

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday March 22nd - Sunday March 28th 2010
Weekly Media Review 2010-11

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COMMENT

Free the airwaves

FEARS that the authorities are attempting to circumvent genuine media reform were reignited with the news that ZBC is forging ahead with plans to launch a new national television station, ZBCTV 2, without any indication that it is attempting to reform its existing inept and biased television "service".

This so-called "entertainment" station, which *The Herald* (30/3) said briefly appeared on air on March 26th on a trial run, is an attempt to seduce Zimbabwean viewers away from external satellite television services that provide viewers with more professional, fair and entertaining programming than ZTV's crude and dull diet.

But it will not satisfy Zimbabweans' information needs. Neither will it bring diversity to the broadcast media which is still monopolized by the ZANU PF-controlled "public" broadcaster despite a Supreme Court ruling 10 years ago declaring its monopoly unconstitutional.

This illegal monopoly will not be annulled by the addition of another ZBC station. It can only be brought to an end if the government complies with the terms of the GPA – which calls for a **"free and diverse"** media – and allows independent broadcasters onto the airwaves to give viewers – and listeners – the opportunity to choose which radio and television channels they tune into for their news and entertainment.

Without this essential reform to Zimbabwe's suffocating broadcast environment, the nation will remain a captive audience of ZBC's illegal monopoly – and the broadcaster will never be challenged by professional competition to reform its incompetent and tiresome output.

Most importantly of all, no amount of new newspapers will qualify Zimbabwe's media environment to be described as "free and diverse" while the airwaves remain under the control of partisan political interests. The government must truly "free the airwaves" before the nation can believe a media environment exists that is conducive to the holding of any credible elections.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

EFFORTS by the coalition parties to resolve the disputes affecting the smooth implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) within the latest SADC deadline, received the most media attention during the week. And comments by senior ZANU PF officials after the departure of the SADC mediator, South African President Jacob Zuma, that ***“nothing had been agreed”*** during his three-day intervention, reinforced the dominance of this story.

While ZANU PF's controversial black economic empowerment programme continued to feature in both the government and private media, debate over the inclusion of gay rights in the new constitution and allegations of corruption against senior ZANU PF officials and MDC councillors added some variety to their coverage of topical stories.

Fig 1: Popular stories in the media

Media	Power-sharing	Corruption	Constitution-making	Indigenization policy	Human rights
Public Media	82	26	48	39	0
Private media	74	12	10	19	37
Total	156	38	58	58	37

Zuma's 'package' gets trashed without question

AT the end of yet another week of talks, which, according to SADC mediator South African President Jacob Zuma, had finally yielded **“a package of measures”** agreed to by the bickering coalition parties, the government media passively reported senior ZANU PF officials flatly contradicting Zuma's statement. They were also the main messengers in communicating renewed statements declaring that the party would make no further concessions until Western sanctions on President Mugabe and his allies had been removed.

None of these media's 21 reports on the inter-party talks attempted to view these comments as effectively negating Zuma's intervention and a fresh threat to the negotiations.

ZBC (24/3, 8pm) & *The Herald* (25/3) quoted ZANU PF spokesman Rugare Gumbo saying that Patrick Chinamasa, ZANU PF's negotiator in the talks, had told the party's Politburo that ZANU PF had not reached any agreement with the two MDC formations during Zuma's visit.

ZBC (26/3, 8pm) and *The Herald* (27/3) subsequently quoted President Mugabe repeating this without question. Instead, Mugabe was also allowed to trivialize the MDC-T concerns over the unilateral appointment of RBZ governor Gideon Gono and Attorney-General Johannes Tomana and his refusal to appoint MDC-T's Deputy Agriculture Minister Roy Bennett as **“nothing”** because they were **“never been part of the agreement”**. Mugabe added: **“The reply from ZANU PF has always been the same: Gono and Tomana have no case to answer while Bennett has a criminal record in the courts...Gono naTomana Havana kwavanoenda (Gono and Tomana are going nowhere). The sanctions must go first!”**

The government media's 61 other reports focused on the resumption of the Zimbabwe-EU dialogue (Radio Zimbabwe, 25/3, 1pm); alleged praise for the work of the inclusive government by some European countries, such as Britain and Norway (Radio Zimbabwe, 25 & 26/3, 1pm & 6am); and fresh calls by President Zuma for the lifting of sanctions (ZBC, 28/3, 8pm & *The Sunday Mail*, 28/3).

