



FIFA 2010 World Cup: Preparedness of Zimbabwean Hotels

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Staging a mega sport event such as the world cup has been traditionally viewed as a golden opportunity for urban regeneration and economic development. Research into the preparedness of hospitality service providers to host millions of visitors associated with world cup sport events is limited. This paper discusses the state of preparedness for Zimbabwean hotels in anticipation of the world cup sport event hosted by South Africa. The study used a purposive sampling of twenty local hotel players in the category of 3-5 stars. Data were collected through self-administered eighteen questionnaires. Findings show that the majority of hotels have increased accommodation capacity ahead of the event. However, findings also demonstrated differences in the level of preparedness for local hotels with hotels in the northern region in the back foot than their southern counterparts. All operators were equally concerned about an ineffective air transport system. Service providers showed lack of confidence that they will benefit from the world cup event due to the poor national payment system and excessive hotel rates. These findings contradict planned refurbishments and human resource training that are currently underway. The study recommends urgent destination endorsement, re-introduction of credit cards, and consensus on the appropriate pricing strategy.

KEYWORDS: *Zimbabwean hotels, preparedness, 2010 FIFA World Cup.*

INTRODUCTION

There has been unprecedented media hype concerning the forthcoming and imminent FIFA World Cup soccer show case to be hosted in Southern Africa by South Africa in particular. The stimulus for this paper and its title came from an official announcement by South African authorities that they would experience accommodation shortages during the June 2010 World Cup soccer show case. It is a *faiti accompli* that in June 2010 all roads will lead to South Africa for the mega event and an avalanche of visitors is envisaged to throng not only the regional economic power house of Southern Africa, but also other surrounding countries like Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Mozambique. To date, both the electronic and print media are already saturated with headline news on the tourism business opportunities available to Southern Africa (Chari, 2010). This mega event has resulted in various theories being put forth as to how best Southern African countries could position themselves to get the most out of this rare opportunity (www.satour.co.za). It is in this context that Zimbabwe being one of the strategically located and proximal country to South Africa, there has been a lot of excitement and expectations on the part of service providers particularly hotels whose principal business is to provide overnight accommodation to visitors (Kasavanna and Brooks, 1995, Medlik, 1990). The excitement reached pitch levels after it was officially made public by South African authorities that they would experience a shortage in the area of accommodation and extended an appeal to Zimbabwe to chip in and assist to fill up the anticipated deficit. It is the rationale for this paper to provide a cursory appraisal of the situation on the ground to ascertain the state of preparedness on Zimbabwean hotels to fully benefit from the anticipated tourism business spill over from South Africa. Historically, data is pregnant with tourism business spin offs from such mega events to hosting and neighbouring countries. To attest to this, in 2006, an on line article on www.FIFA.com/worldcup/koreajapan reports that when this event was held in Germany it is documented that in excess of 2.86 billion Euro revenue was generated, and in Korea and Japan when they co-hosted the event in 2002, close to US\$25 billion and US\$13 billion worth of revenue was realised respectively. It is in view of the above that Zimbabwe, though not officially a host country can take advantage of the anticipated shortfall in hotel rooms and mop up excess accommodation demand to reap the revenue. After having analysed the

concepts and issues concerning the 2010 FIFA soccer tournament and its potential role in the field of tourism specifically in Zimbabwean hotels, the research problem can thus be formulated as how the FIFA world cup can be fully utilised by Zimbabwean tourism players for the benefit of the country's economy. The purpose of this study is therefore to identify and explore key issues that can help local hotel operators to meaningfully benefit from the 2010 soccer extravaganza. This paper seeks to unpack the extent to which the local hotels have positioned themselves to be on spot and rack in the much needed revenue for the country from a multi-billion dollar event, sport tourism. This is laid bare as the yarn unfolds.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sport events are increasingly being recognised as integral to destination's marketing strategy. World cup sport events are a type of event that can be leveraged by local businesses and destination marketers as a way of stimulating flow-on tourism, shaping an image and generating word of mouth (Snelgrove and Wood, 2010). Yet little research has been conducted in this area. Previous research has shown that length of stay in a destination and a group competition can impact on subsequent tourist behaviour.

