



On ZBC

April 2013

“Eye on ZBC” is a monthly summary of how the public broadcaster presented pertinent political and socio-economic issues, especially those relating to the activities of the coalition government, ahead of the constitutional referendum and elections. It will also assess how the broadcaster is monitoring adherence to the Global Political Agreement signed by the country’s three main political parties in September 2008. It is a product of the Media Monitoring Project, Zimbabwe.

SUMMARY

THE national broadcaster, ZBC, carried 162 news reports on various national issues in the period under review.

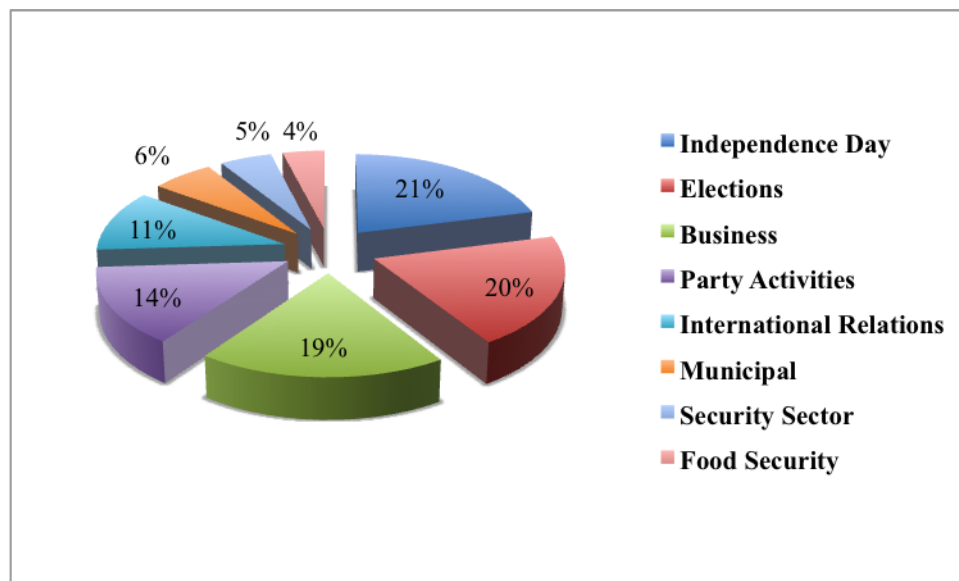
The most popular issue was Zimbabwe’s Independence Day celebrations, whose main event was held at the National Sports Stadium in Harare. The celebrations received coverage in 34 stories.

Reports on Zimbabwe’s preparations for harmonized election, which President Mugabe wants by June 29th this year, also competed for attention, coming a close second with 33 stories.

ZBC devoted 31 stories to business news, whose highlight was the holding of the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair in Bulawayo.

Other issues that received significant attention were party activities (22); international relations (18); municipal (10); debate on security sector reform (eight); and food security (six). See Fig 1.

Fig: 1 Distribution of stories on ZBC



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Zim regains Western confidence - ZBC

THE high profile visits by dignitaries from Western countries and reports indicating that some sections of the West were now supporting President Mugabe and his controversial policies, such as land reforms, were presented by ZBC as evidence of Zimbabwe regaining Western confidence.

But the way the national broadcaster provided this evidence in their news reports did not seem to entirely sustain this notion.

The most basic weakness of the reports appeared to be the broadcaster's inability – whether through omission or commission – to directly quote the diplomats saying these things. This, in turn, generally undermined the accuracy and credibility of ZBC's assertions.

In one such case, the national television station, ZTV (30/4, 8pm), reported Norway as having ***“disassociated itself from Britain and the European Union's stance to impose illegal sanctions on Zimbabwe”***, indicating that it wanted to restore good bilateral relations with Zimbabwe.

This story was reportedly based on remarks by Norwegian Ambassador Ingebjorg Stofring during her courtesy call on ZANU PF's national chairman, Simon Khaya Moyo, that Norway was ***“desperate for a renewal of relations which turned sour when the country got entangled in a bilateral dispute which was essentially between Britain and Zimbabwe”*** (ZTV, 30/4, 8pm).

Apart from reporting Stofring as having ***“begged”*** for Zimbabwe's friendship, ZTV also depicted Norway's alleged stance as ***“a continuing momentum other European countries have taken of late after realizing that the dispute between Zimbabwe and Britain has cost them investment, trade and other business opportunities in Zimbabwe”***.

