

**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe**  
**Monday May 31st 2010 – Sunday May 6<sup>th</sup> 2010**  
**Weekly Media Review 2010-21**

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***Who is asking the hard questions?***

**COMMENT**

WHEN Zimbabwe started down the path of creating a new constitution, the nation might have hoped for a momentous discussion of this sacred contract between the government and the governed.

Unfortunately, the process has so far been sidetracked by partisan bickering, shameless scrounging for donor dollars and bogus non-issues.

What's worse, the media – both private and state-run – have failed abysmally to shine a light into the darkness.

The COPAC outreach teams hope to hold meetings in each of the 1 957 wards scattered from Beitbridge to Nyamapanda during a two-month exercise, starting Wednesday.

Any journalist worth his salt would demand to know exactly when and where these meetings will take place and how ordinary folk can participate. Instead, Zimbabweans have endured a flood of stories in the state media reacting to disputes between the parties, funding shortages and deliberate distractions, like narrow debate on gay rights, which has now become part of ZANU-PF's propaganda.

The private media have not done much better, with the exception of *The Zimbabwean* giving hard-copy space to the results of an exceptional initiative by the online social communication agency, *Kubatana*, to get Constitutional Affairs Minister Eric Matinenga to respond to real concerns from the public about the constitutional-making process.

A recent example was *NewsDay*'s accusation (9/6) that ZANU-PF was delaying the process with MPs' demands for fatter allowances, when it is evident that MDC parliamentarians are also crying for cash.

In any case, the process is about the people, not MPs. Exactly what role are they playing anyway?

Instead of wasting space on petty nonsense, the media should be asking the hard questions to which every Zimbabwean needs answers.

## THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES...

WITH barely more than a week before the beginning of a constitutional outreach programme – now allegedly starting on June 16<sup>th</sup> – to gather public views on what they want included in a new constitution, the media generally continued to confine themselves to superficial “news” about the constitution-making process. There was no information about the outreach teams themselves and where and when they would be visiting the various meeting points to gather the people’s views. Copac only issued a list of these meeting points and the members of the outreach teams in *The Financial Gazette* (10/6) as this report was being compiled. Although statistically, the national broadcaster, ZBC, appeared to devote airtime to this topic, their stories were mainly “event” reports of officials and organizations urging people to “participate”. But there was no information about how they would be able to do this, never mind impartial information about what a new constitution should contain. Instead, ZBC gave excessive, passive and favourable coverage to a “solidarity” visit by a Chinese Politburo delegation. For their part, the private media reported a sharp increase in the number of human rights violations during the week, while the endless bickering between the parties in the power-sharing government continued to attract reaction from all the media. (See Fig 1).

**Fig 1: The most popular stories**

| Media                          | Inclusive<br>govt | Human<br>Rights | Constitutional<br>Reforms | Chinese<br>visit |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Public<br>Press                | 13                | 3               | 7                         | 3                |
| ZBC                            | 9                 | 0               | 28                        | 26               |
| Private<br>papers              | 25                | 26              | 12                        | 0                |
| Private<br>Electronic<br>media | 17                | 22              | 1                         | 0                |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>64</b>         | <b>51</b>       | <b>48</b>                 | <b>29</b>        |

## **COPAC outreach programme remains a mystery**

THIS week the media again failed to investigate important issues relating to the impending constitutional reform outreach programme which hopes to capture the nation's opinions about what they want in a new constitution.

Of the 48 stories that all the media carried on constitutional reforms, only three reports – all published in the weekend papers, *The Sunday Mail*, *Sunday News* and *The Zimbabwean on Sunday* (6/6) – made some effort to publicise the authorities' planned public consultations.

As a result, the mechanics of the exercise remained largely unaddressed. For example, there was no news in the media about the venues for the discussions, how these would be conducted, or what guarantees had been put in place to facilitate full public participation – and to guarantee their safety afterwards. The safety of those airing their views is a particular concern following widespread reports in the private media of the coercion of the public by ZANU PF supporters and militias to support the Kariba Draft Constitution as the basis for constitutional review.

There was also no attempt to investigate whether the eagerly awaited 2010 FIFA Football World Cup competition, which kicked off on June 11<sup>th</sup>, was likely to affect attendances at the public consultations.

Otherwise, the media appeared fixated with publicizing routine comments and activities around the constitution-making exercise. For example, most (20) of the 35 reports the official media carried on constitutional reforms were mainly a repeat of general calls for the participation of special interest groups, such as women and war veterans. These were all reported in isolation of the planned official outreach programme. The other 13 were devoted to ZANU PF's own constitutional outreach exercise, while the remaining two were on the activities of the MDC-T.

The private media's 13 reports on the subject were largely restricted to highlighting concerns by the MDC-T, ZAPU and civic society over, among others, the use of violence by ZANU PF supporters to pressurize the public into supporting their party's viewpoints on constitutional-making ahead of the outreach programmes.

## **BEWARE! SPINDOCTORS AT WORK...**

THE media, particularly the government-controlled ones, either failed to report or honestly interpret developments in the inclusive government and other contemporary issues. As a result, they failed to ensure that they provided accurate information about how the coalition parties were, for example, progressing in the implementation of the power-sharing agreement. Below are examples:

### **Public media ignore principals' meeting**

The public media censored news of a meeting during the week between President Mugabe and Prime Minister Tsvangirai aimed at finding solutions to their longstanding power-sharing disputes. News of this only appeared on *ZimOnline*, SW Radio Africa (2/6) and in *The Financial Gazette* (3/6), which reported the meeting as having failed to achieve anything, saying the two only spoke about general government operations and not necessarily the outstanding issues. However, *The Gazette's* headline, *Mugabe, PM meeting tense*, was inaccurate, as this claim was not supported by the story.

