

Local governance issues in the print media

July- September 2001



For

Introduction

This report seeks to highlight coverage of local governance issues in the private and public press. The research covered Harare and Bulawayo, the two major cities in Zimbabwe. Both cities have relatively well-organized residents' associations in the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) and the Bulawayo United Residents Association (BURA) respectively. It is also in these cities that most of the media analyzed are based. For example, all privately owned newspapers have head offices in Harare and bureaux in Bulawayo.

The report covers three months, i.e. July, August and September. The media analyzed are the government owned Zimpapers (*The Herald*, *The Chronicle*, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Sunday News*) and the private press (*The Financial Gazette*, *The Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Zimbabwe Mirror* and *The Daily News*).

The study coincided with the end of term for the city of Harare's government-appointed commission. Since 1998, residents in Harare have not had an elected council following the suspension of the Solomon Tawengwa-led council by the Minister of Local Government and Housing, at the time John Nkomo. This was followed by a campaign by Harare residents, operating under the auspices of the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), to take government to court over the Harare Commission's continued term in office. Towards the end of the period under review, the Bulawayo local government by-elections received prominent coverage in all newspapers monitored. Incidentally, were it not for these elections, *The Zimbabwe Mirror* would not have had a single news story on local governance issues in Harare or Bulawayo in three months!

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 224 stories directly dealing with local government and residents' issues were analyzed in all the newspapers. The number of stories in each newspaper is shown in Appendix 3. As expected, the dailies had a comparatively high number of stories in the period compared to the weeklies. In general, the research points to scant coverage of local governance issues in the printed media. In all the newspapers monitored, the number of stories was enhanced by the local government elections in Bulawayo held on the 8th and 9th September.
- Stories on council affairs focused on problems the two cities had in increasing their revenue collection. Issues relating to council accounts and health issues were a rare feature in the news. Council accounts call for more media attention given the fact that, for example, Harare City Council's accounts have not been audited since 1998. *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* and the *Zimbabwe Independent* consistently followed up the issue of city accounts in Harare and Bulawayo respectively. However, the coverage in the dailies did not go beyond sourcing comment from council officials and an over-reliance on council minutes. *The Herald* even covered, uncritically, plans by the Harare Commission to implement activities that were not budgeted for. *The Zimbabwe Independent* stereotyped the Commission running Harare City Council's affairs as "under-performing" and used residents associations as the only source for its information on critical issues relating to council accounts and health.
- The effect of government programmes on city planning was hardly covered in the weeklies. Examples include the effect of farm invasions and the railway transport projects in Harare and Bulawayo. The daily newspapers made reference to these and provided little to no analysis of the problems. Worse still, coverage became mired in support or criticism of the various projects and the obvious casualty was analysis the effect on city planning.

- The role of residents' associations was recognized in all the newspapers. However, the media failed to reflect the "grassroots" nature of the association(s). All newspapers that quoted representatives of residents associations did not go beyond the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) or the Bulawayo United Residents Association (BURA). Ordinary residents were quoted only in the context of localized issues such as burst water pipes or blocked sewers.
- There was a total lack of impartial voter education in all newspapers, especially ahead of the local government elections in Bulawayo. Worse still was the failure by all newspapers to analyse the electoral process. On the whole, coverage of the Bulawayo elections was polarized along party political lines. Consequently, the views of residents, the voters, were missing in all papers.

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Many thanks also go to the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) who facilitated some interviews with a number of residents.

The report reflects the views of MMPZ and the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CASEP

THE MEDIA MONITORING PROJECT ZIMBABWE (MMPZ)

MMPZ is an independent Trust that works to promote responsible journalism in Zimbabwe. It started as a joint initiative of three organizations, namely Article 19, Global Campaign for Freedom of Expression; the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)-Zimbabwe Chapter.

The Project monitors the information output of the country's mainstream radio, television and print media.

MMPZ produces weekly reports of its findings and occasional reports on current issues.

METHODOLOGY

For all newspapers, all stories relating to council and municipal affairs had the following information noted:

Page number, line up, summary of the story, the bulletin, number of sources quoted, names of sources and the organizational affiliation, the news agency and the geographical source of the story. The information was entered into a logging form and then a media-monitoring database from which data is extracted.

A story fell within the scope of the research if it covered the following issues:

1. City council events and statements
2. Residents' issues and their relations with the local government structures
3. Letters to the editor or opinions commending or condemning council activities, issues and events.
4. Opinions identifying issues to do with the activities of the council and residents
5. City/ town relations with other cities within or outside Zimbabwe
6. Peri- urban farm invasions and urban agriculture.

Stories were divided into codes developed with university students who assisted in the data compilation. The topic codes used are given in Appendix 1.

