and Algeria and Cameroon; and Tunisia.

But the lack of appropriate institutional capacity in the era post-colonial era, the product of states that failed - or chose not to, develop Southern African football as a professional sport, relegated soccer to informal margins, a sport played simply for the love of the game, from the bottom up.

South Africa for this reason has long been perceived as Sub-Saharan Africa's great hope, due to the country's status as an emerging power with considerable political and economic capital, as well as its global "brand power."

Though the country made history with the Rugby and Cricket Cups (1995 and 2003), the FIFA's 2010 Football World Cup represents the attainment of a space belonging to the identities of the black majority, with South Africa's national team - known as Bafana Bafana, meaning "the boys," though not often successful on the field,

has already received considerable investment in marketing, sponsorship and successful brand management.

## National identity

It will also be the first time the event will be held on the African continent, another considerable victory given the powerful role football occupies across the African continent, signifying the structural globalizing changes taking place within the format of the tournament.

This stands in contrast to South America - another continent where soccer remains the primary space for sports, hosting the Cup four times. In fact, more nations compete for one of 32 places in the World Cup - 200, than are members of the United Nations. This is strongly linked to the concept of national identity, intimately intertwined with the idea of football in the imagination of African peoples.

The perceived democratization of football itself lends to the lucrative nature of the sport: FIFA retains the bulk of profits - some 94 percent, generated by the event, through commercial rights that are exclusively held by FIFA, in addition to the markets of African, Asian and Latin American nations that hold considerable economic resources.

Moving under the banner of "one nation, one soul; one team, one goal," South Africa - the "moral compass" of the world, was the nation best placed to capture the Cup through the brand of Nelson Mandela - known as Madiba Magic.

The notion of a merger between FIFA and the "Rainbow Nation" (as South Africa is known) was perceived as a win-win situation, one that has been realized. Whether this will encourage the government to invest in the nation, beyond the "event," is another matter entirely.

For South Africans, the idea to bid for the World Cup was neither outlandish, nor impossible - it was all for the love of the game. ■

(Reporting from Johannesburg)

## Healing Away From Home

Eritrea, like many other African countries, benefits in no small measure from Chinese medical staff that challenge themselves to heal others far from their comfort zones. In the past 13 years, 108 Chinese doctors have helped heal more than half a million patients in Eritrea.

ADYAM GEBREYSUS spoke to four of these doctors, all hailing from Henan Province in China and working in different medical disciplines, to find out what their impressions were of working in the small East African nation.

Neurologist, Dr. Li Qingtang had visions of bad weather, drought and unsafe living conditions before he set foot on African soil. "After I came to Eritrea I found all my knowledge about Africa was wrong. I am deeply impressed by the comfortable climate, kind people and safe living environment," he said.

Being the only neurologist in the country coupled with a shortage of medical instruments and lack of communication ability made the first six months of his work challenging, to say the least. But times change. "Now I can describe cases easily and can communicate with the local doctors with my improved English without any problem," said Dr. Li.

The enterprising medical professional took up the challenge of being without equipment by making instruments himself and cites Hydrocephalus (an abnormal buildup of cerebrospinal fluid in the ventricles of the brain that can compress and damage the brain) as a common disease in Eritrea. He has already operated successfully on more than 20 children and been given the moniker "savior" by work colleagues. His other operating statistics are impressive - 100 surgeries on brain tumors, head injuries and brain hematoma, all with a 99 percent success rate.

Teaching also occupies a large part of his time and he has given neurosurgery training to two local doctors who are currently performing minor surgeries in the hospital.

Despite missing his family Dr. Li wants to stay on in Eritrea. He has grown fond of the local food especially injera bread and enjoys swimming and siteseeing in Massawa.

Dr. Zhang Jinyue, medical imaging doctor assigned to work in Eritrea in 2009, settled in to his new home with little fuss. The warm welcome he received from day one has left a deep impression on him, according to Dr. Zhang. He was quick to learn the local culture and like his colleagues, the lack of medical equipment



CHINA MAMA: Dr. Wei Zhong talks to one of her young patients at the Orotta Hospital in Asmara, Eritrea

is a challenge he meets headon. With only one magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine and two CT scan machines in the country, the Sembel Hospital in which Dr. Zhang works is crowded with patients daily.

He strongly believes that doctors should have skill, work ethics and be responsible and it is these attributes that enable him to diagnose about 60 patients per day. "I set my own rules in order to give fair and quick service," said Dr. Zhang. He always treats rural patients first as they cannot afford the costs of staying in town overnight, tends to emergency patients quickly and never leaves the hospital until all patients have been seen. He said he sometimes even misses out on meals because of his rules.

Dr. Zhang is head of the imaging department, which includes X-ray, CT scans and MRI and hopes to stay longer than the mandatory two-year period. His goal is to ultimately teach local doctors how to read the imaging film and how to diagnose the diseases themselves, so that after he goes back to China they will be able to work out by themselves. After work he likes to relax with a cup of Eritrean coffee.

Dr. Liu Yingjie, an orthopedic specialist, has been working at Halibet, a public hospital in Asmara, since arrived in January 2009. Dr. Liu said that despite the big differences in all aspects of life in Eritrea he was surprised how

quickly he settled in.

The working conditions are under strain, said Dr. Liu. With only three orthopedic surgeons operating on 20-30 patients a week and the shortage of medical instruments he said the working conditions are stressful. Despite this Dr. Liu is energized by the patient successes and the general positive attitude around him.

Apart from enjoying the local cuisine and fresh air whenever he can, Dr. Liu is trying to learn some Tigrigna, the local language, as well as teaching his local friends Chinese.

Locals know Dr. Wei Zhong, a pediatrician working in Orotta Hospital for over a year, as "China Mother." Her focus is premature babies and with an inflow of 300 premature infants requiring treatment monthly the two pediatricians and handful of nurses are hard pressed to keep up. Initially she had trouble breathing in the lower altitude but now enjoys learning the culture and enjoys the abundance of fresh fruits available.

"I have never seen a country like Eritrea which is safe and clean to live. I really like the atmosphere here," said Dr. Wei. She said she always feel proud of herself of being a Chinese doctor saving lives in Eritrea. "I want to stay here in Eritrea for the rest of my life and bring changes to Eritreans," said Dr. Wei. ■

(Reporting from Eritrea)