Panama Papers: the world.

Amid a plethora of interpretations defining sports diplomacy in his article "Sports diplomacy: South Africa and Fiji 2010," Bishnupriya Padhi opts for a definition associated with Peppard and Riordan which describes it as "the whole range of international contacts and competitions that have implications for the overall relations between the nations concerned." So in this era of COVID-19, what role can sport play to improve relations among states?

Mahlomvo Yousuf Baker

As COVID-19 has exposed major fault lines in our society, we should not miss the opportunity to learn something from the painful experiences in order to reshape the socio-economic trajectory of our very unequal society.

A society with one voice is doomed to fail, as proved over the history of humankind. In the absence of checks and balances, accountability and rationality, all dictatorships and autocratic regimes have ended in disaster.

Our National Command Council (NCC), while claiming wide consultation, has regrettably shown some of the tendencies. Most of us adhered to the harsh regulations the government introduced through its NCC under levels 5, 4 and 3 of the lockdown. Most economists do not appear to agree with the hard lockdown and warned of the negative consequences of the sudden shut down of the economy, on growth, unemployment, government's vulnerable finances, the credit rating of the sovereign debt and the outlook of South Africa in the eyes of foreign investors.

As a result, millions of our citizens are suffering from poverty, unemployment and crime. Let alone the severe impact on education, health care and the deteriorated services delivered by governmental institutions.

We believe our health-care system can protect people's lives without a strong supportive economy. Likewise, the economy cannot function efficiently and at full capacity without a good health-care umbrella. As there is a reciprocal relationship between the two, it requires a balancing of priorities. Has the government got this right? It seems doubtful.

The main driver of economic growth is consumption, even though this is not the ideal model. However, amid the uncertainty about the future due to the extended lockdown, the marginal propensity of consumers to save is higher than their tendency to spend and consume. This means that the recovery of our economy will take longer than usual.

The irony is that the NCC threatens to take the country back to level 5 if members of society continue to violate the restrictive rules. Such threats enhance uncertainty and might make people even more reluctant to go back to their normal life and hence delay the desired economic recovery.

From the outset, a smarter lockdown based not only on theoretical science but also on accurate data and the realities on the ground would have been preferable. Under a smart lockdown, it would not be necessary to shut the whole economy and close all provinces, rather isolate the hot spots where the infection rate is noticeably high and escalating. Life must go on and we must learn how to live with any challenges and strike a balance between working and fighting the epidemic, not asking people to stay home waiting for the unknown.

The government must seize the opportunity to start planning to transform our economic and political systems, introduce genuine democratic reforms to protect us from concentrat ing power in one authority and, more importantly, overcome the pervasive corruption and mismanagement. If the government wants to see people acting responsibly, then it must start to effect the change in its branches and lead by example.

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