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SUSTAINABLE SOCCER:

HOW GREEN PROJECTS AT INTERNATIONAL SPORTING EVENTS BENEFIT THE FANS, THE GLOBAL CLIMATE, AND LOCAL POPULATIONS

by James Mitchell*

From solar-powered stadiums to free public transportation, the “Green Goal” project not only drastically reduced the environmental impact of the 2006 World Cup games through such preventative measures, but it went further: for the first time, an event of this magnitude was “climate-neutral.”¹ Through a multilateral effort involving the United Nations Environment Programme (“UNEP”), the Institute for Applied Ecology, the International Football Federation, and the German Football Association, 100,000 tons of CO₂ will be saved through climate protection projects in India and South Africa, more than compensating for the 90,000 tons incurred by the games.²

Preference for projects that blend global environmental concerns with lasting benefits for local populations appears to be a trend for event planners. One such investment project is based in Tamil Nadu, an area in south-west India that was ravaged by the 2004 tsunami.³ It involves creating facilities that turn cow dung into biogas, and then channels the energy source into homes via new pipes.⁴ Not only will the eco-friendly biogas protect the local forests and decrease global greenhouse gas (“GHG”) emissions, but it will reduce the number of respiratory illnesses associated with traditional wood and kerosene-burning stoves.⁵

South Africa will host the World Cup in 2010 and seeks to emulate Germany’s carbon-neutral success. For example, the German public transportation system was a surprisingly successful feature of the Green Goal Project. By providing free use of trains and buses to all ticket-holders, a full 77 percent of fans relied on public transportation, far surpassing the goal of fifty percent use.⁶ Noting Germany’s success, and aware of its own shoddy public transportation system, in August 2006 the South African Government agreed to a multi-million dollar initiative to revamp its bus and rail services in time for the 2010 World Cup games.⁷ Teaming up with UNEP and the Global Environment Facility (“GEF”), South Africa developed “pilot projects in some of the nine . . . World Cup cities. . . aimed at developing sustainable transport alternatives

that deliver [GHG] reductions above and beyond those currently planned.”⁸

Recognizing that in urban metropolitan areas over a third of GHG emissions are attributable to the transportation sector,⁹ both the World Bank and the GEF have implemented various transportation projects across the world, with particular success in Latin America.¹⁰ Bus rapid transit (“BRT”) systems feature dedicated bus lanes, a restricted number of stations, efficient routes, and little downtime.¹¹ South Africa 2010 planners are envisioning “feeder routes” that link poorer communities to the BRT system via conventional bus/taxi networks.¹² Implementing these networks, along with bicycle paths, will not only alleviate congestion during the games and decrease GHG emissions, but leave a lasting impact on local populations by improving

regional air quality and health, and saving the average South African commuter time and money.¹³

The International community is shifting away from viewing major sporting events as exploitative opportunities, and moving towards a greener mindset that involves both economic and environmental development. UNEP and the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games are striving to make the 2008 Olympic Games “the greenest ever, from cutting air, water and noise pollution to transportation, landscaping and

disposal of solid waste.”¹⁴ Instead of leaving behind massive concrete stadiums, events are providing sustainable systems that benefit local inhabitants. Far from mere publicity stunts, greener games and the offsetting of GHG emissions instills a sense of environmental consciousness and global camaraderie connecting all fans and athletes, thus serving as a catalyst for future multilateral efforts to improve our environment.



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ENDNOTES: SUSTAINABLE SOCCER

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¹ Press Release, World Cup Also a Success for the Environment: Results of the Green Goal Project (Dec. 13, 2006), *available at* http://www.bmu.de/english/press_releases_as_of_22_november_2005/pm/38391.php (last visited Feb. 13, 2007) [hereinafter World Cup].

² World Cup, *id.*

³ World Cup, *id.*

⁴ BBC News, *Going for green at the World Cup* (June 29, 2006), *available at* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5128608.stm> (last visited Feb. 9, 2007).

⁵ Press Release, Green Goal: The OC and United Nations Environment Programme Sign Historic Partnership Agreement (Sept. 6, 2005), *available at* <http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com/06/en/050906/1/4k2o.html> (last visited Feb. 13, 2007).

⁶ World Cup, *supra* note 1.

⁷ Global Environment Facility, *Green Team Climbs Aboard South Africa's World Cup Transport Plan* (Aug. 28, 2006), *available at* <http://www.gefweb.org/WorldCupSustainableTransport.html> (last visited Feb. 13, 2007) [hereinafter GEF].

⁸ GEF, *id.*

⁹ THE WORLD BANK, PROMOTING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES IN THE URBAN TRANSPORT SECTOR: EXPERIENCE FROM WORLD BANK GROUP-GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY PROJECTS 4 (2006), *available at* http://www.gefweb.org/Documents/WB_Sustainable_Transport_report.pdf (last visited Feb. 13, 2007).

¹⁰ WORLD BANK, *id.* at 9-10.

¹¹ WORLD BANK, *id.* at 10.

¹² GEF, *supra* note 7.

¹³ WORLD BANK, *supra* note 9, at 12.

¹⁴ WORLD BANK, *supra* note 9, at 12.