Sources of information were also categorized according to the role played in local government issues. (See Appendix 2)

A. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL ISSUES

i. Harare commission's term of office and legal implications

The period reviewed coincided with the end of term of the government-appointed Harare City commission's fourth six-month term with shallow analysis of the legal provisions on the appointment of commissions by the Minister- at least in as far as none of the media made reference to the country's electoral laws. Other newspapers ignored the news of the extension of the commission's term of office. After missing Local Government Minister, Ignatius Chombo's announcement extending the commission's term of office, *The Daily News* (4 July) analyzed the provisions of the Urban Councils Act and stated that **"...the Act is silent on the number of times the government can extend the commission's term"** *The Herald* (July 3) referred to the provisions of the Urban Councils Act but also noted the pending case of the dismissed councilors.

The Daily News, *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Herald* echoed the sentiments of Harare residents to the move by government to renew the term of office of the Commission.

All three papers noted that residents were calling for the dissolution of the Chanakira commission and the need for an elected council accountable to residents.

Reference to the Electoral Act only surfaced when the daily newspapers (*The Herald & The Daily News*, 19 July) covered the case of some council employees who had been either suspended or dismissed during the commission's terms of office.

The Zimbabwe Independent (August 31) followed up this case. However, like the dailies, it also regurgitated the statements made during the court hearing such as **"the commissioners have not arranged for the elections and the third respondent (Chanakira) is now acting as if he is the executive"**.

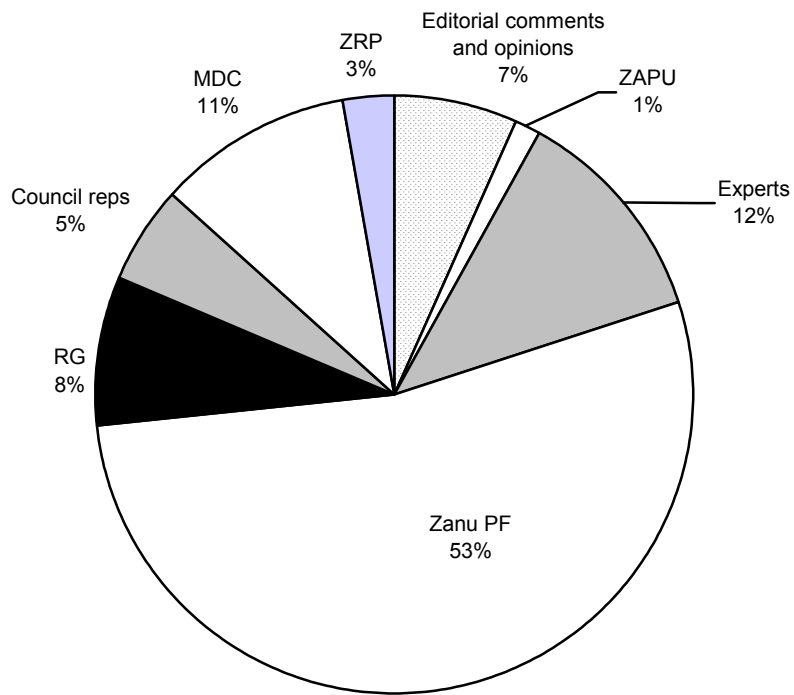
None of the newspapers sought independent legal opinion on the "conflict" that exists between the Urban Councils' Act and the Electoral Act.

The failure to analyze issues relating to the country's electoral issues would later manifest in the failure by all newspapers to provide basic voter education in time for the local government elections in Bulawayo.

ii. The Bulawayo local government elections

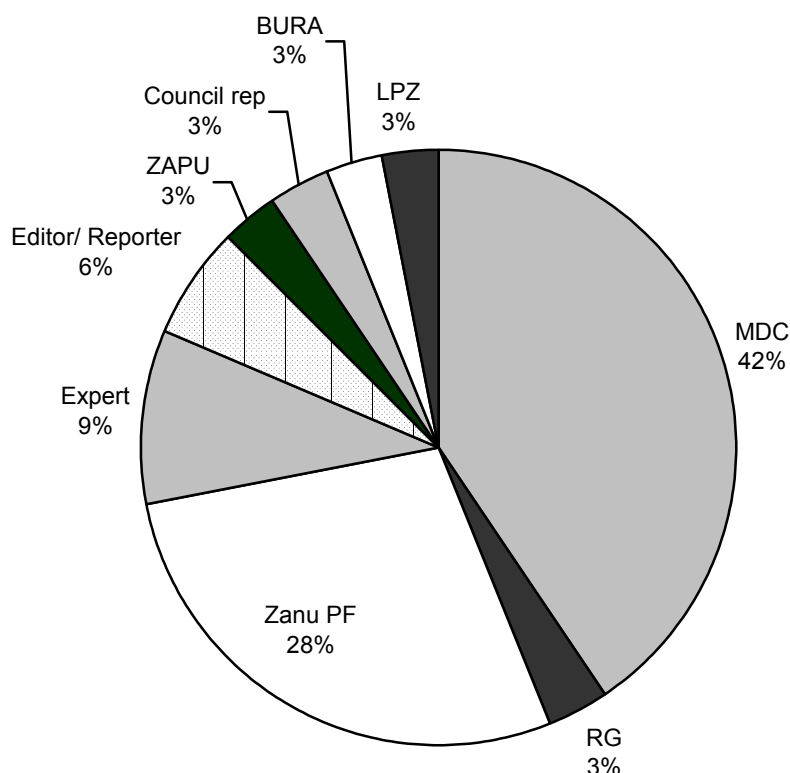
Residents were never accessed for comment on the pending local government elections in Bulawayo. Yet the Bulawayo elections were about residents and the leadership that would serve them.

