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The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
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Weekly Media Review 2010-37

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TOP STORIES

PRESIDENT Mugabe's visit to New York to attend the 65th session of the UN General Assembly attracted most attention in the government media.

Although the public media highlighted what was discussed at the meeting, particularly ways of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it failed to question the truth of Mugabe's claims that Western sanctions were the major reason why Zimbabwe was unlikely to meet the goals.

The private papers focused on the bloated nature of Mugabe's delegation and comments by the US government that it would not lift sanctions against Zimbabwe until there was evidence of democratic reforms.

Although all the media publicized endless administrative problems affecting the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee's outreach consultative programme, the government media ignored glaring incidents of political violence against perceived critics of the ZANU PF arm of government. Fig. 1 illustrates this.

Fig 1: Popular stories in the media

Media	UN General Assembly	Labour unrest	Constitutional reforms	Human rights
Public papers	17	5	16	2
Private papers	4	2	24	0
ZBC	41	12	18	0
Private radios	6	1	11	9
Online agencies	1	1	11	12
Total	69	21	80	24

UN allows Mugabe's media another sanctions platform

ALTHOUGH the government media highlighted debate at the UN General Assembly, especially the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), their coverage was dominated by President Mugabe's claims that Western sanctions were responsible for Zimbabwe's problems and were the major reason why the country might not achieve the MDGs.

This perspective was amplified in all their stories.

ZTV and *The Herald* (22/9) passively quoted Mugabe saying Zimbabwe could not achieve the eight MDGs because of **"illegal and debilitating"** sanctions while addressing a high-level plenary meeting on MDGs on Tuesday 21 September. As a result, Mugabe said Zimbabwe had had not been able to significantly improve **"the lives of the poor, the hungry, the sick and the destitute among its citizens"**. These media did not acknowledge the fact that the West and its donor agencies were playing a crucial role in Zimbabwe's quest to attain the MDGs, including the three Mugabe said the country had prioritized, namely: the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, promotion of gender equality and combating HIV/AIDS and malaria.

In line with their editorial thrust, the government media ran headlines about calls by Malawi President and AU chairman Bingu WaMutharika and Mugabe for the West to lift the sanctions as they were allegedly hurting ordinary Zimbabweans (ZTV, 23/9, 8pm & *The Herald*, 24 & 25/9).

Although the government media did report the US expressing its reluctance to remove the sanctions during a meeting between the Zimbabwe and US delegations on the sidelines of the UN summit (ZTV, 20/9, 8pm), they did not clearly explain the reasons why it was reluctant to do so. The national broadcaster reported the issue only from the perspective of the Zimbabwe re-engagement team, led by Energy Minister Elton Mangoma, who attributed the US's attitude to its alleged unhappiness with the formation of the inclusive government.

The private papers also failed to do justice to the subject.

Only *The Zimbabwean On Sunday* and *NewsDay* reported it. But they restricted their coverage to comments by senior US officials that their country would not lift sanctions against Zimbabwe until Mugabe demonstrated a genuine commitment to reforms (*Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 26/9) and the fact that Mugabe had travelled with a bloated delegation of 80 people, which was a waste of taxpayers' money (*NewsDay*, 22/9). As a result, they failed to discuss the agenda of the assembly or publicize details of Mugabe's speech. Such a narrow perspective, especially by Zimbabwe's only independent daily paper, does not help in satisfying the public's information needs.

The private electronic media performed better.

Not only did they publicize Mugabe's speech, but they also quoted analysts and members of the international community refuting his claims that Western sanctions were the major hindrance to socio-economic progress in Zimbabwe.

Labour unrest receives mixed coverage

WHILE a resolution to the Air Zimbabwe pilots' strike received reasonable publicity in all the media, there was little news about the situation in other sectors of the economy, especially the civil service.

For instance, none of the state media's news reports asked civil servants' unions what they were planning to do following the expiry of their ultimatum to government. It only emerged, through ZTV's current affairs programme *Melting Pot* (21/9, 9pm), that civil servants, especially teachers, were forging ahead with their threat to strike, the same day Finance Minister Tendai Biti insisted that government had no capacity to increase their salaries (*Chronicle*, 21/9).

Although these media also reported the return to work of Air Zimbabwe's pilots following an agreement with the parastatal's management, they failed to explain clearly the nature of the agreement, or seek comment from the pilots (ZTV, 23/9, 8pm & *The Herald*, 24/9).

Instead, they mostly limited themselves to a statement by Transport and Communication permanent secretary Partson Mbiriri that the pilots had agreed to return to work ***“subject to operational requirements being met”***. Among the conditions were the payment of their deferred allowances ***“as mutually agreed”*** and that no disciplinary action would be taken against the pilots. According to anonymous sources these media quoted, the pilots would receive ***“40 percent”*** of what they were owed before resuming work.

In other reports, *The Herald* and *Chronicle* (21 & 23/9) reported that about 300 Marondera municipal workers had gone on strike demanding unpaid salaries for 10 months, severely disrupting service delivery.

The private media adopted a similar pattern.

Although they reported an end to the Air Zimbabwe strike, as well as its impact, they also failed to provide details of the conditions under which the pilots had settled their dispute (*New Zimbabwe.com*, 23/9).

They also ignored discontent in other sectors of the economy.

