Media representation of women in Politics
(October 1 to November 30 2012)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Media representation of women in Politics in Zimbabwe* is one of several investigations by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) into the representation of males and females in the local mainstream media.

It is part of the organisation’s efforts to promote responsible journalism in the country considering the media’s status in society as pervasive and highly influential socialising forces. The research was funded by Department for International Development.

It is aimed at assessing the media’s commitment to act as platforms where both men and women are able to contribute and participate equally in all aspects of private and public life in accordance with local, regional and international regulations and protocols on gender and development.

MMPZ’s research team conducted the research.

It comprised Eric Matingo and Edson Madondo, coordinators of the research; compiler of the report, Elijah Daka; and media researchers Sibusisiwe Dube, Precious Zhou, Pauline Ihani Phuthi and James Bvumira (Print media monitors); and Christina Mundodzi, Hlengiwe Dube, and Pretty Moyo (Electronic media monitors)
Chapter one

Introduction
WOMEN constitute somewhat more than half the world’s population. It is a trend reflected in Zimbabwe too.
According to preliminary census results released by the Zimbabwe Statistics Agency (Zimstat), females constitute 6,738,877 of the country’s 12,9 million population, about half a million (503,945) more than males, whose population stands at 6,234,931.
Yet despite this, women’s participation in formal political structures and programmes – where decisions regarding their lives and the use of societal resources are made – remain at the periphery.
Statistics show that women hold only 14 percent of parliamentary seats in the country, down from 16 percent in the previous parliament. Representation of women in Zimbabwe’s main political parties also mirrors this pattern, as the leadership and decision-making bodies of the two major political parties in the country – ZANU PF and the MDC-T – are male dominated.
According to the MDC-T website http://www.mdc.co.zw/ (18/12/12), the party’s National Standing Committee comprises nine members of which only Thokozani Khupe, who is also the Deputy President of the party, is the sole female representative. The MDC-T’s National Executive is made up of 40 members consisting 26 males and 14 females.
Similarly, the ZANU PF website http://www.zanupf.org.zw (18/12/12) shows the party’s presidium is made up of three men and one woman, Joice Mujuru, who is also one of the party’s two vice presidents; while the party’s decision-making body in between congress, the Politburo, comprises 26 males and seven women.
It is no wonder then that there has been lots of lobbying in support of women’s participation in politics. A local feminist Non-Governmental Organisation, Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), justifies this stance thus: “Participatory democracy cannot be achieved if more than half of the population remains voiceless with no full access to decision-making and to the activities that influence the course of their future.”
Likewise, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international organisation established in 1889 as the first permanent forum for political multilateral negotiations contends “genuine democracy cannot exist without the full participation of both men and women in politics”.

1. Framework
THERE has been a lot of rhetoric in the country on the need to politically empower women although this has not really translated into substantial action.
The current constitution does not provide any quota for women representation in politics. For example, women representation in the House of Assembly has fluctuated from one election year to the other since Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980.
However, a proposed new constitution appears to take critical steps towards enhancing gender equality in politics by proposing the allocation of 60 “affirmative action” seats for women for the first two terms after the new
constitution is adopted. The 60 female MPs would add to the 210 parliamentary seats and the 88 senate seats that the country currently has. While this creates opportunities for more women to enter politics, the level of participation by the women proposed in the draft constitution still falls short of the benchmarks set by several local, regional and international policy frameworks that promote and support women’s extensive participation in politics and decision-making roles that the country has committed itself to. These include:

- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which informed the African Decade for Women under which the African Union (AU) declared 2010 to 2020 as a Decade for Women
- SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (Article H of 1997) that sets a minimum target of 30 percent representation of women in leadership by 2005; and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (Articles 12 and 13) that aims to achieve a 50 percent representation in decision-making roles by women in all SADC countries by 2015;
- 2000 Millennium Declaration and Development Goals, which set a target of 50 percent proportion of seats by women in parliament by 2015;
- African Women’s Protocol of 2003 (Article 9) where the AU set targets of 50 percent women representation in decision making bodies by 2012; and
- 2004 National Gender Policy (Section 6.2.3.2), which advocates a 52 percent representation of women in decision-making positions.