Fig 1: The Chronicle: Information sources quoted on Bulawayo local government election



The Chronicle failed to source comment from residents and one of the contesting political parties- the Liberty Party of Zimbabwe. In 42 stories on the elections, the paper used 75 sources in its coverage. (40) sources (53%) were comments of Zanu PF officials while 8 sources were comments from MDC officials. There were no comments from residents (or voters) in the period leading to, during and after the local government elections. Expert opinions constituted 12% (9 sources) of the voices quoted.

Fig. 2: The Daily News: Information sources quoted on local government elections



The *Daily News* quoted 32 individual sources in its coverage of the local government elections. 13 voices (42%) were from the opposition MDC while 9 voices (28%) were those of Zanu PF. Residents were quoted only once in the form of a comment from a BURA representative.

Fig 3: Distribution of sources in the run- up to, during and after the local government elections in Bulawayo.

	Percentage distribution of information sources per publication		
Sources	The Zimbabwe Mirror	The Financial Gazette	The Zimbabwe Independent
No. of stories on subject	4	6	13
Total no. of sources quoted	6	16	29
Zanu PF officials	50%	37.5%	31.0%
MDC officials	0	31.3%	27.6%
ZAPU officials	16.7%	0	6.9%
LPZ officials	16.7%	0	0
Experts	16.7%	12.5%	20.7%
Council spokesperson	0	0	3.5%
Ordinary people	0	12.5%	0
Reporter/ Editor	0	6.25%	10.3%
Residents associations	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0
Registrar General	0	0	0

The Liberty Party of Zimbabwe (LPZ) was given scant opportunity to express its policies to the electorate. It was only quoted in *The Zimbabwe Mirror* in a story that profiled the LPZ candidate. ZAPU only emerged in the context of a hearing following its appeal against the disqualification of its candidate.

The court proceedings were covered *The Zimbabwe Mirror*, *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Chronicle*.

Ordinary people were quoted twice in *The Financial Gazette* but hardly in relation to their views of the electoral process. One story was about alleged infiltration of the opposition by the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) ahead of the Bulawayo local government elections.

The comments of organized residents' groups were not published in any of the weeklies in the period reviewed.

The media failed to provide residents of Bulawayo with basic voter education. But even worse was the failure to provide any information about the electoral process. For example, information about the voters' rolls, or how many people are registered in Bulawayo was missing, as was any voter education information such as identity documents required for voting.

The task of providing this important information was made even more complicated with the emergence of a new form of campaign conducted by the ruling Zanu PF- cash hand outs for projects. The private press followed these events with detailed analysis.

MMPZ provided weekly reports on the coverage leading up to the local government elections and has compiled a detailed report on the subject.

Zimpapers provided extensive and favourable coverage of the activities of government and ZANU PF officials in Bulawayo while portraying the MDC campaign negatively.

Only the private Press (*The Daily News* 30/8, and a broader analysis in *The Financial Gazette* 30/8) provided any analysis of the ruling party's vote-buying strategy in Bulawayo. Zimpapers portrayed this upsurge in the disbursement of "development funds" as normal government policy and steadfastly ignored the link between the abuse of state funds and ZANU PF's campaign strategy.

For example, *The Chronicle* (27/8) carried a front-page article stating that government had distributed \$12million to Bulawayo-based community groups for income-generating projects. But instead of questioning this activity, the paper shamelessly reported that:

"Cde Manyika took the opportunity to urge the people to vote for the ZANU PF mayoral candidate, Cde George Mlilo".

The article also failed to question the veracity of the comment from the ZANU PF Bulawayo provincial chairman who threatened the city's electorate when he said that electing an opposition mayor would be a **"dislocation of Matabeleland from central government. If we vote for the opposition we will be voting ourselves out of Government. The opposition is just there to oppose what we fought for and achieved".**

In addition to this grossly unprofessional piece of journalism, the opposition was also denied any right of reply.

The Chronicle (29/8) followed this up with a report that \$33bn had been secured for the Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project. Minister of State for the Informal Sector, Sithembiso Nyoni, was also quoted as saying that informal traders would get support from government. Part of the article noted that **"... the ZANU PF mayoral candidate for next month's elections, Cde George Mlilo attended the meeting and promised to do his best to improve the informal traders' lot if elected mayor".**

ZANU PF provincial secretary for information and publicity was also quoted in the same issue as saying ZANU PF was confident of victory as its door-to-door campaign had paid dividends, once again presenting a spurious claim as a statement of fact.