Recently, scholars have suggested that sport events can be leveraged for economic and social benefit of a host destination and even neighbouring countries, for example, (Chalip, 2004; Chalip and McGuirty, 2004; O'Brien, 2007). World cup sport events represent one such opportunity. In view of the above, Zimbabwe is poised to benefit from the hosting of the 2010 world cup by South Africa by virtue of the former's proximity to the latter. Granted this, service providers must spruce up to tangibly benefit from the event largely because clearly, world cup sport events do not exist to serve tourism purposes. However, if destinations realise the potential of these events and they are used strategically, they can result in economic and social benefits of the host (Chalip, 2006; O'Brien, 2006). The world cup is regarded as the world's most prestigious sporting occasion and it has evolved into a major international event with great economic, cultural, political and social importance just like Olympic Games (Girginov and Parry, 2005). The world cup is also seen as a panacea for economic growth and as significant catalyst for urban regeneration (Jones and Stokes, 2003). This

is particularly significant to developing countries like Zimbabwe that are battling with high unemployment levels and shortage of foreign currency. To this end, host countries and even neighbouring countries seeking to tap into tourism business accompanying such an event must adequately prepare themselves well ahead of the event. It is not surprising that host cities invest considerably on improving sporting facilities and supporting infrastructure to enhance the potential for purported economic profits although world cup-related investments are often based on predictions that economic growth will result from the influx of thousands of visitors to the host city and creation of thousands of new jobs (Ritchie and Smith, 1991). Zimbabwean local hospitality operators are figuratively in over drive in making frantic efforts in order to benefit during the duration of this event since Mules and Faulkner, (1996) argue that economic growth following the games is not guaranteed and there have been examples of the world cup bringing about economic havoc rather than prosperity and affluence to the host city.

According to Hall (2004) the benefits or positive impacts of sport tourism include the provision of a community facility, job creation and the promotion of the area for tourism. The announcement by FIFA in 2004 that South Africa would host world cup soccer tournament generated phenomenal media coverage in Africa, not least in Zimbabwe. In the past 5 years there is probably no other global event that has gripped the attention of the media in Africa as the FIFA 2010 world cup in South Africa (Chari, 2010). Against the backdrop of an immense economic crisis gripping the country at the time, characterised by stratospheric inflation figures, and the geographical proximity of the country to South Africa, the host nation, some sections of the Zimbabwe hospitality service providers viewed the soccer event as “pre-ordained” opportunity to alleviate the debilitating economic crisis that the country was going through, while others dismissed the possibility of such economic spin offs as mere fantasy (Chari, 2010).

Different media houses allocated more space to highlight the business opportunities expected to accrue from the 2010 world cup event much to the excitement of the local service providers. For instance, the ZIFA chairman at the time, Rafik Khan, was quoted by *The Sunday Mail* (May, 16, 2004) as having said:

“We are going to feed off South Africa’s preparations for the world cup as we are also bidding to host Acon 2010. Many teams will come and camp this side maybe for a month on their way to South Africa and this will greatly improve our standards.”

In the same edition of *The Sunday Mail*, the Zimbabwe ambassador to South Africa, Simon Khaya Moyo, is reported to have said that: “The fact that the world cup will be hosted by South Africa is a meaningful statement for Zimbabwe. This means big business for Zimbabwe in the tourism sector and indeed foreign currency earnings as well as entertainment for our soccer loving nation. We must therefore celebrate this moment and ready ourselves for the challenges ahead of us. This gives us a chance to exclusively market our country as Africa’s paradise”.