Although it is the responsibility of the State to respect and implement these commitments, this study investigates whether the media is also playing its institutional role of creating the groundwork for gender equity in the country. It looks at the extent to which the position of women in political issues has been approached and portrayed in the surveyed media.

1.1 Lessons from other researches
SEVERAL studies on gender and the media have paid great attention to the manner in which the media represent and portray women. The Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, (2004) notes that the media behave stereotypically when covering women politicians by focusing on their appearance, wardrobe, mannerisms, and when photographers try to get ridiculous or compromising pictures in order to get readers’ attention. The assertion also confirms what Kahn (1994) observed. Khan highlights that representation of women politicians in the media are more prone to focus on gender based evaluations of dress and demeanour than on the substance of decisions and actions. Studies on the traditional relationship between politics and women have also shown that traditionally women’s participation and access to formal political power structures has been hindered by various factors. In a study facilitated by the United Nations (UN), Bari (2005) notes that the structural and functional constraints faced by women have been shaped by social and political relations in a society. Among these are social and political discourses, political structures and institutions and the socio-cultural and
functional constraints that put limits on women’s individual and collective capacities.

The main ideological factor noted by Bari is patriarchy, a system of male domination that puts women’s position in politics on the margins. Patriarchy is used as an ideological tool to place women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere of politics and economics. Bari argues that these socio-cultural factors that restrict women from exercising their political freedoms are embedded within the socially constructed subordinate status of women upon men. This results in low resource allocation to women’s human development by the state, society and the family. It also contributes to varying degrees of gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and politics in general.

This study uses some of these indicators to assess how women politicians are reconstructed in the media.

1.2 Scope of the research

This is a two-month investigation, conducted from October 1st to November 30th 2012. It focused on 10 of Zimbabwe’s 16 mainstream media outlets, both private and public. The surveyed media are listed in Fig 1.

Fig.1: List of media under inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Regularity</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ZTV (ZBC)</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Public media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spot FM</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Public Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Herald</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Public media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronicle</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Public media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sunday Mail</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Public media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dailynews</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Privately owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsday</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Privately owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Independent</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Privately owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Standard</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Privately owned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice of America (Studio 7)</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Privately owned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3 Methodology

The research used both quantitative and qualitative methods to extract information for analysis. Quantitative techniques were basically used to statistically measure the quantifiable elements that gave insight into whether reportage represented male and female voices fairly.
This was done through a voice/source-coding mechanism. The coding system sought to identify the most quoted between men and women so that equitability in coverage could be assessed. The data were presented in form of tables and graphs so that findings can be better understood. Qualitative analysis was used to fine-tune the quantitative findings as well as deduce the diction and pictorial presentation of women in the surveyed media.
Chapter 2

Summary of findings
THE study shows that there was substantial underrepresentation of women in stories on political developments carried in the monitored media in the two-month study. And in the cases that the females were used as sources, attention was often focused not on their intellectual substance but more on their gender and womanhood. This included presenting them as:

- Political ornaments;
- Party support structures;
- Victims of family baggage; and
- Victims of negative politics and power struggles

2.1. Voice distribution analysis
THE public media carried a total of 625 political stories in the period under review, which comprised a total of 762 voices. Of these voices, 645 (85%) belonged to males and 117 (15%) to females. The private media’s sourcing pattern was fashioned the same way. Of the 820 sources they used in the 758 reports they carried on politics in the same period, 712 of these (87%) were males while 108 (13%) were females. Figs 2 and 3 illustrate this.

