

'Humanity-Equality-Destiny?' Implicating Tourism in the Commonwealth Games, 2010

By Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS)

'Humanity, Equality, Destiny' are the three core values endorsed by the Commonwealth Games movement. Inspiring as they sound, the 2010 Commonwealth Games impacts that are already visible have very little to do with these noble principles. EQUATIONS' report entitled: 'Humanity-Equality-Destiny? Implicating Tourism in the Commonwealth Games 2010' draws on the links between mega- events, tourism, human rights and development. What follows is the edited version of the report.

Mega-events and tourism

Apart from giving India its moment to bask in the global spotlight, one of the primary stated purposes of bringing the Commonwealth Games to India in 2010 was to tap potential gains from tourism to the Indian economy.

The Geneva-based Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) notes: "Mega-events commonly also termed 'hallmark events', are large-scale tourist events of limited duration, designed to generate attention and attract support (often in terms of public funding and private investment) in order to stimulate development". The staging of a mega-event is typically motivated by three key concerns:

- Putting the city 'on the world map' (increasing tourism)
- Boosting economic investment in the city and attracting capital (for improving urban infrastructure and redevelopment)
- Re-imagining the city

But do such mega- events really boost the tourism sector? The European Tour Operators Association (ETOA) in a hard hitting study addressing the potential lure of the 2012 London Olympics shows that: 'there is no strong link between hosting sporting events and increased tourism. The audiences regularly cited for such events as the Olympics are exaggerated. Attendees at the Games replace normal visitors and scare tourists away for some time.'

With respect to economic growth, money spent by tourists often does not stay within the local economy but is pocketed by the big international chains and corporations who own hotels and restaurants. The visitors at a sporting event spend their money on that particular event instead of other tourism-linked activities, which results in a reallocation of expenditures in the economy rather than a real net increase in economic activity. Studies indicate that for the Olympic Games held between 1964 and 1984, most cases saw a drop on the number of visitors. The story of India's bid is of a process that did not involve debate at any level of governance of the implications and consequences of the decision to host the Games. Those who took the decision unilaterally are now washing their hands of the consequences – runaway budgets, human rights violations, misplaced investment priorities and returns, and misleading promises about impact and legacy.

Sports policy in India has not been able to move towards the vision of sport for all, or to prioritise the development of a sporting culture and facilities at the grassroots. However these are the claims on which these events are bid for and organised. The draft Sports Policy of 2007 being put in cold storage and schemes such as the *Panchayat Yuva Krida aur Khel Abhiyan* (PYKKA) being starved of funds are stark indicators of priorities gone terribly wrong. Massive infrastructure investments for mega sporting events in the Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode seem to be a method



to transfer resources to lobbies of realtors and the power-elite in the name of sports.

'We want bread, not circuses'

Some Commonwealth countries such as New Zealand and Canada previously withdrew their bids to hold the CWG due to financial concerns and the reluctance to spend taxpayers' money with no guarantee for fiscal return. 'We want bread, not circuses' was the slogan used in a campaign against holding the Games in Toronto. The public demanded dropping the bid and focusing on education, housing and healthcare instead.

In the meantime, India, which has the world's largest number of poor people in a single country, staged the most expensive Games in history. One of the 2009 reports published by the India Ministry of Tourism estimated that US\$17.5 billion of taxpayers' money was to be spent on CWG 2010 (the initial bid report indicated US\$421.66 million).

The making of the 'World Class City'

There is a significant link between the idea of tourism development and 'beautification' of cities. Projecting the image of wealth and success is the first step to achieving the 'world class city' picture. Delhi was to become a city of 'leisure living, high-end infrastructure and a spectacular consumptive landscape'. A number of campaigns were launched in order to educate the 'rude, loud and discourteous' Delhiites on how to behave like the 'world class city's' citizens. The Chief Minister Sheila Dixit announced at the Delhi Tourism Conclave, 'We want the tourists to go back with the impression that Delhi is a sophisticated city'.

Humanity and equality?