Emphasis on spin offs reflects expectations of hospitality service and the Zimbabwe government’s view that the 2010 world cup could be exploited to turn around the economic fortunes of the country. Zimbabwe’s proximity to the host nation, South Africa, was perceived by the generality of Zimbabweans as a natural advantage to be exploited to the maximum. Contrary to *The Sunday Mail*’s overly optimistic view, some sections of the media celebrated South Africa’s winning of the right to host the FIFA 2010 world cup soccer tournament with guarded optimism and excitement, cautioning that over-excitement about 2010 was misguided because Zimbabwe was ill-prepared to reap the material benefits from the mega event, in spite of its proximity to the host nation.

Infrastructural Development

On infrastructure front, various infrastructural developments have been taking place in different sectors of the economy such as football, tourism and entertainment, thus demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between football, economics and culture. In addition, words like ‘renovations’, ‘refurbishments’ and ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘construction, or upgrading’ have been used frequently in the news to highlight that local service providers were anticipating the event. While *The Sunday Mail* presented infrastructural developments as evidence of the government’s positive efforts towards the FIFA 2010 world cup, *The Standard* accentuated the government’s lack of financial capacity in revamping

football and tourism facilities. Examples of such news headlines in The Sunday Mail include:

“Zimbabwe set to Benefit from South Africa 2010” June 24, 2007, “Zimbabwe left out of FIFA 2010 contracts, Need for a clear Strategy with LOC”, August 26, 2007, “Travel Company Set to Promote the Country”, January 21, 2007, “Firm to market Zimbabwe on 2010 Dossier”, July 22, 2007, ‘Business Sector Must Play a Bigger Role’, January 21, 2007.

For The Sunday Mail, the 2010 FIFA world cup was more significant for economic considerations than its social utility. It focused on business opportunities that would help assuage the economic crisis in the country. Acceleration of the economic dimensions of business is further evidence of Critcher’s (1979), cited in Waites et al, (1982, p. 240) view that football is increasingly becoming “underwritten by objective financial considerations” Critcher (p.240) contends:

What has been happening in the post war years has been that football has lost its partial autonomy as a form of popular culture from the economic and cultural forces dominant in the rest of society”. This corporatisation of football is further amplified by a newspaper commentary, where it was argued in The Herald thus:

‘Football, just like sport in general, has moved over the years into a multi-billion dollar-industry-thanks to the riches that have been poured into the games. This has resulted in the changing methods in the industry in the way the world runs the games (“Urgently Review” October 27, 2005, p.5.

Mega sports events provide impressions at host countries to direct spectators, TV viewers and additional indirect audiences (Getz, 1997; Lee et al, 2005; Kim and Morrison, 2005), ancillary socio-cultural activities offer powerful opportunities to promote the host country even further (Kim and Morrison, 2005). Mega sport events thus offer the opportunity to project a desired image of a host country going far beyond the event itself, enabling a country to communicate assets that can be attractive for sports fans as tourists. Due to factors such as extraordinary size, duration, impacts, global range and world-wide significance, some events are regarded as mega events (Fayos-sola,1998; Jones,2001; Horne

and Manzenreiter,2006; Horne, 2007). Getz (in Fayos-sola, 1998, p.242) defines mega events as:

'planned occurrences of limited duration which have an extraordinary impact on the host area in terms of one or more of the following: tourist volumes, visitor expenditures, publicity leading to heightened awareness and a more positive image, related infrastructural and organisational developments which substantially increase the destination's capacity and attractiveness'.

Although the notion of events has been known for a long time (Martyn, 1969; Jones, 2001), it is the scale and strategic use in late modern society that make them appealing for host places, media, researchers, visitors and others. Research on football tourist's motivation to travel to FIFA 2010 world cups has confirmed that the sports competition itself is an important factor besides the destination's attractiveness (Kim and Chalip, 2004). The magnetism of the event, especially related to that of 'eustress' and the positive level of arousal arising from the participation as a spectator, is significantly high among committed fans, who will travel even if their national side does not qualify, as in the case of New Zealand and the FIFA world cup (Breitbarth et al, 2007).

