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The

Transitional Barometer

The Transitional Barometer is a summary of how the media have covered issues relating to the activities of the coalition government – and an assessment of how the media are 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

MONTHLY REPORT ENDING FEBRUARY 2008

ISSUE No.1

Summary

The inclusive government comprising Robert Mugabe's ZANU PF and long-term political rivals MDC-T led by Morgan Tsvangirai, and Arthur Mutambara's smaller MDC-M formation aroused mixed feelings in the media. Data gathered by MMPZ in the month of February exposed the frailty of the new government as some parties were reportedly already acting against the spirit of the inclusive government. For example, SW Radio Africa (12/2) quoted MDC-T chief whip Innocent Gonese alleging that Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa had tampered with the National Security Council Bill before it was presented.

While the public media glossed over some of the weaknesses of the new inclusive government presenting it as a solid structure, the private media provided a different picture by exposing the potentially destabilizing contestations within the new structure.

Political developments

Political developments on the newly formed inclusive government dominated the media, with coverage on the issue totalling 904 stories in all the mainstream media. Of these, 46% were in the state-controlled Press and 54% featured in the privately owned papers.

The public media's coverage of the inclusive government largely followed official statements, which presented a smooth transition into the inclusive

government. The slant in the private media was characterised by a guarded welcome aware of the unresolved issues between the three political parties and the actions of ZANU PF, which contravened the spirit of the GPA.

Although all media celebrated the formation of the coalition government the public media largely did so unreservedly. *The Herald* (5/2), for example, simply reported the country's three major parties as having agreed to approve the passage of Constitutional Amendment No.19 Bill in Parliament after they had **"managed to resolve sticking issues"**. The paper however, did not mention the issues that had caused the postponement of the Bill's presentation the previous week, nor did they explain how they were resolved. The next day (6/2), *The Herald* and *Chronicle* simply celebrated the passing of the Bill and portrayed it as being the solution to Zimbabwe's nine-year-old political crisis without any critical analysis.

The pattern was the same on the state broadcaster, ZBC, where for example, ZTV (6/2, 8pm) quoted ZANU PF's Goodson Nguni welcoming the power-sharing agreement because it would **"remove the interests of the Americans and the British"**, while Spot FM (5/2, 1pm) earlier reported the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) as expressing optimism that the new administration would address their concerns.

The private media however, welcomed the new government with scepticism, raising crucial issues, such as the well-documented political rivalry between ZANU PF and the MDC-T. The potential of the new government to solve Zimbabwe's multi-faceted crises was also questioned in *The Zimbabwean* (5/2) and *Zimbabwe Independent* (6/2) where UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was quoted saying that although the world body welcomed the agreement it was **"an imperfect situation"**, while the EU and Britain said the new government **"will be judged by its actions"**.

In addition, the private Press highlighted policy conflicts; power struggles; duplication of roles; and ZANU PF's unilateral appointments of senior government officials as threats to the success of the inclusive government. *The Financial Gazette* (26/2), for example, interpreted the alleged **"clash"** between Tsvangirai and Attorney-General Johannes Tomana as evidence of the **"gravity of tensions that have rocked"** the inclusive government. This followed the decision by the Prime Minister to offer himself as surety for the release on bail of his choice for deputy agriculture minister, Roy Bennett, who is facing banditry charges.

The *Gazette* and the *Zimbabwe Independent* (27/2) both viewed the conflict over control of the telecommunications sector as another example of the friction between the power-sharing parties.

However, in a clear break from the past where favourable coverage of ZANU PF's activities have dominated ZBC and the news pages of the government papers, these past few weeks have witnessed a significant change in the way these media traditionally reported on ZANU PF's political opponents. In the period reviewed the MDC has received previously unknown positive coverage in the government media following the historic swearing-in of MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister, and his deputies Thokozani Khupe and Arthur Mutambara and their Cabinet ministers.

Figs. 1 to 4 illustrate this point.

