

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2011-2

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Panel-beating the truth – and an ‘intervening’ tale

JOURNALISTS who ask dumb questions are likely to make dumb mistakes, one veteran journalist once observed.

Local journalists could well take heed of this lesson following the misreporting of comments by Attorney-General Johannes Tomana that he would immediately appoint **“a team of practicing lawyers to look into”** a series of cables from US diplomats released by *Wikileaks*, a whistle-blower website, while addressing a Press conference in Harare on December 23rd 2010 (*The Herald*, 25/12/10).

The AG reportedly told journalists that the team, **“comprising five law experts”** would **“soon establish whether there was any constitutional infringement”** in the *Wikileaks* reports and government would **“take action guided by the findings of that team”**.

But such was the failure by some media organisations to get the story right that they misrepresented Tomana’s revelations that he would set up a “panel of experts” to mean he planned to **“set up a commission of inquiry”** to **“investigate”** the issue (*The Herald* and *Chronicle*, 12/1/11; *Africa News*, *New Zimbabwe.com*, 24 & 25/12/10).

Only the *Zimbabwe Independent* (14/1) and *The Sunday Mail* (16/1) got it right and clarified the different roles of a **“commission of inquiry”** and **“a panel of experts”**. The *Independent*, for example, quoted Tomana refuting reports attributed to him in the official media saying that he would form a commission of inquiry, saying:

“I do not have powers to appoint a commission or committee. If you look at the scenarios around the appointment of commissions, it must be of national importance and it is only the President who can appoint a commission. Our powers are vested in Section 76 of the constitution. I do not know where all this is coming from”.

He was clearly referring to the incompetent reporting of those media talking about commissions of inquiry.

But it doesn't beat the deliberate suppression of the news in the state media that SADC's chief facilitator, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa, had "intervened" to put a stop to the headlong rush towards early elections this year. *The Financial Gazette* (6/01) reported Zuma's international relations adviser Lindiwe Zulu saying **"there was a lot of work that needed to be done before the country could hold free and fair polls whose outcome would be acceptable to all the country's political parties, SADC and the AU"**.

"It is an intervention by the facilitator," she was quoted as saying. But you could only have guessed at this from *The Sunday Mail's* front-page lead story at the beginning of that week (2/01) about a sudden delay in fulfilling President Mugabe's desire to hold early elections. This story mysteriously referred to **"intervening complications"** being partly responsible for the delay but didn't explain what these were.... Now we know! Needless to say, ZBC didn't even give its audiences a hint about this important development. But that would have put a dent in all that election propaganda it has been airing...

SMM wrangle: Who's fooling who?

DURING the week, the media provided some insight into the latest developments involving government attempts to wrestle control of the asbestos-mining giant, Shabanie Mashava Mines Holdings (SMM), from businessman Mutumwa Mawere.

The ugly fallout between the two – dating back to 2004 after the State accused Mawere of externalizing funds, forcing him into exile, and subsequently grabbing his mining empire – seemed to have lessened somewhat when the authorities de-specified the businessman five months ago, paving the way for his return home.

However, in the week under review the media highlighted a revival of hostilities between Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa and the businessman on the status of SMM. Although *NewsDay* and the *Zimbabwe Independent* (14/1) gave both sides of the story by publicizing the views of both Chinamasa and Mawere, *The Herald* (11/1) only promoted those from Chinamasa. The daily reported him denying that Mawere owned SMM while censoring the businessman's point of view, in violation of professional journalistic practice on balance and fairness.

But the official and private media did not go beyond Chinamasa and Mawere's comments by seeking independent expert opinion on the dispute to give some picture of who might be nearer the truth.

Below are excerpts of Chinamasa and Mawere's competing views on the ownership of the mining company as reported in these media:

- **"Mawere does not even own SMMZ because he never paid a cent for the mines. He was bound to become owner after paying the full amount in April 2007. The company is now owned 100 percent by Government, of which 70 percent is through conversion of loans to equity and 24 percent through agreement with T&N Plc (UK) – a company that owned AA Mines. We have the share certificates ceded to us by T & N and we are now looking for investors to help in the rebuilding of the company."** – Chinamasa said this while giving oral evidence on the status of SMM to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Energy (*The Herald*, 11/1).

- ***“If Chinamasa on July 9, 2004, came to the conclusion that it was in the interests of justice to specify me in respect of the affairs of SMM, then how can it be the case that after six years I am suddenly irrelevant? ... If I am irrelevant today, then it stands to reason that I should have been irrelevant then”*** - Mawere (*NewsDay & Zimbabwe Independent*, 14/1).
- ***“How then would the government now end up owning 100% of a UK registered company? Chinamasa made the case that through a nominee company, AMG Global Nominees Pvt Ltd, the government of Zimbabwe had purchased the rights held by T&N by way of security in a legitimate transaction, but forgot to tell the committee that AMG lost the case resulting in the ownership remaining the way it was in 1996 through the day I was legally disabled using unorthodox measures”*** - Mawere explaining that the purchase of SMM was negotiated and agreed outside the country between Africa Resources Limited (ARL) and the United Kingdom’s T&N Plc (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 14/1).

