The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Contents

COMMENT

Media reform remains tangled in bureaucracy

AS Zimbabweans commemorated World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd news that the new Zimbabwe Media Commission would be accepting applications for the registration of new players in the print media sector from the following day, was little cause for celebration.

First of all, the Commission has made no effort to publicize this news itself or explain the requirements necessary for the successful submission of new applications.

The ZMC – ostensibly an independent body – had an opportunity to announce these requirements at its own World Press Freedom Day function and to allay the doubts among the assembled media community about its commitment to oversee genuine media reforms.

But the event itself, dominated by senior government officials in the ministry of information, had precisely the opposite effect. Although Information Minister Webster Shamu did talk vaguely about "everything being in place" to comply with the Global Political Agreement's requirement for real media reforms, the mechanics of achieving these were never made clear.

In fact, the event confirmed suspicions that the ZMC's notorious predecessor, the Media and Information Commission, including its chairman, Tafataona Mahoso, had been retained to serve as the ZMC's secretariat.

The MIC, under Mahoso's management, was responsible for suffocating all independent media development and presided over the banning of the country's most popular daily newspaper, *The Daily News*, among other publications.

Now, as the ZMC's chief executive officer, he will again be responsible for ensuring that applications for new media organizations comply with the regulations before being passed on to the commissioners for "processing".

Although ZMC commissioner Chris Mhike was reported in a *NewsDay* supplement to the *Independent* (7/5) defending Mahoso's appointment on the grounds that he was a ***"mere personality"*** who no longer had any of the authority he wielded as chairman of the MIC, it has subsequently become clear that he will be applying the very same excessively bureaucratic and intrusive application regulations established under the notorious Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act that he used so effectively to suffocate independent media initiatives under MIC.

These restrictive application regulations include the demand for new media groups to submit a prospective cash flow statement of the business, a balance sheet projection, a market analysis, a mission statement, a code of conduct for employees, an editorial charter, a code of ethics, a stylebook, and a dummy of the product. Similarly bureaucratic and intrusive conditions apply for individual journalists seeking a licence to operate.

Such intrusive and bureaucratic conditions will clearly have the effect of delaying and frustrating the activities of journalists and the entrance of new, privately owned players in the print media industry.

They are entirely unnecessary and constitute a violation of Zimbabweans' constitutional rights to free expression and the African Union's Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression adopted in 2002.

If the ZMC wishes to escape being viewed as just another layer of bureaucracy added to an already excessively bureaucratic system, it must campaign – as a first step – for these absurd regulations to be abolished forthwith – and to recommend that it hand over the responsibility of registering journalists and media houses to the independent Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe, established by the country's own journalists and media institutions to regulate their media environment.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

ENDLESS arguments between ZANU PF and the MDC-T over their failure to comply with the terms of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) were fuelled by news this week that the US was planning to amend its sanctions law against President Mugabe and his associates. The topic received the greatest attention in both the public and private media alongside government's socio-economic recovery initiatives.

Such tensions however, were not limited to government, as deepening infighting within the MDC-T also attracted substantial coverage (See Fig. 1). While the government-controlled media paid attention to the ongoing constitutional reform programme, the private media barely paid any attention. However, they continued to report incidents of rights violations against a cross-section of the Zimbabwean society, which the official media ignored.

Fig 1: Topical issues in the media

Media	Power sharing	MDC-T infighting	Economic issues	Constitutional reform	Human rights
Public media	52	25	71	19	1
Private media	46	16	27	3	24
Total	**98**	**41**	**98**	**22**	**25**

Media report growing tension in MDC-T

ALL THE media reported on the friction within the MDC-T, which became apparent after the assault on the party's director-general, Toendepi Shonhe, by youths allegedly aligned to Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and exacerbated by the contradictory statements from Finance Minister Tendai Biti and Tsvangirai regarding the fate of civil servants' salaries.

MDC-T Public Service Minister Eliphas Mukonoweshuro compounded the public perception of increasing friction within the former opposition party when he attacked Biti, who had defended his decision to impose a salary freeze, for acting without consultation and for "usurping" his powers (ZBC, 6/5, 8pm and *The Herald* & *Independent*, 7/5).

Sixteen (64%) of the official media's 25 stories appeared to be a fair reflection of the divisions within the MDC-T, while the remaining nine used the conflict to vilify the party and its leadership, describing them as being power hungry, unfit to govern, and heading for another split.

The private media's coverage was more balanced.

They examined both Biti and Tsvangirai's positions and quoted analysts arguing that such open disagreements between the two were not only detrimental to the MDC-T but to the inclusive government as well.

The Financial Gazette (6/5), reported one commentator, Wabata Munodawafa, saying contradictions between Tsvangirai and Biti were ***"harmful"*** for the country as they ***"undermined the integrity"*** of the coalition. He urged government officials to desist from announcing policies before Cabinet had agreed on them to ***"avoid such embarrassing scenarios"***. Other commentators, including ZANU PF's irrepressible Jonathan Moyo, argued that Biti's plans were justified as they were based on reality, while Tsvangirai had merely adopted a "populist" position to appease civil servants (*The Herald* & *Gazette*, 5 & 7/5).