The private press emphatically dismissed the overtures of government and ZANU PF officials in Bulawayo as **"vote buying"**. *The Daily News* (27/8) carried an editorial suggesting that the people of Bulawayo had already made up their minds regarding the election.

The Sunday Mail (2/9) quoted Vice-President Msika urging Bulawayo residents to refrain from violence during the election campaign. But the paper also accused the opposition of instigating violence without providing any corroborating evidence.

The Zimbabwe Mirror (31/8) featured a profile of the Liberty Party of Zimbabwe's mayoral candidate, Jabulani Ndlovu.

On the broader electoral campaign front, *The Financial Gazette* (30/8) reported that President Mugabe had intensified **"a vicious blitz against all perceived opponents while using public funds to shore up waning support..."**

The quoted analysts noted that violence and intimidation remained central to Mugabe and his party's survival strategy and that the planned deployment of soldiers on farms, ostensibly to help resettle villagers, was designed to frighten peasants into voting for Mugabe next year.

ZANU PF's control of the public media was reflected in the way they covered the election. As has become the norm, Zimpapers titles were blatantly used as platforms for the ruling party's campaigns. Zimpapers also failed to see anything wrong with ruling party officials lavishly distributing state funds at political campaign rallies.

The Herald story, *ZANU PF, MDC lock horns* (6/9) illustrated this point. Instead of questioning such malpractices, the paper actually linked the gross abuse of public funds to the ruling party's election campaign when it reported:

"Morale was high at rallies following the disbursement of \$2m to people for projects by the Minister of Youth, Gender Development and Employment Creation, Elliot Manyika."

In contrast, *The Daily News* (3/9) was able to unmask this cheap attempt to bribe Bulawayo's electorate in *Tsvangirai steals show in Bulawayo*. It noted: ***"...the ruling party has major obstacles to overcome, despite its spirited campaign to court voters by liberally disbursing funds for projects in the city"***.

But the paper failed to explain whether this activity contravened the Electoral Act.

Neither did *The Zimbabwe Independent* (7/9). In its article *Byo: ZANU PF's nemesis*, the paper only noted ZANU PF's vote-buying strategy.

Besides throwing taxpayers' money around in Bulawayo, ZANU PF set another record in electioneering subterfuge, using the compliant state media as its tool.

This took the form of a news item in *The Herald* (3/9) reporting a government-hosted gala broadcast live on television to thank the outgoing mayor of Bulawayo at which ***"Cde. Msika took the opportunity to seek support of the hundreds who attended the gala to vote for Cde Mlilo in the election that will pit him against Mr Japhet Ndabeni Ncube of the MDC and Mr Jabulani Ndlovu of the Liberty Party of Zimbabwe"***.

By its own admission, *The Herald* noted that ***"Bulawayo's acting mayor David Ndlovu carved himself a place in Zimbabwe's history when he became the first non-substantive civic leader to be publicly honoured by the government."***

The state media confined its reports of political violence to attacks against alleged ZANU PF supporters in Bulawayo and Makoni West, but ignored attacks on the opposition. *MDC allegedly threatens workers ahead of election*, *The Herald* (4/9) and, *MDC candidate arrested for allegedly inciting violence* (4/9) are examples.

In fact, while *The Herald* (5/9) reported six incidences of political violence it only concentrated on one in which MDC members were alleged to have stoned a bus carrying ruling party supporters. A police spokesman was quoted saying ***"ZANU PF supporters retaliated by beating them, sustaining minor injuries"***. The paper did not question the police spokesman over the other incidents.

The Herald also tried to link the MDC's campaigns to government foreign conspiracy theories against Zimbabwe. In an article headlined *"Ex-Rhodesians team up on Internet"* *The Herald* (4/9) quoted Information Minister Moyo urging ***"... the people of Bulawayo to demonstrate that Rhodesians would never rule Zimbabwe again by voting overwhelmingly for the ZANU PF candidate ..."***

Even the defection of the politically fickle Alderman Mike Parira-Mpofu, back to ZANU PF, made headlines in the state media and was used as further propaganda against the MDC.

Mpofu was allowed to attack the MDC, with impunity.

There was no mention of the outbreak of violence perpetrated by ZANU PF supporters as soon as the news of the MDC victory spread in Bulawayo.

The Financial Gazette (6/9) provided its readers with a credible and balanced story in, *MDC set to sweep Byo mayoral poll*, sourcing comments from both parties.

The entire local press failed to follow-up a revealing statement by Bulawayo wards registrar, Jabulani Mbambo, that ***"the exact number of registered voters would only be known today or tomorrow when the final roll comes from Harare,"*** (*The Herald*, 5/9).