The private media remained skeptical about the parties' ability to reach a negotiated settlement within the SADC deadline, citing ZANU PF's obstinacy. The *Zimbabwe Independent's* comment (26/3) viewed ZANU PF's denial of progress in the negotiations as evidence of its **“stubborn attitude”** and as having dampened renewed hopes for the successful conclusion of the dialogue. *The Standard* (26/3) quoted MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa expressing his party's outrage over ZANU PF's comments and accusing the party of backtracking on what they had agreed.

State media selectively report corruption

THE government-controlled public media gave widespread publicity to alleged corrupt activities by MDC-T councillors while suffocating or refuting compelling allegations of even more serious offences against senior ZANU PF officials.

Sixteen of their 17 reports on this topic accused MDC-T-run councils of corruption, citing as proof the eviction of tenants from three council-owned houses by some MDC-T councillors in Harare and allegations that **“self-enriching”** Mutare city councillors had borrowed US\$24 644 **“for their personal use at the expense of service delivery”** (Spot FM, 18/3, 1pm).

Their remaining story was a denial of private media reports that Mines Minister Obert Mpofu had acquired a number of properties in Victoria Falls and Bulawayo using cash from illegal diamond activities in Chiadzwa.

The Herald's front-page lead (23/3): **“Families left in the cold...as MDC-T councillors seize two Glen Norah houses”** accused the councillors of **“clandestinely”** changing the **“ownership”** of council-owned houses and evicting tenants. The report relied on testimonies of the victims and residents accusing the councillors of corruption and being insensitive to the plight of the poor, while burying a vague comment by one of the councillors that they had acquired the houses legally.

Following up this story, *The Zimbabwean on Sunday* quoted an unidentified MDC-T “spokesman” accusing Harare City Council’s director of housing of “conniving” with Local Government Minister Ignatius Chombo to **“implicate MDC-T councillors in a non-existent housing scam”**. He said the party wanted to investigate council employees **“who fraudulently incriminated MDC councillors...”**

And *The Standard* (28/3) also referred to attempts to incriminate MDC councillors involved in a committee that investigated the irregular acquisition of **“vast tracts”** of council land by Chombo and others. The paper’s lead story reported that a special council committee had recommended that businessman and former ZANU PF official, Phillip Chiyangwa, and senior council officials be arrested for **“the illegal and irregular sale of land by previous administrations”**.

The story revealed that the committee’s report also accused Chombo of **“fraudulently acquiring multiple properties”** and that council was in the process of repossessing them. The online agencies, *ZimDaily* and *New Zimbabwe.com*, also reported this news, while a separate story in *The Standard* reported the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Energy as being eager to question Mines Minister Obert Mpofu how he had recently acquired “dozens” of properties in Victoria Falls and Bulawayo.

None of these stories appeared in the government media.

Homophobic views poison constitutional debate

DEBATE over the inclusion of gay rights in a new constitution also received prominent publicity in the government media.

Twenty-one of their 48 stories on constitutional reforms focused on this, but exclusively vilified homosexuality as an “abomination” of Christian values and African culture.

The discussion intensified after President Mugabe criticized suggestions by some sections of the Zimbabwean community to have gay rights included in the new national law while addressing hundreds of people at a belated event to celebrate International Women’s Day in Chitungwiza. According to the state media, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, who also attended the event, supported Mugabe’s sentiments.

