The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2010-4

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COMMENT

Government steps up stranglehold on media market

News in the week that government was forging ahead with plans to launch a second state television channel while making no effort to licence private broadcasters provided more worrying evidence of the authorities' disdain for the media reforms they agreed to under the Global Political Agreement (GPA). It also underlines the authorities' determination to hang onto and entrench their monopoly on the broadcast sector despite a 2000 Supreme Court ruling declaring this monopoly unconstitutional.

Article 19 (1) of the GPA directs the coalition to ***"ensure the immediate processing by the appropriate authorities of all (print and broadcast) applications for…registration"*** in terms of the law. But more than a year after its signing, no new independent broadcasters or newspapers have been registered because of the paralytic pace of promised media reforms.

For example, besides the inordinate delays in establishing the Zimbabwe Media Council (ZMC) and the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) due to political bickering and political manipulation in the selection of board members, the coalition clearly appears to be no hurry to ensure that the two media regulatory bodies become operational so that they can get down to work.

Now ironically, while prospective private media players wait anxiously for this excessive bureaucratic process to be finalised, ZTV (5/2, 8pm) reported Information Minister Webster Shamu announcing ZBC's completion of the digitalisation of its second channel, TV2, which he said was now ***"ready"*** to kick-start programming as soon as it gets the go-ahead from the BAZ and Transmedia, the national signal carrier.

This news, coupled with last year's media reports that ZBC was planning to launch community radio stations in Harare and Bulawayo and that the Met Office (a government department) had applied for 50 community radio stations around the country, suggests elements within government intend to "crowd out" private media initiatives and raises serious questions about the authorities' commitment to encourage the emergence of a diverse and democratic media.

None of these developments represent the media reforms that the public has been demanding.

The week's most popular stories

Politics beats dirty diamonds…

Ongoing controversies over the messy constitutional reform process and the power struggle between the governing parties continued to dominate the media during the week. But the civil service strike and more news about Chiadzwa's dirty diamond mining business also attracted considerable attention, along with the endless land dispute featuring the High Court's ruling upholding Zimbabwe's controversial agrarian reforms, gave the public some relief from the political haggling that has plagued government and the constitution-making exercise. (See Fig 1).

Fig 1: The media's most popular stories

Media	Chiadzwa diamonds	Civil servants' strike	Govt power struggles	Constitutional reforms
Public media	19	19	30	41
Private media	14	7	25	18
Total	**33**	**26**	**55**	**59**

29kgs of gems 'disappear' after Chidyausiku 'clarifies' order

Although the government media carried 19 stories on the various controversies surrounding Chiadzwa and its diamonds (and six on land "reforms") their selective and distorted reporting fuelled public confusion and intensified doubts about the proper administration of justice. Nor did they explore how these events and official government statements were likely to affect investor confidence and the country's fragile economy.

An extraordinary *Herald* report (5/2) obsequiously headlined: *Chidyausiku clears air on diamond wrangle,* was a good example.

It simply reported that a letter from the registrar of the Supreme Court stated that diamonds extracted from African Consolidated Resources' claims should not be surrendered to the Reserve Bank for safekeeping. It claimed that Chief Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku had said this while ***"clarifying the meaning"*** of an earlier ruling he had issued.

But the report was careful not to remind its readers that Chidyausiku's earlier ruling expressly stated that the disputed diamonds should be surrendered to the Reserve Bank until the courts had decided who owned them. The paper therefore allowed its readers to believe that a letter from the Supreme Court's registrar was sufficient to overturn a Supreme Court judge's ruling.

The remainder of the story simply dwelt on defending this position – except for a telling comment from ACR's lawyer, Jonathan Samkange, who said, ***"The letter by the registrar is illegal. An order has already been made by the highest court in the land (and) cannot be challenged. That is lack of (the) rule of law."***

Earlier in the story *The Herald* reported Mines Minister Obert Mpofu saying, ***"Government would not allow people representing hostile foreign interests to exploit Zimbabwe's resources without stiff legal challenges."***
And apparently referring to the minister's comments Samkange is quoted as saying, ***"If the minister is now forcing the registrar to write a letter…he is actually defeating the course of justice."***
But the truth of this bizarre tale only emerged in the private media (SW Radio Africa, 8/2 and *The Zimbabwean on Tuesday*, 9/2) when they reported that 29kgs of diamonds in three strong boxes had disappeared after they were taken from the Reserve Bank by the police escort assigned to assist in their safe transfer to the central bank in compliance with Chidyausiku's order.

Other murky Chiadzwa stories appeared in the private media earlier in the week, mainly related to the struggle by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Energy to extract information from Chiadzwa's miners *(The Zimbabwean* & Studio 7, 4 & 5/2). This included the irregular manner Chiadzwa tenders were awarded to two SA-based companies, and government's reluctance to disclose the composition of the board of one of them. Even *The Herald* (5/2) referred to this evident embarrassment in its opinion piece, *'Let's Clear Chiadzwa Mess'.*

Media keep tabs on Constitutional reforms

The media generally gave informed updates on developments on constitutional reforms in 59 stories (government media 41, and private media 18).
Thirty (73%) of the government media's stories reported the programme as moving forward while 11 highlighted problems haunting it. The private media paid more attention (15 reports) to draw backs in the process while the remaining five recorded progress in the exercise.