Talks deadlock gets mixed coverage

WHILE all the media reported on divisions within the MDC-T component of government, the government-controlled media suppressed fissures in the whole administration and renewed international pressure on ZANU PF to fulfill its commitments under the Global Political Agreement.

Sixteen of their 52 stories on this topic portrayed the coalition parties as working in harmony to revive the country. The remaining 36 (69%) singled out alleged Western sanctions against Zimbabwe, including plans by the United States to amend its sanctions law, as the sole hindrance to progress.

The government media nearly ignored the visit by DRC President Joseph Kabila's special envoy, Jean Ngandu, to urge the coalition parties to resolve their differences. Only *The Sunday Mail* (9/5) reported the visit albeit from ZANU PF's perspective. It reported Ngandu, who separately met negotiators from the coalition parties, as having said that Kabila had ***"stepped up efforts to have illegal sanctions against Zimbabwe lifted by setting up a regional team that will engage the West on the issue"***, quoting ZANU PF negotiator Patrick Chinamasa.

The government media's coverage of friction within the coalition only emerged in eight reports [four news stories, two editorials and two opinion pieces] focusing mainly on the proposed amendment of the US sanctions law, which, they argued, was designed to benefit the MDC-T and confirmed its status as a Western puppet. As proof they cited a clause in the new law that allegedly sought to ***"pave the way for the US government to directly fund certain Cabinet portfolios in Zimbabwe, ostensibly those in the MDC-T formation's hands"*** (*The Herald* & *Chronicle*, 6/5).

The private media identified other sources of tension in the coalition, including alleged plans by President Mugabe to unilaterally reshuffle the judiciary and re-assign ambassadors (*The Standard*, 9/5).

They also quoted commentators interpreting the visit by Kabila's envoy as an indication of growing regional displeasure with the coalition parties' failure to conclude the drawn-out power-sharing deadlock (Studio 7 & SW Radio Africa, 7/5).

THE MEDIA'S MOST POPULAR VOICES

POLITICIANS continued to dominate all the media's sourcing patterns on topical issues, reflecting the scale of the tension within government and the MDC-T.

President Mugabe was the most quoted individual in the official media. He was accessed for comment 10 times, followed by Prime Minister Tsvangirai (nine); MDC-T secretary-general and Finance Minister Tendai Biti (eight); and Public Service Minister Elphas Mukonoweshuro (seven).

Mugabe was quoted commending progress in the implementation of the power-sharing agreement. Tsvangirai was quoted downplaying divisions in government and his party and urging the West to lift sanctions against Zimbabwe. Biti was heard defending his position that the country had no capacity to increase civil servants salaries, while Mukonoweshuro was quoted criticizing Biti.

Tsvangirai topped the charts in the private media. He was quoted 16 times, followed by his deputy, Arthur Mutambara (eight) and MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa and co-chairperson of the national reconciliation organ Sekai Holland, who were quoted four times each.

Mutambara and Tsvangirai were mostly quoted praising progress in the implementation of the GPA, while Holland criticised the lack of progress in the national reconciliation process. Chamisa was quoted dismissing reports of divisions in his party as a figment of ZANU PF's imagination.

UZ political science lecturers Eldred Masunungure (four) and John Makumbe (three) were the most quoted analysts in the private media. They were quoted criticizing senior government officials for issuing conflicting policy statements, which they argued exposed a lack of coordination in government.

Human rights abuses

THE government media reported just one incident of political violence, implicating the MDC-T, while all the 11 incidents the private media recorded singled out ZANU PF and state security agents as offenders.

Among them were:

- Retributive attacks on a ZANU PF supporter, Dzingirayi Nematere, by two MDC-T activists for having eaten their beasts during the June 2008 presidential poll run-off in Bikita (*The Herald*, 5/5);
- Assault of Chief Nyamombe in Nyazura by ZANU PF youths who accused him of being sympathetic to the MDC-T (SW Radio Africa, 4/5);
- Arrest of a senior MDCT official, Paul Madzore, for having allegedly assaulted police officers two years ago (Studio 7 & *The Daily News*, 4 & 5/5); and
- Coercion of some Masvingo residents by ZANU PF supporters to attend the burial of party activist Javas Takavada (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 9/5).

WHAT THEY SAID….

"It is most important for me to stress that all issues pertaining to the Ministry of Public Service i.e. remuneration issues (and) conditions of service…are the responsibility and central mandate of the responsible minister and no one else. This government does not operate on the basis of Super Ministers who may frequently arrogate to themselves responsibilities that are neither in their present province of competence nor designated mandate" – Public Service Minister Elphas Mukonoweshuro (*The Herald* & *Chronicle*, 7/5).

"Until we grow the economy, the government has no capacity to pay its workers. From 1997 to 2008, normal production was devalued to 24 percent and until December 2008, there was no economy to talk about. At the moment, government is not making money from tax and industry is not producing so we have little fiscal space" – Finance Minister Tendai Biti defending his proposal to suspend servants' salaries increases (*The Herald* & *New Zimbabwe.com*, 5/5).

Ends/

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