Nowhere in the story is Stofring given a sound bite directly saying what was attributed to her.

Earlier, ZTV (11/4, 8pm) reported visiting Denmark's State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Ib Petersen as having told his Zimbabwean counterpart, Simbabrashe Mumbengegwi, that Denmark was ***"ready to re-engage Zimbabwe and assist in rebuilding the national economy"***. The station claimed that Denmark, which is a member of the EU, ***"was sucked into the bilateral dispute between Zimbabwe and Britain and relocated its embassy to Zambia"***. ZTV (14/4, 8pm) added: ***"After pulling out its embassy from Zimbabwe at the height of the Harare-London dispute over land in 2002 and later returning in 2009, Denmark is once again working with Zimbabwe for development"***.

In other stories, ZTV (16 & 18/4, 8pm) reported Zimbabwe's relations with the US as ***"normalizing"*** on the strength of a visit by American State Department Special Envoy Ambassador Andrew Young.

The station reported Young indicating that the US was ***"prepared to move beyond sanctions"*** after meeting President Mugabe and during a public lecture at Sapes Trust in Harare.

The former US Congressman asserted that the US needed ***"reassurance that Zimbabwe is peaceful as it was known in the past and that the world hopes to see the beginning of a new flowering of freedom and democracy"*** (ZTV, 16/4, 8pm).

ZTV (16/4, 8pm) also reported Young as having ***"saluted Zimbabwe's land reform programme which has empowered and transformed the lives of over 300 000 Zimbabwean families, saying it was very successful"***.

Young's sentiments were reportedly echoed by another prominent visiting civil rights campaigner the Rev. Jessie Jackson, who was reported ***"commending Zimbabwe for the strides made in recent times saying the environment is very ripe for the country to forge development partnerships with the outside world"*** (ZTV, 30/4, 8pm).

The US civil rights activist was reported saying this after meeting Mugabe. In addition, Jackson reportedly said he was ***"anxious to see the sanctions go and to see the removal of any barriers hindering strong cooperation between Zimbabwe and some countries"***.

In this context ZBC reporter, Judith Makwanya, declared: ***"The United States, which decided to side with Britain in the Zimbabwe-Britain dispute, has imposed sanctions which have been hurting ordinary people for the last decade"***.

Apart from reporting Western countries as falling over each other to re-engage Zimbabwe, ZBC also reported that Zimbabwe's relations with other countries such as United Arab Emirates; Malawi; South Africa; Palestine; South Sudan; Pakistan; DRC; Japan; and Cuba were ***"cordial"*** and ***"strengthening"*** (5, 7, 18, 26 & 29/4, 8pm).

Zim in economic doldrums

REPORTS on the poor state of Zimbabwe's economy and efforts being made to address the situation continued to hog the limelight on the national broadcaster, ZBC, in the month.

Of the 31 reports that ZBC carried, 17 (55%) highlighted symptoms of economic decay, such as further company closures; low capacity utilization; price increases; power shortages; shortages of safe drinking water; and the outbreak of water-borne diseases, such as cholera and dysentery, in Harare, Bulawayo, Beitbridge and Chiredzi.

Seven (23%) were on improvements in other sectors of the economy such as banking and mining.

The remaining seven were on the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF), held from 23rd to 28th April.

The reports generally highlighted indicators of economic decay without paying attention to the root causes of the problem and how this could be holistically resolved. Thus, they failed to relate current events with background information to help inform the public about what is actually happening.

For example, ZBC (27/4, 8pm) simply reported the **"closure"** of at least 17 companies in the steel and engineering industry over the past year **"amid fears that the delay in the resuscitation of new Zimsteel will worsen the situation"** without explaining why.

It recorded Engineering Iron and Steel Association President, Callisto Jokonya saying the steel companies were constrained to the extent that they were now importing steel from neighbouring countries rendering the end product very expensive.

Said Jokonya: **"We are operating at below 10 percent capacity and more companies are likely to close operations in the next few months."**

ZBC (27/4, 8pm) also reported Jokonya challenging government to **"offer Zimbabweans explanations regarding the Essar deal as most of the steel firms relied more on the operations of the company for survival and the plant in Kwekwe was an example of value-addition"**.

Jokonya complained: **"The failure to resuscitate ZISCO has negatively impacted the sector considering that it used to employ 50 000 workers who are currently out of employment and government continues to dilly-dally with the lives of citizens."**

In another report, ZTV (12/4, 8pm) reported captains of industry and commerce highlighting that Zimbabwe's industry growth projections for this year **"are likely to be lower owing to persistent funding challenges"** and high production costs, which have made it difficult for companies to increase output.