Only *The Zimbabwean On Sunday* (26/9) addressed this issue. It quoted the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) president Lovemore Matombo repeating the ZCTU's intention to mobilize workers for a nationwide strike to press employers to match wages to the cost of living, estimated to be \$500. Apart from accusing the unity government of failing to improve the workers' plight, Matombo complained that most employers were allegedly paying wages ***“that were never paid during the colonial period”***.

State media downplays Copac mayhem

ALTHOUGH the government media reported on logistical and administrative chaos characterizing the perpetually tardy Constitutional Parliamentary Committee's outreach consultative programme, they failed to view these problems as having severely undermined the credibility of the exercise.

Apart from that, the official media also did not question Copac to clearly explain when the outreach programme would resume in those areas of Harare that were affected by violence, and when the whole exercise would finally be concluded.

Neither did they assess the implications of reports about the suspension of other constitutional outreach meetings in Manicaland owing to violence and boycotts by Copac teams (*The Manica Post*, 24/9).

ZTV (24/9, 8pm) passively quoted Copac co-chairman Paul Mangwana saying Copac would resume outreach meetings in Harare after studying reports about the violence from its teams. Mangwana assured Zimbabweans that Copac **"already"** had **"solutions to handle"** the violence without elaborating.

The Sunday Mail (26/9) buried on its page four news that more than 30 Copac outreach team members had **"stormed"** the body's headquarters in Harare last Friday **"demanding outstanding allowances"**.

The private media, on the other hand, quoted analysts and the MDC-T questioning the credibility of Zimbabwe's constitutional reform programme on the grounds of the violence, information blackout and administrative chaos that characterized Copac's outreach consultation exercise.

They also reported the violence that gripped Harare as having claimed the life of an MDC-T activist, Chrispen Mandizvidza, in Mbare (*NewsDay*, *NewZimbabwe.com* & *Daily News*, 22, 23 & 24/9).

NewsDay (23/9) quoted Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai describing the violence-ridden constitutional outreach programme as a **"messy"** exercise that had **"failed to pass the test of legitimacy, credibility and people-drivenness"**. He made these remarks after receiving reports of widespread violence and intimidation from MDC-T Copac teams and independent monitors. UZ constitutional law expert Greg Linington and political commentator Sydney Chisi agreed that the constitutional reform exercise did not reflect the will of Zimbabweans (*Studio 7*, 20/9).

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

THE government media continued to suppress incidents of political violence, most of which were linked to Copac's outreach programme, presumably to shield the discredited constitutional reforms and national reconciliation drive from criticism.

The media recorded 13 new incidents of human rights violations in 24 stories [private media (22) and government media (two)]. Seven of the incidents stemmed from Copac's outreach. All of them appeared in the private media.

Among them were:

- The death of two Bindura University students from injuries they sustained after university security guards who were attempting to stop them from attending a graduation ceremony assaulted them, as they had not paid their tuition fees. Sixteen other students sustained serious injuries from the beatings (SW Radio Africa, 21/9).
- The arrest and detention of more than 80 Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) members for participating in an "unsanctioned" march to mark International Peace Day (Studio 7 & SW Radio Africa, 20/9).
- The arrest of Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) president Tafadzwa Mugwadi for allegedly organizing the spraying of graffiti on several buildings in Harare (SW Radio Africa, 23/9), and
- The alleged assault of five MDC-T officials, including a village headman, by suspected ZANU PF supporters in Makoni South (*Daily News*, 21/9).

LOUDEST VOICES

PREDICTABLY, President Mugabe was the most frequently quoted individual in the government media.

He was quoted 34 times, mostly speaking at the UN General Assembly. This reflected the overkill publicity the government media gave to Mugabe's visit to the UN and his speeches, which mostly centered on sanctions. So important was the sanctions debate to the official media that they also gave enormous publicity to presidential spokesman George Charamba (15 times) and AU chairman Bingu waMutharika (11 times), who were widely quoted blaming sanctions for stifling progress in Zimbabwe.

Vice President John Nkomo (17 times) and Copac co-chairmen, Douglas Mwonzora (nine) and Paul Mangwana (seven), competed for attention too. Nkomo mostly appeared condemning violence and assuring Zimbabweans that the inclusive government was committed to national healing, while Mwonzora and Mangwana spoke about problems bedeviling Copac's outreach.

Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai was the most popular source of news in the private media.

He was quoted nine times mostly expressing displeasure about the violence plaguing the constitutional reform programme.

Mwonzora (eight times), Mugabe (six) and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Page (four) followed suit.

Mugabe was mostly quoted speaking at the UN General Assembly while Page repeated her country's position on sanctions. Mwonzora commented about constitutional reforms.

What they said...

"I will not commit to an election if it is going to be a declaration of war because we are supposed to show...that we are mature democrats" – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai addressing a Heal Zimbabwe Conference in Harare (NewsDay, 21/9).

"Do they (perceived Western imperialists) think that we are going to keep quiet? No! If they attack Zimbabwe, we shall pick our guns and defend Zimbabwe. Africa belongs to Africans, Europe to Europeans and America to Americans" – former Namibia president Sam Nujoma declaring Africa's alleged determination to defend Zimbabwe against Western aggressors (*The Herald*, 20/9).

"If you (former white commercial farmers) have an issue that is at stake deal with your governor...You may go to court to contest but you cannot contest our desire to acquire farms, its not...logical" – ZANU PF lands secretary Ignatius Chombo telling former white farmers in Mashonaland West that challenging the acquisition of their farms was a waste of time and resources (ZTV, 27/9, 8pm).

Ends/

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