Fig 1: Stories on the parties in the government Press

Medium	Political Parties		
	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M
<i>The Herald</i>	12	25	4
<i>Chronicle</i>	16	9	7
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	5	2	1
<i>The Sunday News</i>	1	2	2
<i>Manica Post</i>	4	4	1
Total	38	42	15

Fig 2: ZBC stories on parties in the inclusive government

Station	Political parties		
	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M
ZTV	78	34	7
Spot-FM	43	20	2
Radio Zimbabwe	32	22	3
Total	153	76	12

Fig 3: Voice distribution in the government Press

Medium	Political Parties' voices		
	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M
<i>The Herald</i>	12	33	4
<i>Chronicle</i>	22	11	7
<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	5	3	1
<i>The Sunday News</i>	1	3	2
<i>Manica Post</i>	4	7	1
Total	44	57	15

Fig 4: Voice distribution on ZBC

Station	Political parties' voices		
	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M
ZTV	84	35	5
Spot-FM	45	17	3
Radio Zimbabwe	24	18	1
Total	153	70	9

However, although these statistics show a significant improvement in the official media's coverage of the country's main political parties, they do not fully address or do justice to the bias that still discredits their coverage of the activities of the inclusive government.

This bias has chiefly manifested itself through the suffocation and censorship of important MDC activities and announcements; story angling, prioritisation and story placement.

For example, while ZBC gave some space to the MDC, ZANU PF remained the dominant party on the national broadcaster as it received more news airtime compared to the two MDCs in the inclusive government. According to MMPZ's statistics, of the 87 minutes and 39 seconds ZTV devoted to the activities of the inclusive government in its bulletins between February 11th and March 1st, 51 minutes and 15 seconds of this (58.5%) were on President Mugabe and ZANU PF ministers, while 23 minutes and 9 seconds (26.4%) were on Prime Minister Tsvangirai and ministers from his faction of the MDC. The remaining 13 minutes and 15 seconds (15.1%) covered Deputy Prime Minister Mutambara and ministers from his small faction of the MDC.

As the figures show, the total time allocated to both MDCs still represented less than half of the total amount of time ZTV devoted to all parties in the new government, despite the MDC's critical government roles in resuscitating the country's collapsed socio-economic sectors.

In addition, while the national broadcaster either suffocated or completely censored some of Prime Minister Tsvangirai's newsworthy activities, they turned President Mugabe's birthday celebrations into a national event, whose proceedings saturated the airwaves. For instance, ZTV (26/2, 9pm) devoted about one hour and 40 minutes to its interview with Mugabe to commemorate his 85th birthday. This was repeated the following day. Then on February 28th it disrupted its afternoon programming to accommodate live broadcast of his birthday party in Chinhoyi, which ran for at least three hours.

This contrasted sharply with a mere two minutes and 45 seconds ZTV (11/2, 8pm) devoted to Tsvangirai's post-inauguration celebration rally at Glamis Stadium where he outlined his party's programme of action in the new government and another two minutes the station (23/2, 8pm) allocated to his Gweru rally celebrating the MDC's 10th anniversary.

Most critically, ZBC stations all ignored Tsvangirai's press conference where he announced that President Mugabe's unilateral appointment of Permanent Secretaries was null and void because it constituted a violation of the Global Political Agreement. The important accompanying issues raised by Tsvangirai at that meeting as representing obstacles to the fulfilment of the GPA and the earlier Memorandum of Understanding, such as the continued detention of MDC and civic activists, have also been completely ignored by the broadcaster.

While the general slant of ZBC stories since the formation of the unity government has been to project Mugabe as enjoying unequivocal mass support, ZTV (28/2, 8pm) carefully avoided showing the rapturous welcome Tsvangirai received from Harare Central Hospital workers during his tour of the health centre. The report merely restricted itself to his pledge to mobilise funds for the hospital. While his pledges were important, given Zimbabwe's perilous health service delivery, the censorship of the health workers' rousing reception for the MDC leader appears to conform with the government media's previous attempts to mask the widespread support Tsvangirai enjoys among Zimbabweans and thereby buttress the ZANU PF notion that only Mugabe commands national appeal.

