

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2010-10

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COMMENT

Distortion sours PM's ZMC meeting

THE Sunday Mail (21/3)'s heavily editorialized front-page news story of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's meeting with members of the new Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) to ensure that it begins its work of licensing new media products without delay, vividly exposed the negative sentiments of the newspaper's managers to media reforms.

Instead of actually reporting on the meeting, the story, headlined '*One step at a time Mr Prime Minister*', claimed Tsvangirai **"got more than he had bargained for"** when he was allegedly **"told that the registration of other newspapers will not be a hurried process"**, citing unnamed sources.

In its efforts to give this unsubstantiated headline some credibility, the paper relied on its faceless commentators accusing Tsvangirai of violating protocol on the grounds that he had convened the meeting before Media, Information and Publicity Minister Webster Shamu had had the chance to meet the commission.

This so-called news story then resorted to total editorial fiction by stating that **"It is understood...the MDC-T is panicking that elections are around the corner and is desperate to have *The Daily News* registered"**, without even bothering to attribute this absurd comment to anybody.

Instead of seeking some informative comment from ZMC chairman, Godfrey Majonga, on the outcome of the meeting – or even from the Prime Minister, the paper again resorted to unidentified sources claiming that Majonga had told Tsvangirai the commission needed to **"understand their mandate"** before licensing new media products and would need to consult the media ministry and the Attorney-General **"so that he can explain the meaning of the new law under which the commission would be operating"**.

Readers of *The Sunday Mail*'s competition however, would have got a completely different impression of the meeting. *The Standard* carried a happy picture of the Prime Minister surrounded by beaming members of the commission - and none other than the information minister himself, Webster Shamu, and his deputy, Jameson Timba. The presence of the ministry's most senior officials was completely suppressed by *The Sunday Mail*. *The Standard* at least reported Tsvangirai advising the commission to **"ignore opponents of media reforms in the inclusive government"** who were trying to frustrate the licensing of new media products.

The government paper's grossly unprofessional distortion about news of this meeting involving its own officials precisely illustrates the urgent need for more alternative sources of credible information.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

SOUTH Africa President Jacob Zuma's meetings with Zimbabwe's coalition parties to "assist" them to fulfill the terms of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) generated most interest in both the government and private media in the week.

Controversial plans by the ZANU PF arm of government to seize majority shareholdings from foreign-owned firms and its meddling in the mining of diamonds in Chiadzwa remained in the spotlight too (See Fig. 1). The government media however, also kept an eye on poor service delivery across the country, underpinned by increasing cases of water-borne diseases, while the private media continued to report human rights violations against a cross-section of Zimbabwean society.

Fig 1: Popular stories in the media

Media	Power sharing issues	Poor service delivery	Indigenization policy	Chiadzwa diamond mining	Constitutional reform	Human rights issues
Public media	44	38	19	11	14	1
Private media	57	9	23	16	8	25
Total	101	47	42	27	22	26

Security chiefs' meeting with Zuma escapes investigation

THE government media had little choice but to report South Africa's President Jacob Zuma as having succeeded in getting the country's coalition parties to resolve their protracted power-sharing dispute amicably during his three-day visit to Zimbabwe, but they avoided any attempt at analyzing this news.

The Herald's front-page lead story (19/3) quoted Zuma telling a Press conference that the parties had **"agreed to a package of measures...as per the decision of the SADC Troika in Maputo"** and to report back to him by the end of this month.

While only the private media reported that the briefing lasted for less than five minutes and that Zuma refused to take any questions elaborating on this vague statement, *The Herald* claimed agreement had been struck on three main issues; sanctions; the appointment of provincial governors; and the status of RBZ governor Gideon Gono, Attorney-General Johannes Tomana and MDC-T's choice of Deputy Agriculture Minister, Roy Bennett.

While ZBC's television and Spot FM morning bulletins (18/3) reported Zuma's talks progressing in the context of false observations by its reporter, Reuben Barwe, saying, **"There isn't a lot of disagreement except on the sanctions issue** where Britain has insisted that **"sanctions would only be lifted after Mugabe and ZANU PF are removed from power and the land reform programme reversed,"** the national broadcaster's evening bulletins reported news of the "breakthrough", by sticking more passively to the script of the Press conference.

Although the government media did, belatedly, report in passing that Zuma had met Gono, Tomana and Bennett separately (ZBC, 18/3, 8pm & *The Herald*, 19/3), they censored intriguing news that he had also held separate meetings with Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa and State Security Minister Sydney Sekeramayi.

Most of the private media also reported Zuma succeeding in extracting an agreement from the signatories to the GPA but doubted whether the parties would be able to stick to the deadline in view of their past record.

While the *Zimbabwe Independent*, Studio 7 & *ZimOnline* (18 & 19/3) resorted to citing unidentified "informed sources" on what had been agreed, including the restoration of the powers of MDC-run ministries, *The Standard's* comment naively described Zuma's initiative as **"hugely disappointing"** as there was nothing **"tangible"** to suggest success. In addition, none of the media successfully investigated the purpose of his meeting with Zimbabwe's security chiefs.