According to Leiper (1990), mega sport event attendants need to be understood from a sport and tourism perspective that results in relevant attractions tailored to segments. As Hinch and Higham (2001, p.52) conclude "for many sport tourists a specific sporting event may function as the primary attraction in a destination, but the cluster of other nuclei found in the surrounding area may be needed to finalise the decision to travel'.

Germany earned a total of 140 million Euro from the tournament (DFB, 2007).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOTEL SECTOR TO ZIMBABWE'S ECONOMY

The economy of Zimbabwe is anchored in agriculture. However, of late the country made significant strides in an effort to diversify the economy by directing attention to developing the tourism industry. In addition to

the traditional pillars of the country's economy namely agriculture and mining, the tourism sector has been realised to be arguably one of the untapped sector with the greatest potential for growth (www.zta.co.zw). In tourism circles, Zimbabwe indeed is a towering giant endowed with a blend of physical and manmade tourist attractions of global appeal. The industry's foreign currency and employment generative capacity has prompted the Zimbabwean government to channel substantial financial resources to fully develop the sector. In Zimbabwe economic terms the tourism sector has been extolled as the panacea to the country's myriad of economic ills top among which are unemployment and shortage of foreign exchange. In Zimbabwe the tourism industry stands on third position coming after agriculture and mining in terms of GDP contributions (Finance Bill,2009). The hotel sector which is an integral component of the tourism industry is anticipated to help in the revamping of the country's limping economy that has been literally in a comatose for the past ten years. The hosting of the world cup soccer show case by South Africa has come at the most opportune time when the economy of Zimbabwe has registered some modest growth. The Business Herald of 5 April 2009 reported that green shoots of recovery have been noticed across the economic sectors and efforts are underway to consolidate the gains attained so far. It is in this light that hotel service providers are working along the clock to make an impression come June 2010. The FIFA 2010 soccer tournament is surely a grand opportunity which must be made maximum use of and has the potential to assist Zimbabwe in her efforts to climb out of the current economic stabilisation mode into growth. The Finance Bill (2009:1853) categorically states that "...Tourism, which contributed an estimated 9% directly and indirectly to GDP in 1999 has been on a down ward spiral , negatively affecting the whole economy given its linkages with other sectors." This seeks to attest to the importance of the hotel sector to Zimbabwe's economy especially when it was on the verge of collapsing.

Worldwide, the significance of tourism as defined by Ghosh (1998), is, among other, one of the major items of international trade. The industry helps in facilitating the flow of foreign currency, amongst countries. In developing countries, according to Medlik and Jenkins (1991), tourism is mainly seen as a growth industry as the flow of tourism in these countries distributes foreign currency. According to statistics supplied by SADC (1999), tourism in Zimbabwe contributes about 5% to the GDP. The sector employs approximately eighty

thousand people directly and indirectly, according to 1999 data. The tourism sector is estimated to have generated 2 billion Zimbabwe dollars in 1996/1997 for the country. This makes it the third highest earner of foreign currency, after agriculture and mining for Zimbabwe (Finance Bill, 2009).

To date the sector is still crawling and the 2010 soccer tournament, to be hosted by South Africa provides a perfect opportunity for the sector to regain its yester year glory. It is the contention of all tourism players in Zimbabwe that there is going to be a spill over of tourism business to Zimbabwe. With South Africa being a neighbour to Zimbabwe, this stand as unprecedented opportunity for hotels in Zimbabwe if they strain every sinew to make sure that all goes smoothly, with the anticipated flood of arrivals in 2010. The hosting of international mega events of such global magnitude in the area of sport event and their tourism related activities presents the country and the region with a unique opportunity to shine and boost economic growth and social development in both tangible and intangible ways. Zimbabwean hotels have got an opportunity to dispel negative stereotypes about visiting Zimbabwe, grab a share of the estimated spectator spend, expand the tourism skills base, strengthen Zimbabwe's hospitality brand, and intensify attention given to safety and security issues that have long bedevilled the hospitality message in Zimbabwe. A summation by Preuss (2000) is instructive as it provides the ensuing, inter alia, as incentives and implications to hosting iconic mega-sport events in the developing countries for example, putting the country (Zimbabwe) on the world tourism map, showcasing the region (Southern Africa) as a tourism power house with quite an array of artificial and natural attractions, promoting political system and cementing relations, creating new trading partners, attracting the much needed foreign direct investment, boosting tourism, creating jobs and business opportunities, and urban renewal and building a legacy of hotel infrastructure.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study largely consisted of a comparative literature study of implications of 2010 FIFA world cup tournament to Zimbabwe, with special emphasis on Zimbabwean hotels and a field survey among the tourism community. Data were collected through in-