The good…

The media paraded the constitutional reform process as gaining some ground mostly citing pledges of financial support by the EU and UNDP (Studio 7, 4/2 and *The Herald*, 6/2).

…and the bad

They also pointed out its shortcomings, which included:

- Disagreements between the parliamentary management committee and Copac over the role of donors in the project (*New Zimbabwe* & *The Herald*, 1 & 6/2);
- Alleged state media bias against the MDC arm of Copac (SW Radio Africa & the *Zimbabwe Independent*, 1 & 5/2);
- Concerns by civic organisations that prevailing political conditions did not permit Zimbabweans to freely participate in the process (the *Independent*);

- The arrest of 74 MDC-T and civic activists, including WOZA members, for conducting outreach activities allegedly without notifying the police (Studio 7 & SW Radio Africa, 2, 3 & 4/2); and
- Copac's management committee dismissing *The Standard's* claim (31/1) that MPs had ***"swindled"*** Copac. In a detailed statement signed by all three parties it stated that ***"there have been no irregular payments of allowances to Members of Parliament."***

Sanctions row mars parliamentary debates

The official media paid more attention to parliamentary proceedings than the private media, carrying 21 reports against just five by the private media. These included:

- Debate on the proposed amendment of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) (Studio 7, SW Radio Africa & *The Herald*, 2/2);
- Investigations into Chiadzwa diamond mining (*The Herald*, 2/2); and
- ZANU PF's contentious motion calling on MDC leaders to unequivocally call for the removal of sanctions (ZBC, 3/2, 8pm & *The Herald*, 4 &5/2).

However, the official media's coverage of the rowdy scenes in Parliament following ZANU PF's notice to move a motion calling on MDC leaders to campaign for the removal of sanctions only focused on criticizing the MDC MPs' vehement opposition. And *The Herald*'s Eagle Eye opinion column (6/2) accused them of ***"shamelessly"*** and ***"violently"*** fighting ***"tooth and nail for something (sanctions) that hurt"*** Zimbabweans.

MISSING STORIES

- Presidential and Cabinet Secretary Misheck Sibanda's directive to ministers to report to President Mugabe's two vice-presidents, Joice Mujuru and John Nkomo, instead of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai in contravention of the GPA (Studio 7, SW Radio Africa, *ZimOnline* & the *Independent*, 3, 4 & 5); and

- The removal from remand of MDC-T activist Pascoe Gwezere, who was facing charges of stealing guns from Pomona army barracks - after the State again failed to provide a trial date (*ZimOnline* & the *Independent*, 5/2).

Biti, Mutambara most quoted in state media

The media remained polarised with the official media quoting more ZANU PF sources generally than its coalition partners, while the private media gave preference to the MDC-T. (See Fig 2).

Fig 2. Parties most quoted in the media

Media	Govt	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M	Alternative
Government media	10	51	25	13	17
Private media	2	12	25	2	15

However, at an individual level, Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara (12 times) and MDC-T Finance Minister, Tendai Biti, (nine) were the most quoted individuals in the government media. Mutambara was widely cited calling for the removal of sanctions, while Biti was quoted promoting his proposal for Zimbabwe to be declared a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) for it to stand a chance to be exempt from its debt burden. ZANU PF's Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa (six), and MPs Edward Chindori-Chininga and Kudakwashe Bhasikiti (five times each) also featured in the official media giving updates either on inter-party talks and constitutional review or urging the MDC-T to lobby for the removal of sanctions.

Once again the government media paraded ZANU PF official Christopher Mutsvangwa as an unaffiliated "analyst". He was quoted seven times, the same times as pro-ZANU PF analyst Tafataona Mahoso, both complaining about sanctions.

The private papers mostly quoted Biti and MDC-T's deputy justice minister Jessie Majome (four times each) and Nelson Chamisa (three) commenting on constitutional reforms, Zimbabwe's debt burden and Western sanctions.

HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS

The media published six incidents of rights violations. Five of these appeared in the private media and one in the official media.

They included:

- Alleged death threats against ZANU PF legislator Zacharia Ziyambi by suspected MDC-T MPs for seconding a motion denouncing sanctions in Parliament. (*The Herald*, 6/2); and
- The arrest of 10 UZ students protesting against poor education standards and high tuition fees (Studio 7 & SW Radio Africa (3 & 4/2).

Quote of the week

"Zanu PF continues to use the public media, the constitutional process, commercial farms, the diamond mines and the civil service as the battlefields for its destructive agenda aimed at perpetuating their selfish grip on power. Their determination to enrich themselves at the expense of national development risks keeping all our citizens mired in poverty."

– Finance Minister, Tendai Biti (SW Radio Africa, 2/2).

Ends/

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