The government papers were no different.

Despite their attempts to provide equitable coverage, MDC activities were almost always subordinated to those of President Mugabe and his ZANU PF, especially whenever these were reported concurrently.

The papers' coverage of Tsvangirai's swearing-in ceremony typified this deliberate bias.

The Herald (12/2), for instance, gave extensive front-page space to Mugabe's speech at the swearing-in ceremony while relegating to the end of the story snippets of Tsvangirai and Mutambara's inaugural statements.

In addition that same day, the paper and the *Chronicle* buried news of Tsvangirai's Glamis Stadium rally where he outlined his vision of Zimbabwe's recovery on their inside pages. They also censored most of his promises, including paying civil servants in hard currency, preferring to stress his calls for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence among the parties. His promise only appeared the next day (13/2) in the context of acting finance minister Patrick Chinamasa expanding on it, and teachers' representative Sifiso Ndlovu dismissing it as "void".

Their failure to cover the MDC's activities adequately also manifested itself in their reports on Tsvangirai's Gweru rally. The official papers (23/2) devoted a small piece to the event, which they tucked away in their inside pages.

More importantly, the papers censored some of Tsvangirai's important policy statements, especially relating to his party's position within the inclusive government. These appeared only in the private papers.

Such reluctance to openly report on the MDC's activities and announcements, particularly those of critical national importance, reached intolerable proportions when the papers totally censored Tsvangirai's Press conference where he rescinded Mugabe's unilateral appointment of permanent secretaries to most ministries, including those being run by the MDC, and his fact-finding visit to Harare Central Hospital.

(Notably, *The Herald* (21/2) began referring to Biti and Tsvangirai as "**Cde**", a term previously reserved for ZANU PF officials and their inner circle of friends. No explanation has been given about whether this represents new editorial policy or was simply an oversight, especially as the next day *The Sunday Mail* continued addressing them as "Messrs" while *The Herald* (23/2) maintained its "Cde" honorific.)

Parliament

Media coverage of parliamentary proceedings surrounding the formation of the inclusive government was inadequate in the official media. Although they carried 40 stories on parliamentary issues, these media failed to carry adequate details of the debates on the legislation that gave birth to the inclusive government.

ZTV's coverage (4/2) of the passage of Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.19), for example, was largely a regurgitation of official statements without any informative analysis. The reports merely referred vaguely to the parliamentary proceedings that led to the "**unanimous**" passage of the Bill without reminding its audiences about the provisions of amendment and what

they entail. The only detail given was that the amendment gives legal effect to the inclusive government, without explaining how it did so. There was no mention about whether there was any debate on the Bill or why it was rushed through the House.

ZBC's news bulletins also made no effort to explain the provisions of the National Security Council Bill, with Radio Zimbabwe and ZTV (11/2) for example, reporting inanely that Parliament had passed the Bill, which paved the way for the formation of the National Security Council. The broadcaster made no attempt to provide any helpful information about the need to establish a new security council to replace the Joint Operations Command, or to discuss its mandate. Neither did ZBC follow up private media reports claiming that ZANU PF had again tried to tamper with the provisions of the Bill before it was tabled in Parliament.

The private media's 23 stories on parliamentary developments were rather more helpful in explaining the new legislation.

For example, Studio 7 (6/2) put the National Security Council Bill into context by explaining that the formation of the council – to replace JOC – had been one of the MDC-T's main negotiating demands, and that it would be represented in the council. The station pointed out that the MDC had insisted on these provisions in order to have some oversight of the state security agencies, particularly in view of the fact that they had been so heavily implicated in the deadly election violence that followed the March 2008 elections.

In an earlier bulletin (5/2) Studio 7 quoted political analyst John Makumbe explaining that the likely effect of Constitutional Amendment No.19 becoming law would result in Parliament not having an effective opposition, an insight totally missing in the public media.