depth interviews and self administered questionnaire using a purposive sample of twenty local hotels in the category of three to five stars. The questionnaire had a 5-point scale on 20 items. The in-depth interviews and questionnaires were targeted to two marketing managers and eighteen Front office managers drawn from the four major chain groups in Zimbabwe.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research study identified an array of pertinently critical issues to be investigated. Twenty strategic issues were found to be the most important for Zimbabwean hotels to fully benefit from the 2010 FIFA world cup, which are outlined and discussed below:

Prospects for Zimbabwean Hotels

Respondents indicated they had very high prospects for them to benefit from the world cup event. They cited the country's economy that is currently in stabilisation mode as a good platform to provide quality service to millions of tourists and even for training visits by international soccer stars when the world cup comes to South Africa. 90 per cent of the respondents anticipated an influx of soccer fans before or after the tournament. It is interesting to note that hotel operators deemed the influx as godsend, and saw visits by teams like Brazil, Germany or even England not only providing huge business but also boosting morale for millions of soccer mad fans. One operator said:

*“ If the envisaged tourist statistics are anything to go by, we could reap as much as US\$100 million from the world cup. What we need is to put adequate strategies in place to realise this”.
The above shows that operators were quite upbeat and looking forward to benefit from the world cup event.*

Accommodation Capacity for 2010

All hospitality service providers were agreeable that they were bracing themselves than ever before to cash on the 2010 world cup after South

Africa contracted the Zimbabwe to provide 40 000 beds for the tournament. One local operator boasted:

“ You see, we have been contracted by South Africa to provide about 40 000 beds, and we are capitalising on this opportunity. The beds must be ready for occupation by the time the soccer extravaganza explodes into life”. Despite not having the requested beds operators were quite upbeat that they will provide something and in return benefit from this event. The task, though Herculean, is a boon to the local operators. At present, Zimbabwe has about 12000 hotel beds through-out the country, of which only about 10 000 are above the three star benchmark, leaving the country with a tougher task to meet the South Africa quota. The clarion call made by South Africa must be grabbed by Zimbabwean hotels and benefit from this event.

Inspection of Accommodation and Sporting Facilities

Local operators were of the contention that a lot had been done to prepare them for the world cup. A number of respondents cited a recent visit to Zimbabwe by a group of Brazilian sports officials with the intention to inspect sporting facilities and hotels to see if they could accommodate the Samba Boys during the 2010 world cup. To local operators this was ample proof that they were anticipating the event by allowing inspection and seeking an opinion on the level of standards ahead of the event. Other respondents reflected further by noting the despatching of Tourism and Hospitality industry minister to Brazil to woo the Latin American country to base its national soccer squad for 2010 world cup in the country. This was done on the understanding that Brazil is expected to be followed by about 10 000 legion of supporters which means a lot of business for Zimbabwe hotels. However, some operators were not pleased to learn that Angola and Mozambique are had approached Brazil with similar offers to host the Samba Boys. To this they unequivocal indicated that they need to put in place workable strategies so that the Samba Boys camp in Zimbabwe.