Fig 2. Public Media
2.2 Voice distribution per topic
STORIES on political developments carried in the media in the period under review were classified under various sub-categories. These consisted developments on the constitution-making exercise; parliamentary affairs; political party activities; electoral matters; violence and conflict; and legal and judiciary issues. Figs 4 and 5 show this.

In the public media, females were least used as sources of information in stories on violence and conflict, accounting for just five percent of sources used in these stories against the 95 percent participation of males. In stories on the constitution-making exercise, males made up 87 percent of sources used by the public media while women comprised the remaining 13 percent. Equally, there were fewer female sources in stories carried on the activities of Zimbabwe’s political parties in the public media with women making up 15 percent contribution to the political discourse of their parties against those of men (85%).

Fig 4. Public Media
There was also scanty representation of women in the 708 politically related stories the private media carried in the period under review. For example, there were no women sources used in all the 12 stories on parliamentary affairs these media carried in this period while women were only quoted 30 times in the 218 reports these media carried on the activities of political parties as compared to the 230 times male sources were accessed.

**Fig 5. Private Media**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political issues</th>
<th>Total number of stories</th>
<th>Number of times men were quoted</th>
<th>Number of times women were quoted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constitution</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary affairs</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party activities</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral matters</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence and conflicts</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal and judiciary issues</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>708</strong></td>
<td><strong>712 (87%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>108 (13%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2.3 Media’s Voice distribution per role**

The media accorded various functions to the sources they used in their coverage of political stories in the period under review. These were presented in their diverse roles as public officials such as MPs and cabinet ministers; experts in their field of practice like lawyers and analysts; or as part of the general public. See Figs 6 and 7.

Females were more likely to be quoted commenting on political issues equitably with male sources only in their roles as ordinary members of the public than in any other capacity in the public media. For example, the only time women (16 voices) were given equivalent opportunities as male sources (14) to discuss pertinent political developments in the country in the public media was when they were recorded in their roles as ordinary members of the public. Otherwise, men out-talked them in every other role.
Fig. 6: Roles distribution table in the public media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voices</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysts</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministers</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentarians</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal experts</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other govt officials</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary People</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>691</strong></td>
<td><strong>111</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the private media, females were most likely to get a sympathetic hearing of their political opinions alongside their male counterparts only when speaking in their roles as MPs.

Fig. 7: Roles distribution table in the private media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voices</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysts</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentarians</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal experts</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary People</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>823</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4. Emerging themes

SEVERAL themes were noted in the media’s coverage of the participation and representation of women in politics in the period under review. These included:

2.4.1 Women as victims of the family ‘baggage’

THE media at times needlessly drew public attention to age, marital status, looks and domestic and family circumstances of female sources in situations that did not merit such scrutiny. This was mostly reflected in the media’s coverage of women politicians or spouses of politicians performing their political duties.
For example, the media often referred to MDC leader and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai’s wife Elizabeth Macheka as the “35-year old daughter of long-serving senior ZANU PF official”, encouraging the public to judge her on the basis of her father’s political links and not on her capability and integrity as a woman or politician.

‘Ministers’ wives eye parly seats’ (NewsDay, 25/10) risked giving the impression of a cabal of women dependant on the influence of their spouses in their political endeavours. Such methods of political coverage of women may translate into electoral disadvantage for aspiring female candidates as compared to their male counterparts whose coverage focuses less on their domestic background.

2.4.2 The load of motherhood and domestication

The media also framed women through domestic and traditional standards through, among others, stressing the compassionate and nurturing qualities of women, while men’s competences were accentuated. The term “mother” was habitually used when referring to some female political figures such as the wives of President Mugabe, Prime Minister Tsvangirai and, at times, Vice President Mujuru. The Dailynews (7/10), for example, opined that Macheka was a “businesswoman” who had now assumed “a stay-at-home mom role, managing her husband’s tight schedule”, taking “the political version of mom” to avoid “controversy”.

