

Angola 2010: Where the other word for 'Impossible' was 'Nothing'

Contributed by Confidence Musariri recently in Angola
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It took Angola about six months to polish up the faces of Luanda, Cabinda, Benguela and Lubango in time for the just-ended African Cup of Nations.

Most Angolans have no potable water and no electricity resorting to the use of generators and boreholes.

Although Angola is still under construction, it owes it to CAF that there is a lot that has been completed.

I was greeted by the huge heart that Angolan citizens have. Despite being Portuguese speaking, Angolans were always keen not only to host but engage in dialogue with visitors. It's like there was a national hospitality course before the tournament.

"Kolisense..fala Portuguese?" (Excuse me, do you speak, Portuguese?) they would ask, before they indulge in animated sign language.

Their hospitality, is far from what I witnessed at the Confederations Cup in South Africa last June. Theirs gives security. They hero-worship President Dos Santos in this dirty city of Luanda where it takes three hours to drive from the Central Business District to the stadium which is only 20km away, due to the thick traffic and damaged roads.

There are long fuel queues in Luanda, mainly because of too much traffic.

It is said after the Angola-Mali 4-4 draw, the President banned his gorgeous wife, Ana Paulo from attending matches, because she had jumped around too much in an "un-presidential manner" as Angola went 4-nil up. The former flight attendant is the President's fourth wife, but I was more surprised that she is 47, with all those youthful looks. Dos Santos had time for all the Luanda matches.

His first wife was a Russian and all the president's kids have keys to the country's diamond stores and just like Ana Paulo who runs a lot of businesses.

Tremendous football and night-long parties stopped journalists from being home-sick. Most visitors partied all night, escaping from brigades of mosquitoes which operated as if on command.

Ghana lost the final but showed a brighter future as compared to the Egyptians. Five Under 20 players played in the final which was six minutes away from a goalless end, while Egypt had five senior players who will not play in the 2014 World Cup qualifiers.

"We don't need to win this tournament. The next two AFCON and 2014 World Cup must be won by us because these youngsters won the Under 20 World Cup and reached the finals of the AFCON," Kofi Addae, one of Ghana's top writers, flattered himself before the final. The tournament was made more intriguing because we had the host Angola and the defending champions Egypt, in the quarter-finals, as well as all the World Cup bound teams, plus Zambia, who had graduated youngsters from the team that reached the second stage of the FIFA U20 World Cup in Canada, three years ago. That's a positive sign of African football development.

Journalists debated the quality of officiating. A Qatar photographer called for video evidence, with support of a writer from the *Zambian Post*, while a guy from Eurosport was mocking African referees.

There was some alcohol involved but I took insult from this Spanish guy of EuroSport who fancied Ivory Coast because of Yaya Toure (Barcelona-Spain) and other European stars.

"You forget Barcelona robbed their way into the Champions League final against Chelsea last year. France robbed Ireland to win a World Cup ticket. Ireland also got a dubious penalty in Georgia, all thanks to European referees. The fact that we have video replays when watching on TV does not mean the refs are pathetic. Maybe we must ban video replays of (no)goals rather than introducing video evidence in football. The passion, those slight glitches by referees, the emotions, all come with the game. African football is unpredictable unlike in Europe where you can easily predict a winner," I preached to him.

Angolans seemed not bothered much by that Cabinda issue. There is no road linking Angola to the Cabinda Province where Togo was attacked. You either go by ship (two days) or an hour's flight which cost US\$120 (approx R900). And flights to Cabinda are like taxis to Walvis Bay from Windhoek.

Cabinda and Angola are separated by the Congo River. You need a map and a good history lecturer to make the distinction of Cabinda. The province is called Cabinda and there is a town also called Cabinda which is where Togo was headed.

They were attacked in the province but not in the host City of Cabinda. They were shot 10km from the border at a place called Chikamba. Chikamba is a bushy area, 160km away from the place Togo was going, but also 25 km from Port Norte (Congo Brazzaville). It seemed politically correct for the Angolan government to allow the games to be played in Cabinda because they want every Angolan to be part of this tournament. If not, then Cabindans would say "we want our own independence because we are not considered Angolans."

Rusting military tanks, armoured cars and other reminders of the 27 year old civil war are on the side of the road as one drives to Lubango, which is a thousand kilometres from Luanda.

I found Lubango, surrounded by mountains like Windhoek most attractive.

A new school has just been built next to the Tundavala stadium. The new road to the stadium was only tarred less than three months ago. Houses along Augustine Neto Street leading to the stadium were demolished and the owners compensated by the government to allow that once-dusty one way road to be expanded. That even affected the hotel at the corner of the street which could not even be completed in time for the AFCON. But at least now there is a four-way. Most things for the AFCON in Angola seem to have been built six months ago.

"They said AFCON cost US\$1billion, but in truth, we were behind time, they just brought in the Chinese and made

a deal to exchange labour for oil. Chinese are fast, efficient and built nice things. Tanks of oil go to China everyday as part of the AFCON US\$1b deal,” my guide, Rogerio Zau tells me. All the same, Angola did it. Even CAF’s operations seemed efficient for once. It should be a reminder to all African countries that impossible is indeed nothing as we look to the bidding of the 2016 AFCON.
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