Destination Endorsement

One interesting finding was the need for destination endorsement on the country as a way of guaranteeing maximum dividends from the event. In their quest to get maximum benefit from 2010 world cup, Zimbabwe local operators revealed that they had sought this endorsement by South Africa as the 'second home' of the 2010 FIFA world cup to promote tourism and investment in Zimbabwe. They argued that this will put Zimbabwe in the global spotlight. Operators also noted the visit to Victoria Falls by South Africa's minister of Tourism as providing considerable mileage to the country as one of the best tourism destination and conducive place to do business. Operators reiterated that they were targeting US\$200 million from the world cup in South Africa and expects about 130 000 of the 450 000 visitors who would descend on South Africa to also extend their visits to Zimbabwe. This could be quite achievable as normally 30% of tourism visitors to South Africa end up in Zimbabwe according to the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority Quarterly Statistical Report of May 2007. In addition to the above, operators revealed that at national level they had impressed upon the government to seek assistance from South Africa to enhance efficiency and reduce congestion at Beit-bridge border post, which could restrict the expeditious movements of travellers, especially during the world cup. Further on that it was also revealed that as industry operators they had made representation to South Africa to ensure that its national airline makes more flights to Zimbabwe to enhance accessibility during the soccer event, and had also requested South Africa in its capacity as the host country to help to have some of the African teams participating in the tournament camp in Zimbabwe ahead of the event. All of the above constitute some of the initiatives taken by local service providers to ready themselves for the event.

Apart from the above, operators highlighted that their hopes of reaping huge benefits from the 2010 world cup were boosted by a high profile visit to the country by FIFA president Sepp Blatter in the count down to the historic tournament in South Africa. This was in line with what was reported in *The Herald* that a visit by Blatter will just be a seal of approval for other countries to appreciate that Zimbabwe remains a safe haven to be included in their itinerary when they come down to South Africa in June 2010. Operators pinned their hopes on the government's commitment to preach a solid message to the globe,

inviting teams and fans to visit this country, as part of their 2010 world cup show which will help boost the nation's tourism receipts.

Increasing/Upping Hotel Capacity

Thrilled by the 2010 FIFA soccer show case, service providers outlined that they had plans to increase capacity citing the giant African Sun hotel group as leading the pack with a plan to spend US\$60 million on hotel capacity expansion in light of the expected huge demand for accommodation when South Africa hosts the 2010 world cup. Such capacity expansion initiative is envisaged to raise the hospitality group's capacity to 8500 rooms by 2012 from the current 3000 rooms. Another leading operator indicated that it would spend US\$15 million on face lifting its local hotels ahead of the soccer showcase. The foregoing provides ample evidence that operators have modestly prepared themselves to accommodate the envisaged visitors.

Marketing Efforts

Most respondents bemoaned the lack of financial resources to help in marketing their services. Operators were contented that in order for the tourism sector to remain visible on the map, industry operators indicated they collectively intended to generate a whopping US\$3 million to fund a campaign to market Zimbabwe as the 2010 world cup tournament approaches. Zimbabwe Council for Tourism chairperson of the 2010 marketing sub-committee revealed that as service providers they are determined to pool resources together towards the marketing fund despite challenges besetting the sector. With sufficient marketing and promotion Zimbabwe would definitely reap the full benefits of the football tournament to be hosted by South Africa. On that front service providers have made some progress but their efforts are being hamstrung by lack of funds.

Familiarisation Tours

Educational tours are a common phenomenon in the tourism industry. Local service providers were of the view that in order to create awareness of themselves there was urgent need to hold such educational tours ahead of the soccer tournament. One respondent made reference to the invitation of BBC journalist Tanya Beckett, who is responsible for BBC World Business editor, to do a tourism expose as the country ups its bid to host the England soccer team for the 2010 world cup. Apart from the above the invitation of Joe Thomas was also noted as a giant step in the right direction for hospitality service providers. However, a lot still needs to be done in this area.

Improvement of Service and Standards

There was a unanimous call on the grading of hotels and restaurants after operators themselves admitted that some services they offer were below the expected standard. Of particular concern were tourism services in the Southern parts of the country which were extremely poor, raising a need to urgently grade hotels and restaurants if the operators are not to lose out on the 2010 world cup. Operators admitted that they were lagging far much behind in terms of improving standards, and this weighed heavily against their hopes to benefit from the event.