Such terms reflect widely held social dogmas about women as mothers, even when these women were performing official or formal duties outside the domestic context. Notably, the media carried no reports that referred to “fathers” prominent male politicians performing formal political duties.

2.4.3 Women politicians: Ornaments of politics

Some media reports tended to mix women’s political activities with their physical appearances such as beauty, character traits and attire regularly than they did for male politicians. One story in the Dailynews (7/10) had this to say about Prime Minister Tsvangirai’s, wife Elizabeth Macheka: “Elizabeth has been politically active on her husband’s behalf since her customary wedding last month...Macheka controls her image carefully, focusing on her role as a mother, philanthropist and morale booster...” It added: “Stunningly gorgeous, one would be forgiven for thinking she is the type for beauty spars and top restaurants...Looking stunning as usual, she was splendid in trendy platform heel, expensive cameo pantyhose and a matching monochrome wrap-over subtle coloured dress”.

Accompanying the story was a picture of Elizabeth clutching her handbag. In another report, which tries to capture the “microcosm of the widening gap between the poor and the rich” in Zimbabwe at an MDC-T rally in Buhera, the Zimbabwe Independent (23/11) described Elizabeth as “the eye-catching Elizabeth who was exquisitely clad in purple head gear and bright blue, red, yellow and purple ‘African Attire’ with a turquoise blue lace over the upper top and arms”.

Headlines such as ‘Queen Elizabeth’ enters political fray’ (Zimbabwe Independent, 19/10); ‘Elizabeth a hit’ and ‘Inside Elizabeth’s political goddess revolution’ (Dailynews, 7/10); epitomized this too.
Such manipulation of communication symbols like descriptive texts and images to depict the beautiful side of female politicians have significant impact on the formation of public opinion about these people. This, among others, influences the public to appreciate their physical appearances more than what they should offer in terms of political substance.

2.4.4 Victims of negative politics and power struggles

THE scanty opportunities given to women to express themselves on political issues were further diminished by the circumstances under which they were reported in, especially in the media’s coverage of political parties’ activities in the period under review.

Female politicians, for example, were likely to be reported in the context of being at the centre of factionalism and succession issues. Their political activities or aspirations were sometimes associated with trouble-causing rather than competence and aspirations to occupy top political posts in life. For example, Vice President Mujuru and Deputy Prime Minister Khupe appeared in both the public and private media as mischief-makers and instigators of trouble in their respective parties in the period under review.

While Mujuru was reported responding to allegations of leading a faction in ZANU PF competing to succeed President Mugabe, Khupe was accused of inciting violence and inflaming divisions in MDC-T’s Matabeleland provinces. These allegations were embodied in stories such as: ‘Khupe elbows out rivals in poll plot’; ‘Heads to roll in MDC-T Bulawayo Province’; and ‘VP Mujuru denies leading party faction’ (The Herald and Chronicle 2, 12 & 19/11); and ‘Tsvangirai, Khupe fall out deepens’ (The Standard, 11/11).

In other cases, women were mostly presented as victims of political and social disasters. For instance, Studio 7 (15/10) widely reported women in Epworth “crying” after police demolished their homes to pave way for Sunway City, a private company, to take over its land.

2.4.5 Women as party support structures

WOMEN were also portrayed as support mechanisms or structures in politics. Several political campaign reports carried in the media in the period under review were urging reports that encouraged women to rally behind their male political leadership during elections.

This tended to reduce women to a secondary group of people, whose existence was simply to give support to male politicians, whose political positions were already guaranteed.

For example, several reports in the public media reported ZANU PF officials, including female politicians, urging the party’s Women’s League to campaign for the party and President Mugabe during the forthcoming elections. No reports urging men to rally behind female candidates during the party’s primaries or general elections were noted in the period under review.
2.4.6 The ‘symbolic annihilation’ of women Parliamentarians within Copac

WHILE women MPs constitute 32 percent (eight members) of the Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac)’s 25-member team, these were rarely quoted commenting on the constitution-making exercise. Exceptions were Jessie Majome and Olivia Muchena. Otherwise the rest, including Rorana Muchihwa, Thokozile Mathuthu, Gladys Dube, Flora Buka, and Monica Mutsvangwa – representing their political parties in Copac management committee – may not even have existed.