ZBC (25/3, 8pm) & *The Herald* (26/3) reported Mugabe and Tsvangirai as having “**strongly condemned**” efforts to include “**gay rights**” in the new constitution, saying Zimbabwe “**will never succumb to shameless foreign traditions**”. They quoted Mugabe expressing his homophobic sentiments by saying the proposal was an act of “**madness**” and “**insanity**”, insisting that the issue was “**not even debatable**”.

Tsvangirai was quoted concurring with Mugabe.

The remaining 27 stories on constitutional reforms were on problems between government and the UNDP over funding (*The Herald*, 25 & 29/3) and calls for Zimbabweans to participate in the constitution making process (ZBC, 22, 23, 27 & 28/3, 8pm).

The private media presented diverse views on the subject.

While Studio 7 (26/3) quoted Tsvangirai’s spokesman James Maridadi saying his boss’ views on gay rights were not a reflection of the party’s position, and MDC-T’s constitutional committee co-chairman Douglas Mwonzora saying the issue would be discussed during national outreach programmes, *Standard* columnist Blessing Tendi criticized Mugabe and Tsvangirai’s homophobic attitude, accusing them of not only using the debate to gain “**political mileage**” but also to divert Zimbabweans’ attention from other serious issues.

THE MEDIA'S MOST POPULAR VOICES

THE public media continued to give more publicity to the ZANU PF component of government compared to its MDC partners.

The MDC was mostly quoted in the context of calling for the removal of sanctions, praising Mugabe's leadership or supporting ZANU PF's views on gay rights. Although the official media appeared to have sought the views of MDC-T councillors, they were mostly quoted in the context of portraying them as corrupt and insensitive to the plight of residents. The few "analysts" they quoted endorsed Mugabe and Tsvangirai's homophobic comments, while foreign voices were quoted commending progress in the implementation of the GPA.

While the private media discriminated against ZANU PF's views, they widely quoted alternative voices giving their opinion on the topical issues. Fig. 2 illustrates this.

Individually, President Mugabe, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere were the most quoted in the government media.

Mugabe was quoted 14 times while Tsvangirai and Kasukuwere featured 13 times each. Mugabe was quoted emphasizing that his party would not make any more concessions to the two MDC formations until sanctions were removed and castigating suggestions to include gay rights in a new constitution. Tsvangirai was mostly quoted calling for the lifting of sanctions and "agreeing" with Mugabe over gay rights. Kasukuwere defended his party's plans to seize majority shareholding in foreign-owned firms.

South Africa's President Zuma was the most quoted individual in the private media (nine times) commending progress in the implementation of the power-sharing agreement and repeating his call for the West to support the inclusive government. He was followed by Mugabe (seven) and Tsvangirai (six) commenting on the power-sharing talks and gay rights.

Fig 2: The most quoted groups in the media

Media	Local government	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M	Business	Alternative	Foreign diplomats
Public Media	9	57	21	3	11	6	17
Private Media	2	12	34	4	7	26	15

Human rights violations

THE private media published 13 incidents of human rights abuses. None of them appeared in the government-controlled media.

These included:

- Harassment of ZimRights officials, organizers of a photo exhibition in Harare showcasing pictures of the 2008 victims of political violence, and seizure of the photographs by the police (the *Independent & Zimbabwean On Sunday* (26 & 28/3);
- Sexual abuse of a 13-year-old girl at Hopley Farm by a suspected ZANU PF activist (*The Standard*, 28/3); and
- Arrest of 15 MDC-T supporters for allegedly provoking ZANU PF supporters in Mutare (SW Radio Africa, 23/3).

Quote of the week

“Women need friends among men...The biggest and greatest ally for women of Zimbabwe is President Mugabe...We need consistent leadership. We need organizational capacity. We need strategic vision. I am here to present to you the personification of consistent leadership in the name of President Mugabe...” – Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara introducing Mugabe at International Women’s Day celebrations in Chitungwiza (*The Herald*, 26/3).

Ends/

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