Uncorroborated reports also suggested more political chicanery on the legislative front. SW Radio Africa (12/2) quoted MDC-T chief whip Innocent Gonesse claiming that Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa had tampered with the National Security Council Bill before it was presented to Parliament. But MMPZ could find no reference to this in the official parliamentary record, Hansard, suggesting that the tampering had either not occurred, or had been allowed to pass without comment in Parliament. None of the media have followed up this mystery or attempted to make a comparison between what was in the agreed provisions of the Bill and the final version of the Act.

Despite this disturbing oversight, consumers of the private media were, comparably, better informed about parliamentary issues than those dependent on the public media.

Human rights violations

Coverage of human rights violations in the official press was wide in scope but limited in depth. A total of 62 stories reflecting human rights violations appeared in the official papers, while the private weeklies carried 37 stories on the same topic.

While the two private radio stations carried 62 stories on human rights abuses in the period under review, ZBC reported only 11. The four online news agencies monitored carried 86 stories on the topic, suggesting that the national broadcaster was severely under-reporting the occurrence of these events.

As the statistics above show, the formation of an inclusive government did not put an end to human rights abuses. Although the official media often carried stories containing human rights violations, they did not view them as such, merely reducing them to court reports and follow-ups on arrests of political prisoners and human rights activists, such as the continued irregular detention of Zimbabwe Peace Project director, Jestina Mukoko, and deputy agriculture minister-designate, Roy Bennett. The official media completely turned a blind eye to the violations.

The coverage of human rights violations was comparably better in the private media, which recognised that certain actions violated people's right and that such actions were against the spirit of the inclusive government. For example, SW Radio Africa (3/2) covered the arrest of UZ and MSU students protesting against the payment of school fees in foreign currency. The station also reported that eight WOZA women and two lawyers from the activist NGO, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, were arrested for marching to commemorate the values of love and peace expressed in the annual St. Valentine's Day celebrations – at a time when Tsvangirai was being sworn in as Prime Minister of a unity government.

The private press also reported a new wave of farm invasions. *The Zimbabwean* (22/2) quoted the Commercial Farmers Union saying that at least 40 farms owned by white commercial farmers had been invaded from the time the MDC agreed to participate in the SADC-brokered inclusive government. The same paper (26/2) reported that the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Justice, David Mangota, had urged ZANU PF supporters to "grab" land from white farmers while they had the opportunity.

The government papers only carried news of the farm invasions in the context of refuting them.

Media and free expression

Free expression issues were scarcely dealt with in the media during the month. The public media carried 15 stories on media issues and the private media featured seven. The inclusive government is pledged to ensure the emergence of "a free and diverse media" in line with Article 19 of the GPA.

But media analysis reveals that the inclusive government sent out discordant messages on the issue of media freedom and freedom of expression. Whereas MDC-T voices within the inclusive government, carried in the private media, recognised the need for a free media, ZANU PF voices inside the same government, carried by the official media, threatened free expression. For example, an article by *Herald* columnist Nathaniel Manheru (14/2) could easily have been construed as an attempt to intimidate journalists into self-censorship, especially on stories that exposed the fragile nature of the

coalition government. Manheru said journalists should, “... **not cry when “JOMIC” or some such creature pays them a visit**”. ZTV (26/2) also aired President Mugabe dismissing inclusive government benchmarks, including media freedom, as “**nonsensical**” and a product of Western demands.

However, *The Standard* (15/2) quoted Prime Minister Tsvangirai in his inaugural speech saying he would prioritize the creation of a democratic society underpinned by guarantees of media freedom. Furthermore, *The Zimbabwe Independent* (20/2) quoted the newly appointed MDC-T Media, Information and Publicity Deputy Minister, Jameson Timba, promising to restore media freedom in Zimbabwe with the immediate return of closed publications and an end to ZBC’s monopoly of the airwaves. This conflict too, remains to be resolved.

Ends/