Editing becoming a forgotten skill

EDITING is the process of checking reporters’ copy to make it suitable for publication by, among other things, strengthening the language, making grammatical and spelling corrections, and making stories generally easier to understand. However, MMPZ has noted the proliferation of poor editing at some of the country’s leading privately owned newspapers, particularly the UK-based *Zimbabwean* stable, over the past month.

Between December 16th 2010 and January 16th the stable’s two weeklies published 18 stories that contain mostly grammatical, factual or typographical errors. The private daily, *NewsDay*, was a lesser offender.

Examples include:

- *ZANU-Ndonga to join MDC-T* (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 16/1):
“Zanu Ndonga said **it will has** joined hands with the Morgan Tsvangirai led Movement for Democratic Change”.
- *“Coleen Nyandoro: A **women** on a mission”* (*Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 16/1).
- *A ZANU PF henchman makes criminal utterances* (*The Zimbabwean*, 21/12/10):
“Retired Brigadier Ambrose Mutinhiri last week sent a chill down the spines of MDC supporters who were forced **to attend saying** he was ready to kill people who continued to oppose the reign of President Mugabe and his party.”
- *Pensioners face destitution, as NSSA pays peanuts* (*The Zimbabwean*, 21/12):
“Most of Zimbabwe’s senior citizens are near destitute unable to pay for basic survival commodities or services on their paltry pensions, Parliament **was been** told last week.”

- *The 2 lions of Zimbabwe (The Zimbabwean, 21/12).*
Opinion piece by columnist Elliot Pfebve
“This month of December **seem** to make headlines both for the good and bad **reason**...High on the agenda is that of the likelihood of a general election next year or presidential election **depending with which party you listen to...ZANU PF... have nothing to show that they still have the political inertia to govern the embattled country.**”
- *Drugs expire due to shortage of pharmacists (The Zimbabwean, 21/12):*
“A huge stock of drugs worth thousands of US dollars have expired and **disposed off** at Gwanda Provincial hospital due to non-availability of a qualified pharmacist to dispense them”.
- *Copac **expells** MDC faction – (NewsDay, 17/1), and*
- *Wikileaks probe: Why keep **indentities** under wraps? – (NewsDay, 17/1).*

State media continue to violate GPA

THE official media, particularly the national broadcaster, ZBC, continue to violate section 19 (d) of the Global Political Agreement that requires the media to give equitable coverage to the three coalition partners. They brazenly continue to favour ZANU PF in their coverage of the coalition partners' political activities. See Fig 1.

These media mostly portrayed ZANU PF as the only party fit to govern Zimbabwe, because it was allegedly sensitive to the peoples' needs. They cited Mugabe's agricultural input scheme, meant to assist poor farmers after MDC-T Finance Minister Tendai Biti had allegedly refused to significantly support them, and the controversial indigenization programme, as proof of this.

All their reports on the two MDC formations remained negative. The main MDC group was mostly vilified for allegedly allowing its councils, especially in Harare and Bulawayo, to slash crops planted by residents on undesignated land.

The smaller MDC faction was depicted as unfocused, “ideologically bankrupt” and power hungry following its disputed congress, which resulted in its former secretary-general Welshman Ncube taking over as party leader. However, the party's power struggles, which spilled into the ongoing national constitutional reform programme, appeared to justify this.

Fig: 1 How the political parties were covered

Media	ZANU PF campaigns (positive)	MDC-T campaigns (positive)	MDC-M campaigns (positive)	MDC-M campaigns (negative)	ZANU PF campaigns (negative)	MDC-T campaign (negative)
Official Press	9	0	0	0	0	7
ZBC	65	0	0	8	0	15
Private papers	2	0	0	0	7	0
Private radios	0	0	0	0	2	0
Online agencies	0	2	2	0	0	0
Total	76	2	2	8	9	22

Rights abuses

THE official media continued to report selectively on pertinent national issues, largely ignoring the rights abuses in the country, mostly blamed on ZANU PF.

They left that to the private media, which recorded 16 out of the 18 incidents published this week. The official media carried the remaining two.

These included:

- The alleged abduction and torture of an MDCT official Elson Mutohori at Renco Mine, Masvingo, by Major-General Engelbert Rugeje. The story was sourced from the MDC-T and eyewitnesses, who were not directly quoted confirming it. (*The Zimbabwean*, Studio 7, Radio VoP & SW Radio Africa (11, 12, 14 & 16/1).
- The alleged assault of more than 30 people at Jerera Growth Point, Zaka, by a group of soldiers in unclear circumstances. The ZNA confirmed having heard about the incident. (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, Radio VOP & SW Radio Africa (11,14 & 16/1), and
- The arrest of three MDC-T councillors and five youths in Victoria Falls for allegedly disrupting a council meeting and assaulting Mayor Nkosilathi Jiyani (*The Herald & Chronicle*, 11 &12/1).

WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK

MMPZ is anxious to hear from our readers. We would love to get your feedback about our weekly media reviews. Do you enjoy what you read? Is it helpful? Are there issues that you think we overlook? If there is anything that you think we can do that will improve our product? We would like to hear from you. You can contact us either by email at monitors@mmpz.org.zw or you can even sms your comments on our dedicated hotline cell phone number: 0774 432 509.

Comments on the stories themselves are also welcome. We hope to publish a selection of your story comments if you keep them brief and to the point. We look forward to hearing from you.

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