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**Unfulfilled desires in SA's World Cup**

By EMMANUEL ONYANGO in South Africa

Call it a case of bad timing, but when South Africa President Jacob Zuma paid a State visit to the UK in March with a request for one billion condoms, three months to the World Cup, the international media went gaga about the stockpiling of condoms in preparation for the influx of 300,000 football fans.

Western journalists variedly dubbed the tournament as a sex orgy - the biggest of its kind others added – as the nine years of former President Thambo Mbeki´s HIV “denialism“ came under scrutiny.

Existing data on South Africa's struggle with the Aids menace were revisited : 16 million sexually active men, 1 in every 8 adult infected, 1, 300 fresh infections every day, 350,000 die every day and 450 million male condoms distributed each year.

Interviews were conducted with South Africa's taxi drivers, hotel owners, restaurateurs, bar keeps and yes, prostitutes, about the anticipated boom in sex tourism for the duration of the 2010 World Cup.

The fire was stoked further by the admission of the South Africa Central Drug Agency that 40,000 sex workers, mostly from Africa, were expected in the country for the month long tournament.

So, what was the purpose of the one billion condoms and were they necessary?

Lefa Tlhame, a policy and research officer of Treatment Action Campaign, a leading South Africa lobby group, explains that the one billion condoms were part of a four year national campaign to reduce the number of fresh HIV infections by fifty percent.

The World Cup too featured prominently in the government's plans, as it allocated five million condoms for the 30 day soccer bonanza, an envisaged use of 166,000 condoms daily across the ten host cities in South Africa.

“The government was concerned that like any tournament, commercial sex activity will register a boom during the duration of the World Cup and it wanted to ensure that preventive methods were available.“

“There is so much poverty here, particularly among the black community, and with a tournament like this it was envisaged that young women will sell their bodies to foreigners to make money.“

Yet it took a rare occurrence at the stroke of the half hour mark during the Ghana – Germany match to bring to the fore South Africa´s over-estimation of the sex tourism that would accompany the World Cup.

Seated on seat number 12, block 505, row Y of the Soccer City Stadium, a travelling German fan opened a six-pack of government provided condoms, inflated them to the size of a giant hot dog and released them freely to the air.

The Westgate bus station in Johannesburg, where fans with match tickets are provided with free condoms, has its rubbish bins full; the condoms are swiftly discarded.

The billion condoms, a portion of which had been donated by UK government at a cost of $ 1.5 million , have lacked use and have been reduced to products for amusement.

Interviews with a cross-section of Johannesburg's sex workers, initially expected to be the busiest lot during the World Cup, also confirmed a slump in commercial sex activity, with accounts from the *Mohoshas* (prostitutes) indicating unfulfilled financial expectations.

At the Maxiem Hotel in Doornfontein, one of Johannesburg's leading adult entertainment spots, the skimpily dressed *Mahoshas* endure the cold of the winter sitting on their high stools and waiting in vain for their World Cup dream that was to usher a flood of clients.

Seated at the bar counter is the only tourist they have seen since morning, a grumpy European pensioner who is more interested in companionship than “real business“. A handful of local, regular clients are also present playing a game of pool, but most are conversant with the prices and are never willing to pay more.

“The normal price in usually between R50 and R40. But with the World Cup we expected to charge tourists double or even triple the amount. But they are not here, so we just stick to our local clients,“ one of them discloses.

“We just assume that the tourists went to expensive places like in Sandton, but some of my friends working there are also complaining“ she explains.

Every *Mahosha* at the Maxiem Hotel is assigned a room from where they operate in their eight hour shifts. The rooms are stocked with government-provided choice condoms. Awareness levels on condom use is high and the use of protection is mandatory by every client, on paper at least.

“No, we must use protection here. Even the tourists must use condoms, but we are not seeing them,“ another replies.

The envisaged boom in sex tourism has not materialised, but HIV and Aids lobby groups are reluctant to write off the one-billion-condoms acquisition as unwarranted.

“I think it is too early to give a verdict on the impact of the World Cup and whether the condoms were wasted. And in any case, any unused condoms can still be integrated into the national campaign after the World Cup,“ explains Lefa.