In an article titled 'What does a beautiful Delhi look like?' Shalini Sharma and Akhil Katyal comment that 'the Delhi Government's ideal view of the city is the figure of the tourist who should have an uninterrupted passage through the city's streets and sidewalks, malls and monuments'. The price for achieving this ideal vision was high and unfortunately, it was mostly paid by the most suffering and vulnerable groups:

- The poor, the homeless and the beggars who clearly do not fit the image of a modern, sophisticated city were arrested and harassed. Equating poverty with criminality, calling the beggars 'status offenders' and placing them in overcrowded, prison-like 'hostels' was the authorities' solution to cleaning up the city. Disregarding the inhumane and unjust character of this operation, the city's target was to 'process' 2500-3000 beggars before the Games opened.
- The city's slums were to be hidden behind bamboo screens specially ordered for this occasion from the North-Eastern States.

Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions estimates that the Olympic Games have displaced more than 2 million people in the last 20 years.

- Child rights groups under the banner of Bal Adhikaar Abhiyaan India reported on alarming incidents of street and homeless children being taken in trucks and dumped



Delhi slums were hidden behind bamboo screens

on the city borders. Virtually no measures were taken to protect the street children from paedophiles.

- According to COHRE, more than 300,000 people were evicted till 2007 in New Delhi in developments linked to the 2010 Commonwealth Games. A significant portion of the evictions were from the banks of the Yamuna, the north east of Delhi – an area crucial to the Games. Thousands of poor migrants who settled there have been forced out with no alternative accommodation offered.
- Street vendors (over 300,000 of them in Delhi) were targeted as well. The fact that they contribute to economy and provide inexpensive food for the poorer residents of Delhi was entirely disregarded. The food stalls on the streets were colliding with the modern image of the city. Only 14,000 vendors were granted licenses. The remaining majority were considered ‘illegal’.
- Increase in the sex industry is an inevitable consequence of holding a mega-sport event. Delhi was no exception. Sex workers were improving their English, while GB Road, Delhi’s red light district also ‘spruced up its act in anticipation of big business from tourists’. Media reported that the shortage of women ‘available’ in Delhi will be compensated by sourcing from other cities.
- Employment generated to prepare the city to host CWG (especially in the construction sector) is in most cases short-term, exploitative, and violates basic labour and human rights. Irregular and delayed payments, no weekly offs, no wage slips, women being routinely paid less,

etc. are the realities the CWG workers had to face. A disregard for health and safety put the workers at the risk of injury or even death.

- Moreover, the lack of public participation, accountability and democratic processes are very common problems that go hand-in-hand with sport mega-events. Local populations which are mostly affected by such events are rarely consulted and given a chance to part-take in decision making. The citizens of Delhi had no say in the decision to bring the Games to their city. Interestingly enough, the ‘Global Accountability Report’ published in 2008 by One World Trust indicated the International Olympics Committee as the most powerful corporate intergovernmental organisation with the lowest overall score of accountability (32%) to the people it affects.

Mega events have little to do with bolstering tourism, and in fact can have a negative impact. The Ministry of Tourism in asserting the need for 40,000 rooms in Delhi for the Commonwealth Games has been singularly lax in ensuring the quality of its research or data. What this has set off is a real estate bonanza. 39 prime properties have been auctioned by DDA for the purpose of construction of starred hotels to meet the demand for CWG of which only 4 were completed by April 2010. It would have been better to focus on the budget accommodation and SME sector which have received little attention.

Conclusion

Large scale tourism projects are major accomplices in the world class city project. The Union Ministry and the State governments jockeying for large scale tourism projects have resulted in land grabs, illegalities, and human rights violations on an unprecedented scale-facts that do not appear in tourism’s glossy brochures.

The report has been edited due to space considerations. For the full text please go to EQUATIONS website: <http://www.equitabletourism.org/stage/campaign.php?AID=973>

Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS) is a research, campaign and advocacy organisation studying the social, cultural, economic and environmental impact of tourism on local communities (www.equitabletourism.org).