Enhancing Visitor Security

Top on operators priority was the introduction of a new training curriculum in partnership with The Zimbabwe Indigenous National Security Association (ZINSA) with the view to fully equip staff with cutting edge skills and knowledge to ensure the provision of a world class security services to visitors expected to grace the Southern Africa sub-region during the 2010 Soccer World cup set for South Africa. Operators underscored that following concerns by potential visitors to Southern Africa region for the soccer extravaganza on crime threats they saw it fit to upgrade their training methods so as to prepare their staff for the challenges expected to come with managing the security of the multitudes expected to descend on Southern Africa. Such a noble effort

resonates well with visitors who are conscious about their safety and security. One operator drew a comparison and was convinced that the situation obtaining on the ground reveal that Zimbabwe is a more secure and safe tourism destination in comparison to the host country South Africa which is riddled by a high crime rate punctuated by high profile crimes ranging from hijackings, killings and robberies with examples abound to attest to this.

Coffee Stains

Of major concern operators pointed out that they could lose out on the 2010 soccer showcase benefits in the wake that the cash strapped inclusive government is failing to secure funds to complete the upgrading of the country's major airports, dealing a heavy blow to preparations for the 2010 world cup to be hosted in South Africa in June 2010. The operators decried the sorry state of all the country's major airports including the main Harare International Airport, Victoria Falls, and Buffalo Range Airport in Chiredzi were in dire need of major refurbishments of their road infrastructure as well as sprucing up their ageing equipment ahead of the world cup. It was noted that work on these projects was progressing at a snail pace due to funding constraints. Operators were particularly concerned about the compounding of the inaccessibility of the country through the aviation front.

Apart from the above, operators conceded that their hopes to benefit from the 2010 FIFA world cup tournament to be hosted by South Africa were hanging by the needle thread. This was on the strength that, previously, Zimbabwe had engaged seven countries who pledged that they would stay in Zimbabwe during the tournament, however it was officially made public that not a single team will camp in Zimbabwe. Operators confirmed that all the participating teams have decided to camp in South Africa the host country. As if that was not enough, Match Event Services, a company specialising in providing ticketing and accommodation services for the world cup showcase visited Zimbabwe to assess hotel accommodation facilities and soccer facilities and sadly resolved to sideline Zimbabwe citing political instability and the cholera pandemic that were ravaging the country at that time. The company came back to Zimbabwe in May in 2009 to sign a deal with Zimbabwe's hotel industry, but the deal did not materialise as the hoteliers were charging

exorbitant rates as high as US\$600 per night to soccer tourist who will camp in Zimbabwe during the tournament. It does not make positive reading to note that Zimbabwean hotels lost out on that score.

Zimbabwe A Cash Economy

Operators' hopes to fully benefit from the 2010 soccer tournament have been further scuttled by the obtaining liquidity crunch in the country. It was the contention of the service providers that plastic money could boost their prospects ahead of the world cup event. As operators they are understandably upbeat about the prospects of raking in US\$200 million from the human traffic expected to make its way to the FIFA 2010 world cup in South Africa. Though the showcase is being held in the neighbouring Southern African state, the hosts have ominously indicated that it is an African world cup and benefits are supposed to be shared.

However, Zimbabwe operators' preparedness to capture the anticipated revenues still remains an outstanding issue in view of the poor state of the national payment system. Grave concern has been raised about the state of the national payment systems and internal credit platforms that are supposed to maximise spending at tourist designated facilities. The perception on the international source market has continued to be negative and will definitely have to be managed if the country is to gain anything meaningful.