State media report cholera's return

THE government media continue to highlight problems arising from persistent poor service delivery and quoted authorities attributing this to inadequate funding.

Of their 38 stories on the subject, seven were on power cuts; 11 were on water shortages; nine were on the outbreak of diseases such as cholera, bilharzia and typhoid, and the remaining 11 were on the poor state of Zimbabwe's roads and municipalities' failure to collect rubbish.

The Herald (23/3) reported outbreaks of cholera, mostly in rural areas, citing a government health bulletin. It reported three people dying from the disease since its outbreak last month and 22 more cases in the past week, bringing the total cases to 99. Measles, it said, had now claimed 183 lives. The government media reported officials blaming the outbreak of water-borne diseases on poor sanitation and clean water supplies.

In the private media, only SW Radio Africa and *The Zimbabwean On Sunday* (18 & 21/3) reported the typhoid threat, quoting the Combined Harare Residents' Association (CHRA) attributing the outbreak in urban centres to ***"dilapidated and broken sanitation and water infrastructure..."***

But they haven't yet woken up to the resurgence of cholera.

Gono speaks out on indigenization regulations

ZANU PF's controversial company indigenization plans continued to receive prominent and favourable coverage in the state media.

As a result, they censored criticism of the measures from various sections of Zimbabwean society, including Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono.

The Herald (20/3) published a half-page interview with ZANU PF's David Chapfika, in which he argued that the indigenization regulations were the ***"way to go"*** and insisted that they were ***"long overdue"*** because countries like Britain, America, South Africa and Nigeria have similar laws.

In contrast, the private media continued to air more thoughtful insights on a rational indigenization policy.

The Financial Gazette (18/3) buried news of Gono's robust criticism of the ZANU PF government's black economic empowerment laws in an interview with the Reserve Bank governor spread over four pages.

But his views received much more prominent coverage in the *Independent*, *The Standard*, Studio 7 & *The Zimbabwe Times* (19 & 21/3), where he was reported urging government to ***"depoliticize"*** indigenization regulations, ***"shun racial discrimination or political polarities that do not move the country forward"***, implement empowerment measures in ***"a less disruptive manner as possible"***; and ***"restore investor confidence..."***

Mpofu's 'diamonds' testimony censored

THE government media censored news of Mines Minister Obert Mpofu's appearance before the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Energy on March 17.

Only *ZimOnline* (17/3) and *The Zimbabwean On Sunday* (21/3) reported this and quoted sources who attended the "closed-door" meeting saying he admitted he did not follow procedure when he awarded licences to two South African companies, Canadile and Mbada, to mine Chiadzwa's diamonds. But he was reported defending his decision by challenging the committee to find any diamond-mining operators who weren't "**crooks**". These media reported that Mpofu had appeared before the committee after Attorney-General Johannes Tomana had advised him to do so or risk being jailed.

Nine of the government media's 11 stories on the Chiadzwa controversy defended the ZANU PF component of government's interventions and the reluctance of the two mining companies to be investigated. *The Herald* (17/3) and ZBC's main bulletins that evening, reported Mpofu saying Cabinet had endorsed their mining activities and was quoted describing critics of the irregular awards as being "**the country's detractors who are politicizing the diamond issue to perpetuate illegal sanctions on Zimbabwe**".

Readers of *The Sunday Mail*'s front-page lead, *Parly vs Mbada: The untold story*, were left to wonder about the "untold" part of a story that merely reported that the two companies had applied for a postponement of their appearance before the parliamentary committee on the grounds that "**attending the hearing would prejudice an enquiry pending before the courts**".

As is so often the case with state media reports, the real story of the minister's appearance before the committee remained untold.

THE MEDIA'S MOST POPULAR SOURCES

THE public media again allocated more publicity to ZANU PF sources than its coalition partners, while the private media heavily favoured the MDC-T, reflecting the magnitude of the polarization in the domestic media (See Fig. 2).

Although the official media appeared to have widely sought the views of independent commentators in their coverage of the week's stories, these were mostly individuals who unequivocally endorsed ZANU PF's perspective of the stories reported.

The public media's reports on poor service delivery however, appeared to be generally fair and this was reflected in the amount of space they allocated to local authorities to explain what they were doing to improve the situation.

SOUTH Africa's President Zuma was the most quoted person in the government media. He accessed for comment nine times.

ZANU PF negotiator in the inter-party talks Patrick Chinamasa (seven), Matabeleland South governor Angeline Masuku (six) and Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo (five) closely followed.

Zuma and Chinamasa were quoted giving updates on the progress of the talks; Chombo was accusing MDC-T controlled councils of corruption, while Masuku was warning about imminent hunger in her province.

Chinamasa (eight), RBZ governor Gideon Gono (five), Zuma (seven) and his spokesman Vincent Mangwenya (six) were quoted the most in the private media. Zuma, Chinamasa and Mangwenya were commenting on power-sharing talks, while Gono was expressing reservations over ZANU PF's black empowerment plans.

Fig 2: The most quoted groups in the print media

Media	Local government authorities	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M	Business	Alternative	Foreign diplomats
Public media	14	23	10	11	27	11	21
Private media	4	19	49	2	9	38	27

Ends/

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