In fact, what has manifested itself in the Press over the years is their woeful failure to probe the mechanics and manipulation of the electoral process thoroughly. And in this case they should have made Mbambo's revelation their concern.

The Daily News only highlighted alleged anomalies in the electoral process in its article on the first day of voting (8/9), which quoted the MDC accusing ZANU PF of manipulating the voters' roll. Unlike *The Herald*, *The Daily News* accorded ZANU PF the right of reply through its secretary for publicity and information, Nathan Shamuyarira, who denied the allegations.

The Daily News followed this up on the other side of the voting weekend with its story, *Massive rigging alleged in polls*, (10/9) in which the MDC also accused ZANU PF of harassing its members in Bulawayo and Makoni West.

Predictably, the news focus in *The Sunday Mail* (9/9) was that MDC youths had assaulted ZANU PF members without any mention of the rigging allegations. The assaults were reported as fact despite police comments that investigations were continuing.

B. COUNCIL AFFAIRS

Harare City Council accounts have not been audited since 1998, a fact all newspapers seem to be aware of. Yet issues relating to council accounts received scant attention in the newspapers. The issue was covered in the context of the many problems bedeviling the Harare municipality, which mainly had to do with revenue collection and sewage disposal.

The Herald did not go beyond stating the problems facing the Commission running the affairs of Harare. For example *The Herald's* story (4 August) *Council produces audited accounts* read in part:

Harare Municipality has finally managed to produce the 1997/98 audited accounts that were due some three years ago and is now battling to finalise the 1999/2000 accounts.

No mention was made of the 1998-1999 accounts.

The paper highlighted some of the problems facing the municipality and noted that the failure to produce audited accounts had resulted in financial institutions turning down loan applications needed to fund a number of capital projects. A South African company hired to computerize city treasury abandoned the project after the city failed to pay it on time. Another South African-based credit company is said to have undertaken a study and concluded that Town house was not creditworthy.

The story relied on comments from the acting City Treasurer Cosmas Zvikaramba and no follow-up was made with comments from interested parties such as the residents associations, the responsible ministry and the Harare business community.

Instead, the paper covered, uncritically, plans by the Harare Commission to implement activities that were not budgeted for. The newspaper also reported statements by Commission chairman Elijah Chanakira saying all these problems would be addressed by the end of the year.

But a critical analysis of the alleged abuse of council funds was only noted in *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Sunday Mail*

The Independent (August 17) story "Harare commission splashes out \$50 m on luxury vehicles" quoted city public relations officer Jane Gambiza confirming the move. The story also quoted a CHRA representative questioning the Commission's priorities, especially given the fact that it had failed to produce any audited accounts in two years.

"As residents, we are very concerned and we need to know where our money is going," he said.

"This can only be done if we have elected councilors."

The Sunday Mail (12 August) story on Harare's revenue collection also questions commission's priorities. The paper quoted Dr Tizirai Gwata, the first black mayor of Harare as saying:

"There has been notable improvement in revenue collection, but the council must know which areas need to be urgently addressed and provide services in a cost-effective manner."

Gwata is also quoted as saying it is unhealthy to continue having an appointed commission running the affairs of the city.

"The commission must be substituted and there must be representatives chosen by the people to democratize the whole process."

Harare City Council is owed millions by "ratepayers" among them government institutions. The Commission seems not to have found the best way to recover this money. *The Herald* (4 July) noted other debtors to the Harare City Council who included motorists. It was not clear from *The Herald* reports whether government departments were also culprits. Yet it consistently failed to mention the money government owes the council. In its story (13 August) headlined "Council can write off debts of up to \$10,000.00, *The Herald* noted that the Harare Commission ***"has increased revenue collection resulting in \$200 million being collected in a day"***. Research shows that in reality the Commission had increased revenue collection by increasing illegal rates charged to residents. The rates were nullified by a court of law.

"...A percentage of the rates that are charged every month are in fact illegal and were ruled as such by the High Court in 1999 – it is the City that is acting unlawfully in continuing to collect these illegally levied rates..." a member of the CHRA told MMPZ.

The Herald also reported plans by Commission to have the Vehicle Licensing Act amended to make it mandatory for motorists to pay their fines before renewing their vehicle licenses.

“The committee noted with concern that large amounts owed to council by traffic offenders due to cumbersome recovery procedures which required the council to go through the courts,” read minutes of the city’s audit committee.

The Zimbabwe Independent went beyond merely stating the problems and gave extensive analysis of their origins. The paper consistently noted that chief bad debtors were government institutions. In its August 31 issue, the paper reported that the commission running the affairs of Harare threatened to sue or disconnect water supplies to government institutions, Rufaro Marketing and residents, to recover \$700 million in unpaid rates. The paper quoted council minutes dated August 3 stating that top on the list of defaulters are government institutions, which owe council about \$477 million in rates.