The station however, did capture the industrialists' concerns over these problems, with official data showing that most companies have in the first four months of this year operated at an industrial capacity rate of 10 percent compared to 25 percent in the same period last year (ZTV, 12/4, 8pm).

ZTV (12/4, 8pm) quoted a Managing Director for a Local Investments Portfolio Company, Sean Gammon, indicating that it was highly unlikely for industry to achieve a projected capacity utilization of more than 60 percent by year-end.

However, ZBC also reported some sectors of the economy showing some signs of recovery.

These included projections that the local banking sector would grow in the last three-quarters of the year because of stable macro-economic conditions; an increase in bank deposits and mineral production during the first quarter of 2013; and the improvement in the quality of products, which were displayed at the ZITF, compared to last year (ZBC, 3, 22, 23 & 26/4, 8pm).

SECURITY SECTOR REALIGNMENT

ZANU PF rules out security reforms

ZBC displayed bias towards the ZANU PF arm of government in its coverage of the debate on proposed reforms in the security sector.

Its eight stories on the subject exclusively marketed the party's dismissal of the reforms to the exclusion of all other alternative opinion. At the same time, it passively reported some service chiefs uttering partisan political statements without viewing their behaviour as an indication of the need for such reforms.

The broadcaster's unprofessional practice is clearly at odds with the mandate of public broadcasters in any functioning democracy.

According to World Radio and Television Council (WRTC), a public broadcaster speaks to everyone and does not discriminate. It is a ***"meeting place"*** where all citizens are welcome and considered equals and should be ***"accessible to all and meant for all"*** whatever their social, economic and political standing.

Article XIX (d) of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) also provides standards and guidelines for the media on their coverage of political parties; it stipulates that coalition parties should be given equal coverage in the media, especially the public media.

But ZBC appeared preoccupied with marketing ZANU PF's political interests to the exclusion of others, especially its two MDC coalition partners.

In one story, ZBC (17/4, 8pm) reported Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa reiterating that Zimbabwe ***"will not give in to pressure from the West to discard veterans of the liberation struggle as they are the country's heroes"***.

Chinamasa said this after a briefing session for diplomats accredited to Zimbabwe, which he attended with Foreign Affairs Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi on April 16th.

According to Chinamasa, the issue of security and media reforms ***“have remained a chorus on the lips of Western powers”*** as echoed in the discussion with the Western diplomats during the meeting.

Chinamasa insisted that Zimbabwe ***“will not get rid of war veterans and other elements that are not favoured by the West”***, adding, the Zimbabwe Defence Forces ***“is a professional force that participates in international and regional peacekeeping missions”***.

Earlier, ZBC (4/4, 8pm) failed to question the truth of claims by Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa that ***“calls for security sector reforms by the MDC formations and their regime change partners”*** were ***“aimed at undermining Zimbabwe’s security and sovereignty”***.

Mnangagwa made these allegations while speaking at the National Defence College in Harare, where he also declared that the ZDF ***“are a professional force that are the envy of many across the globe”***.

In addition, ZBC (4/4, 8pm) allowed Mnangagwa to falsely claim that ***“the so-called security sector re-alignment was never a GPA issue”*** and the only two outstanding issues ***“are the illegal sanctions imposed on the country and pirate radio stations”***.

A look at the GPA disproves Mnangagwa’s claims.

Article 13.1 of the agreement, for instance, declares: ***“State organs and institutions do not belong to any political party and should be impartial in the discharge of their duties.”***

Article 13.2 (b), compels the coalition parties to ensure that all state organs and institutions ***“strictly observe the principles of the rule of law and remain non-partisan and impartial”***.

Chinamasa and Mnangagwa’s utterances coincided with similar ones by General Augustine Chihuri and ZRP spokeswoman Charity Charamba, as well as State Security Minister Sydney Sekeramayi, that calls for security sector reform were ***“misguided”*** and being sponsored by ***“retrogressive”*** and ***“external forces”*** to ***“destabilize”*** Zimbabwe (ZBC, 4, 23, 24/4, 8pm).

Ends/

This PUBLICATION was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 /778115, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw

Feel free to write to MMPZ. We may not be able to respond to everything but we will look at each message. For previous MMPZ reports, and more information about the Project, please visit our website at <http://www.mmpz.org/>