2.4.7 The bright side of the media

THERE were encouraging efforts by the media to prioritize women’s concerns in some of their reports, including gender-neutral reports that aimed at highlighting the importance of creating an environment of equality between women and men.

One such report was carried in the *Chronicle* (20/10), which quoted provincial development officer in the Women Affairs Ministry Vaidah Mashangwe expressing caution on a controversial provision in the proposed constitution that bars women from the death penalty, saying this might have both positive and negative repercussions in the country.

The media also carried several reports that focused on women’s political events aimed at empowering females. These included one on the re-election of the Women’s Parliamentary caucus exclusively by female participants. The caucus is a grouping of female parliamentarians drawn from parties in Parliament (*The Herald*, 17/11 and ZTV, 16/11, 8pm).

The other stories covered events and forums with the effect of promoting women’s self-realization and fulfilment in finding political identity.

For example the *Dailynews* (11/10) carried an event report on Deputy Prime Minister Khupe launching the Zimbabwe Chapter of Global Power Women Network Africa, an organization that focuses on ensuring that political leaders respect the interests and importance of women in national development.
Chapter 3

Conclusion
There was underrepresentation of women sources in political stories that the surveyed media carried in the period under review. Reliance on men as sources in political news showed that the genre of politics is still dominated by men.

Of a total of 762 voices the public media recorded in their coverage of political developments in the country in the two-month period, women constituted 15 percent (117 voices) as compared to males, who were quoted 645 (85%). Similarly, they were 108 females sources (13%) used in political stories carried by the private media against 712 male sources.

In the public media, females were least represented in stories relating to politically motivated violence and conflict while in the private media, it was on issues relating to parliament.

Women were more likely to be given equal opportunities with males to comment on political developments in the country only in their roles as ordinary members of the public than in any other capacity (public media) and, in the case of the private media, in their capacity as MPs.

The ‘ordinary’ women were mostly reported in their capacities as part of the general electorate and were limited to commenting on issues relating to political developments in their various constituencies. Women MPs were mostly quoted within their fixed roles as legislators.

Stereotyping of the women was rife in the media where they were presented, among others, as victims of the family baggage, political ornaments and political troublemakers. This had the effect of attracting attention not to the females’ ideas and capabilities, but on their biological, marital and physical traits.

However, they were also encouraging signs in the way the media promoted women’s self-awareness and fulfilment in finding political space, realisation and identity.

3.1 Recommendations
• The media should make it a policy to first study the gender mechanism of political institutions before approaching them for information to understand the gender distribution so that no sex would be underrepresented, especially if there is an equal opportunity for both sexes to be quoted as news sources.

• The media should broaden their sourcing patterns so that parity between men and women’s views is achieved, including a multiplicity of perspectives;

• The media should continue to raise public awareness on the need for gender equality and empowerment of women in all spheres of life so that the practice of gender equality becomes a norm in the society. This would help in creating a balanced society where both men and women enjoy same opportunities.
• The media should start a comprehensive discussion in their opinion columns and current affairs programmes on the unsuitability of traditional gender roles today that society uses to either discriminate or have negative perceptions about women in politics.

• Educating political institutions, especially political parties and journalists, on the importance of gender equality so that these institutions and practitioners become gender aware to avoid structures and reports that are skewed towards one gender over the other.

• Point out to Parliament and political parties that introducing gender quotas would be a positive move towards increasing women’s representation and participation in politics. However, the concept of quotas should be backed by total empowerment of these women in terms of education and access to resources so that their participation become meaningful and fruitful.
References


Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia. 2004


Ends/