The paper quoted Numero Mubaiwa the City’s director of housing and community services as saying: ***“Vigorous water disconnections at individual properties and at government institutions are currently being done in order to recover the money.”*** He is also quoted as saying: ***“Legal action is also being instituted against the defaulters.”***

The move was met with condemnation by residents. The paper quoted a CHRA representative saying ***“disconnecting water is tantamount to bullying the people. That is illegal because people have a right to withhold paying rates if they are not happy with the services offered.”***

As is the case with *The Herald* stories, no legal opinion was sought on this matter.

FLASHBACK!!

On 7 April 1999, *The Daily News* published a story on the alleged misappropriation of land by the Tawengwa-led Harare City Council. The story quoted councilors alleging that OK Zimbabwe Limited, one of the country’s leading chain stores, benefited from the controversial land deal. From that date, until April 2001, OK Zimbabwe Limited never advertised in *The Daily News*. Similarly, Harare City Council, and more specifically, in the period reviewed, never advertised in the daily paper. (The Bulawayo City Council had two adverts in the daily paper in the period).

The use of public funds to prop up pro-government media in the form of advertising cannot be condoned. Worse still, attempts by corporate bodies to influence the editorial content of newspapers by withdrawing advertising reflects badly on their relationship with the media. MMPZ encourages media organizations to publish any attempts to subvert their editorial independence by corporate bodies in the public interest.

The Chronicle and the *Zimbabwe Independent* consistently followed issues relating to Bulawayo City Council affairs with interest. However, coverage was limited to problems relating to financial resources. *The Chronicle*, like *The Herald*, excelled in its reliance on council sources and sought no comment beyond that.

Apparently most of the stories revolved around the awarding of tenders and the Bulawayo City Council’s attempt to raise funds for its capital projects suspended last year owing to cash flow problems.

Government’s payment of an \$80 million portion of its debt to the City of Bulawayo was given front-page prominence in *The Chronicle* (24 August). However, the private press questioned the sincerity of this move, especially given the pending local government elections in the city. *The Chronicle* quoted Ald. David Ndlovu saying:

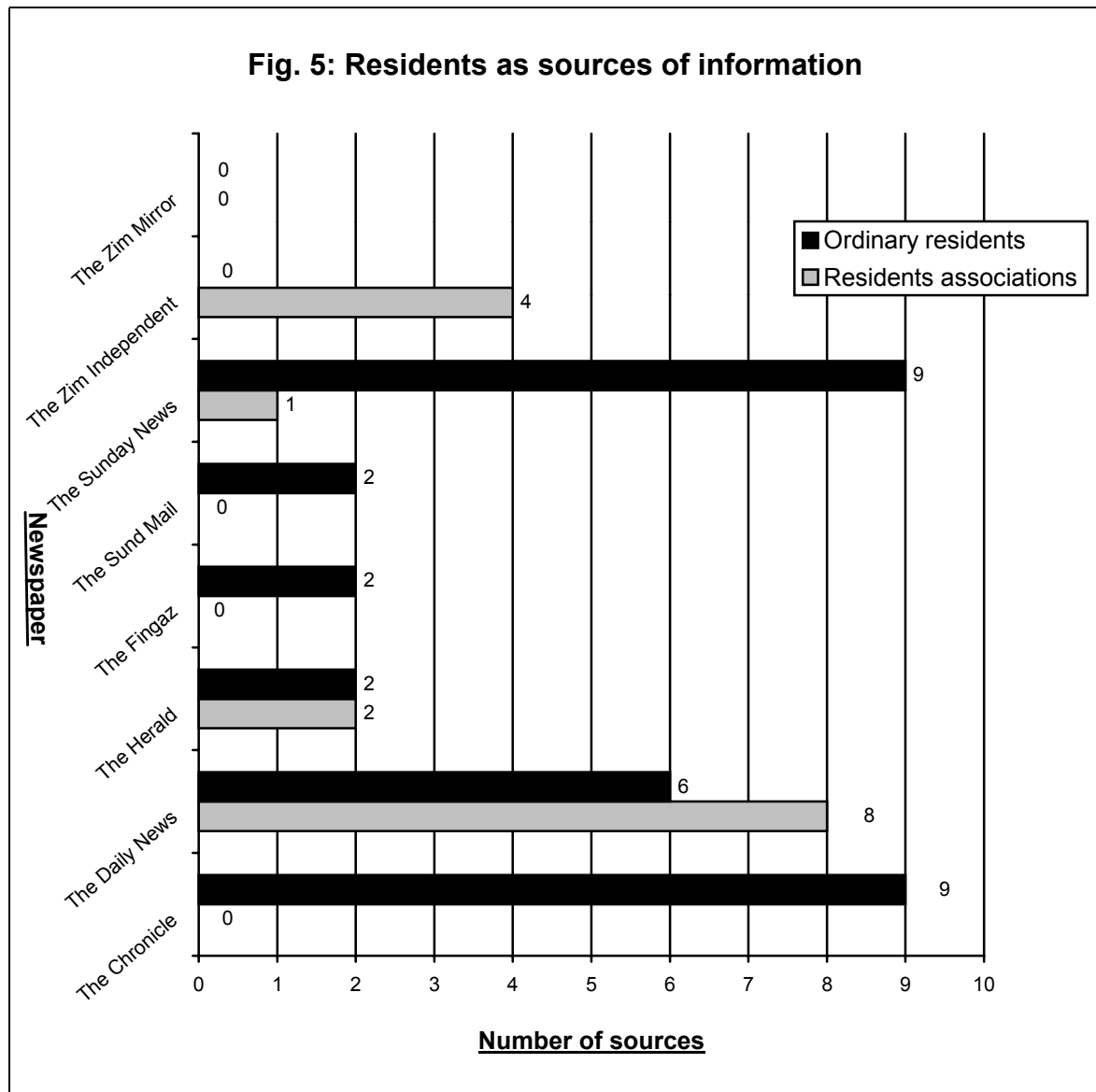
“...We have witnessed what we thought would not happen in this world...this is the announcement of the year...”