Respondents pointed an advisory that was posted on the United States State Department as instructive:

"Zimbabwe has become a cash society, with very few establishments accepting international credit cards or debit cards. All ATMs in the country are incompatible with international networks and are unreliable. Cheque cashing facilities are effectively non-existent. Travellers must bring adequate cash for their planned visits or wire through Western Union". Naturally, the hassles of trying to explore different alternative methods that are obviously inconvenient, are enough to discourage visitors from opting to use the country as a destination of choice according to the views expressed by service providers. This further dampened local operators' prospects to benefit from the event.

Irrked by the preceding bad state of affairs, the Minister of Tourism and Hospitality industry recently bemoaned the state of payment platforms as the missing link as the country angles to reap dividends from tourism arrivals. Operators content that most tourists do not travel with suitcases of cash, they use plastic money and unfortunately that service is not available in Zimbabwe. Over 90% of hotel respondents indicated that they have adopted the most unorthodox of methods through which they take customers to the back office where they are expected to settle their bills through Internet, provided that they are familiar or willing to settle their transactions this way. Despite this initiation, the limited bandwidth that the country has, has not helped matters. Most of the players in business are familiar with the pitfalls that come with the sanctions that are presently placed against the country. Operators also highlighted that it is increasingly difficult to process a transaction using a financial institution that is domiciled in the United States without a message popping up that you are conducting operations from a sanctioned country. They bemoaned this as taking them several steps back in terms on their preparedness.

Respondents reflected further that in a situation where a potential customer manages to travel with cash to Zimbabwe, there are other problems that have been spawned by the multi-currency system, especially related to change issues. Change has been a huge problem in the payment system principally because multi-currencies are not printed locally, and there are fewer denominations. Local operators complained that some private players in South Africa have already taken advantage of these hurdles obtaining in Zimbabwe by coming up with packages that include Zimbabwe, whereby visitors are flown to the country for a visit, for example, to the Victoria Falls, as part of a South Africa package. Ultimately, the profits will be retained in South Africa while the country gets precious little. However, the use of plastic money can go a long way in ensuring that there are no revenue leakages from the system. As it stands, government might be optimistic about generating US\$200 million during the month long soccer tournament, but these hurdles have to be overcome first to make this a reality.

Exorbitant Hotel Rates

Respondents admitted that as operators they had literally shot themselves in the foot by what they regard as wanton pricing mechanism in which they have priced themselves out of the market. Understandably marketing directors from hotels, in a last minute effort to resolve this pricing anomaly, met in Harare to reconsider their pricing regime after a deal offered by FIFA to occupy 80 per cent of their rooms for the 2010 world cup flopped. The meeting came after the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA), remonstrating against what it termed “ridiculous pricing demands” of up to US\$3000 per night that led FIFA turning its back on local service providers and signing a counter deal with Botswana. One operator did not mince his words:

“We have chased away the golden goose by our wanton pricing! FIFA representatives have abandoned us for allegedly charging exorbitant rates of up to US\$3000 per night. Match Events Services, has turned its back on the Zimbabwean hotels and instead signed an agreement with Botswana after we refused to append our signatures on its pricing regime even if it had offered us twice the current room rate plus 16%, but still as service providers we would have none of it”. The above shows that local operators will not meaningfully benefit from the event.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, at a point and time when the Zimbabwean hotels should capitalise on the 2010 FIFA World Cup to help revitalise the country’s economy, not much seems to have been done by these hotels to fully prepare for the event. The local service providers have not adequately prepared themselves particularly in the areas of financial resources, poor national payment system, exorbitant prices and poor accessibility of the country. Zimbabwean hotels could have benefited if they could go around these problems.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The major limitation of this research study is of scale. It is not possible to generalise the findings to each and every hotel owing to their different geographical location. Some hotels in the southern region of the country are more proximal to South Africa than those that are in the northern region. A more complete picture built on similar studies in other countries like Germany, Japan and Korea would provide a more basis for conclusion.

Future research should also focus on evaluating the imprints of the post FIFA 2010 soccer show case on the economy of Zimbabwe comparing the occupancy levels for hotels in the Southern and Northern regions which are pole sides. Some useful and illuminating comparisons can then be drawn.

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