C. THE ROLE OF RESIDENTS’ ASSOCIATIONS

Although residents associations have been in existence since the 1940s, the Urban Councils Act does not acknowledge or enhance their role in the formulation of local government policy

All newspapers that quoted residents acknowledged the role of residents associations in the running of city affairs. However, this honour was not extended to ordinary residents who were mostly quoted in the

context of localized problems. The figure below shows the extent to which the associations and ordinary residents were used as a source in the different newspapers



[NB: The number of stories on local governance issues is shown in Appendix 3]

The term “resident” is used in this context to mean persons living in either Harare or Bulawayo with no affiliation to any of the criteria given in Appendix 2.

The private press, mainly *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Daily News* used CHRA & BURA as their main sources of information on local government issues. And although *The Daily News* sourced comment from ordinary residents in Harare and Bulawayo, both papers failed to portray the grassroots nature of residents associations. CHRA is the umbrella body coordinating several grassroots residents associations in Greater Harare, Chitungwiza, Norton and Ruwa while BURA coordinates residents associations in Bulawayo.

While city council activities received deserved media attention, activities of residents were never covered. In other words, residents only appeared in the picture when everything else appeared not to be normal in the city council. This research does not suggest that this was the fault of any newspaper. Resolutions of council meetings are newsworthy by any ordinary journalistic standards. Resolutions at meetings of residents associations can only be covered at the discretion of individual news organizations. Residents associations exist to represent citizens’ interests to elected councils. As a result, it would appear that most of the submissions made by residents associations were the wishes of those individuals the papers sourced for comment.

The Zimbabwe Independent, *The Daily News* and *The Herald*, for example, covered CHRA's objections to the government extending the term of office of the Harare City Commission. None of the newspapers made any reference to a previous meeting of the residents' association(s).

D. CITY PLANNING

In the period reviewed, various government programmes were implemented either in the city and other peri-urban areas. These included the ongoing farm invasions and the government initiated city railway projects. The effects of these projects on city planning cannot be underestimated. Yet this was a gray area in the coverage by the media. *The Daily News* and *The Herald* only made side reference to these issues and soon got drowned in their criticism and support of the government projects.

The introduction of the rail commuter service received endorsement in Zimpapers and scepticism in the private press. Across the different press stables no analysis has been accorded to the obvious casualty, the effects on city planning.

The Daily News carried a number of articles that highlighted some of the problems attendant to the introduction of the train service. Other private newspapers ignored the development.

Nothing of critical importance was raised in the state newspapers about the viability of the train service. News articles in the state newspapers all favoured the train service and ignored its implications relating to city planning. *The Herald* (30 July) reported that Mufakose commuter omnibus operators had reduced their fares because of the service. It also reported (1 August) the start of the train service trials and quoted Minister Ignatius Chombo (4 August) assuring the public that the service would continue.

The Chronicle (4 August) carried photographs of the trials in Bulawayo claiming they had attracted an overwhelming response.

The Daily News (1 August) quoted the NRZ saying the service had been introduced as a **"national service"** and would be unprofitable. Although the story interpreted the introduction of the service as a political move, especially as the NRZ was billions of dollars in debt, its headline, **"NRZ says commuter trains a political move"** was misleading, since this was not confirmed in the story. All the daily needed to have done would have been to quote Information Minister, Jonathan Moyo, from *The Herald* of the day before saying in the paper's story of ZANU PF's Bindura victory: **"For us it is not just winning elections, it is delivering on the ground, giving people the land and implementing urban based projects such as the commuter rail train."** Needless to say, *The Herald* never questioned Moyo about the costs of implementing such a service or its effects on city planning.

The Daily News noted that commuter fare wars had erupted in Bulawayo following the introduction of the train service. It also reported that Bulawayo councilors had **"...shot down a government request to spruce up surroundings and erect shelters at pick-up points along the commuter train route at a cost of \$500 000"**. Councilor Charles Mpofu was quoted as saying:

"The way ZANU PF is accelerating things raises suspicions. Everything is being fast-tracked and after running down ZUPCO, they now want to bring NRZ to the same level of ruin."

The Daily News (17 August) story **"Commuter train for Mabvuku"** quoted a Harare City Council report dated 15 April 1998 compiled by the municipality's director of works. The report said the **"the project is absolutely unworkable and economically unsustainable"**. The paper also followed up a story on the construction of three houses in Kambuzuma officially opened by the President. The paper (14 September) maintained, quoting council officials, that the houses were illegal, as they were not connected to water and sewer systems as required by council regulations. The story also quoted Minister of Local Government Ignatius Chombo dismissing the story and the comments of municipal officials.

There was no information on the effects of the peri-urban farm invasions in Harare on city planning in the period reviewed.

E. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has explored the print media's coverage of residents' issues in the municipal affairs of Zimbabwe's two biggest cities; Harare and Bulawayo.

While municipal issues appeared regularly in the print media, the result of this work has exposed a woeful lack of in-depth coverage of the governance of the two cities. It would also appear that the activities of the two main residents' associations (CHRA and BURA) are either irregularly covered or that the

associations themselves are not as active as they should be in challenging the plethora of civic problems plaguing the management of the two cities.

Without being able to access the number of public statements issued by the two associations, it has been impossible to assess how well the print media have responded to issues raised by the associations.

However, it is clear that the Press has relied heavily on these associations and on unnamed sources within the councils when covering municipal issues.

Such reliance clearly suggests a serious lack of transparency in the governance of the two cities that urgently needs to be addressed by activist campaigns by civic organizations, especially residents' associations, with the active support of the formal media. Community groups could also enlist non-formal media methods, such as the publication and wide distribution of pamphlets relating to specific civic problems, to break down the pervasive lack of openness in local government.

One of the main responsibilities of the formal media is to act as a watchdog on the performance of public institutions. But in this respect, it has manifestly failed to provide the public with a clear record of the details of how the two cities are being governed.

Most stories have concentrated on national government issues relating to local government, for example, the issue of council elections and government's manipulation of the laws to its political advantage. While this is, indeed, a most important issue, details relating to the day-to-day management of the two cities have been few and far between, and when they have been raised, they have barely scratched the surface.

An example of this has been the coverage of the lack of audited accounts from the City of Harare. The failure of the city's commissioners to provide this most fundamentally important piece of public information has been widely reported. But demands from the Press – and the public – for the commissioners to make public the details of their spending has not appeared to be a priority. Nor has there been much investigation into this failure, or even the spending policies of the two municipalities. Both of these issues should be essential public information and in themselves affect all other areas of local governance.

Thus, details about the state of housing, health, capital developments, water supply and sewage disposal, population planning and controlled development, among a host of other issues that should be in the public domain, have barely been tackled by the Press during the three months of this research.

With the advent of commissioners running Harare, regular public meetings have not apparently taken place. But even in Bulawayo, the activities of the City Council do not regularly appear in the Press. While this failure, to a large but immeasurable extent, can be blamed on the culture of secrecy that pervades local government (as it does national government), the media generally, and the Press in particular, have also failed to investigate municipal affairs on a regular basis or at any great depth. It is impossible for MMPZ to explain this failure, but it is likely that, in addition to a certain lack of resources (and a reluctance by the state media to investigate irregularities in local government), there is a pervasive ignorance of the mechanics of local government and of the importance of councils' decisions on the communities they run. For even council resolutions made during meetings that are open to the public are not regularly covered.

It would be MMPZ's recommendation that newspapers regularly devote space to municipal activities and appoint municipal reporters whose responsibility it is to cover the activities of local government institutions and develop strong and reliable contacts with councilors and those professionals running them in the hope that this will improve their penetration of the secrecy that shrouds their operations. It would also be important that such journalists become fully acquainted with the regulations and protocols surrounding local government – and the rights the public have to know what their councils are doing with ratepayers' money. It would be as well that residents' associations do the same.

Ends

Appendix 1: Topic codes

Topic	Code
Local government health issues	A
City works and engineering	B
Local government electoral issues	C
Local government legal issues- courts & by-laws	D
Urban housing	E
Urban agriculture and land resettlement	F
General	G
Local government politics- referring to political party interference in local government issues	H
Local government finances and accounts	I
Council/ commission meetings	J
Local government labour and strikes	K

Appendix 2: Local government voice codes

Label	Code
Party (Zanu PF, MDC, UP e.t.c)	Party acronym
Former councilors	Fc
Commissioners/ councilors	Com
Residents-	Ra/chra OR ra/root
Economic, works, & health experts	exp
Council spokesperson	Cs
Reporter or editor	Rep
Foreign diplomats or their representatives	Fd
Informal traders/ kombi drivers	Itaz
Police	Zrp
Military	Zna
Warvets	Warvet
President	President