### **Baiting the hook**

*The Saturday Herald* (5/6) distorted the reasons behind the reluctance of Western countries, under the banner of "Friends of Zimbabwe", to directly fund the operations of the inclusive government during a meeting in Norway aimed at establishing ways to help the country. The paper deliberately avoided providing a fair and balanced report of a statement issued by the group, commonly known as the Fishmongers.

Instead, it used the story as a platform for its political analysts, especially ZANU PF's Jonathan Moyo, to make absurd allegations about the group. For example, the paper reported the group's alleged failure to **"to come up with tangible assistance for the inclusive government"** so that it could lend credibility to its analysts' invention that it was a **"cover-up for their (the group's) bankruptcy"**.

A more balanced story appeared in *The Standard* (6/6), which reported the Fishmongers as having pledged more aid to Zimbabwe but would continue to bypass government coffers until issues such as disregard for the rule of law, violations of bilateral investments, and delays in implementing outstanding issues were resolved.

### **A pack of lies**

LACK of honesty also characterised *The Herald* front-page report: *Airzim retrenchees lied under oath: MP* (31/5). While the story reported that some leaders of the retrenched workers at the company **"could face contempt of Parliament charges as they are suspected of lying under oath"** when they appeared before a Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Transport and Communications, there was no evidence to support this allegation. A follow-up editorial in *The Herald* (2/6) merely built on this misrepresentation, presenting as

fact its conjecture that ***“some members of the (parliamentary) committees have tended to encourage the giving of such half-baked information in the hope of nailing those who are being investigated”.***

## Legal disputes demand more clarity

TWO interesting cases in the media during the week would have benefited from follow-up stories providing more clarity from legal experts:

- *The Herald*, the *Chronicle* and *Manica Post* (3 & 4/6) reported differences between Constitutional Affairs Minister Eric Matinenga and the Speaker of Parliament Lovemore Moyo over the nomination of four ZANU PF members to the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission. While the papers cited Matinenga arguing that the four were ineligible for nomination as they had already served their maximum terms according to the law (Anti-Corruption Commission Act of 2004), “political analyst” Jonathan Moyo, contested that the law the Minister cited referred to the old body that was dissolved through Constitutional Amendment 19, which created the new body and could not therefore apply to the new commission. Except for the use of two unnamed lawyers, (both of whom supported Moyo’s argument), there were no other credible independent experts to give some legal clarity to the dispute.
- Confusion also arose over the status of the “despecification” of businessmen Mutumwa Mawere, James Makamba and John Moxon, initially reported in *The Herald* (28/5). However, the *Independent* reported (4/6) that they still faced possible arrest over allegations of externalizing foreign currency and defrauding government despite their despecification. While the paper reported Home Affairs Minister Giles Mutsekwa saying his ministry had found that the three had ***“no case to answer”***, it quoted Attorney-General Johannes Tomana saying: ***“Being despecified does not wash away any wrongdoings which can be proven. Despecification is not like an acquittal.”***

Police spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena was also quoted warning the three of possible arrest.

## Reports on rights abuses soar

THE media recorded 20 new cases of human rights-related abuses this week, a 222% increase from the nine reported the previous week, reflecting widespread political tensions in the country despite the inclusive government's attempt to launch a national healing exercise.

Of these, 18 appeared in the private media, while the official media published the remaining two.

These included:

- Alleged burning of a home belonging to an MDC-T activist, Alec Rapera, by suspected ZANU PF supporters in Murehwa (31/5 SW Radio Africa & *The Zimbabwean*, 31/5 & 3/6);
- The arrest and detention of two unnamed vendors for the newly launched private daily, *NewsDay*, for allegedly disrupting traffic after the first copies of the paper hit the streets of central Harare (SW Radio Africa, 4/6);
- The arrest of MDC-T's Eliah Jembere and another party official for addressing an 'unsanctioned' rally in Shamva (*The Standard*, 6/6)
- Arrest and prosecution of three white commercial farmers, Goff Carbutt and James Taylor and his son, for allegedly refusing to vacate state-acquired farms in Matabeleland North and the eviction of six others in Bubi (*The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, *ZimDaily* & SW Radio Africa, 31/5 & 4 & 6/6); and
- The disruption of an MDC-T rally at Hopley Farm by the police and assault of party chairman for the area, Vengayi Chingorima, by ZANU PF supporters (SW Radio Africa 31/5 & *The Zimbabwean*, 3/6).

### ... AND THE MOST POPULAR VOICES

BOTH the government and privately owned media exposed their bias by failing to equitably access the country's coalition parties.

The official media favoured ZANU PF voices in their coverage of this week's topical issues, while the private media preferred those of the MDC-T. The MDC-M formation was hardly heard (See Fig. 2).

Although both media widely publicised alternative voices, they were used in different contexts. The government media widely accessed alternative voices on issues such as women's participation in the constitution-making process and in discrediting the MDC-T, while those recorded in the private media were heard mostly questioning the delays in implementing the GPA and launching of the constitutional outreach programme.

Women's Affairs Minister Olivia Muchena was the most quoted voice in the public media (eight times), mostly in the context of urging women to play their part in constitutional reforms.

ZANU PF officials David Karimanzira, Cornelius Bwanya and Goodwills Masimirembwa competed for attention. They were heard six times each, mainly campaigning for the ZANU PF position on land, independence and the unitary system of governance in a new constitution. ZANU PF official Jonathan Moyo

(four), who was paraded as an analyst, criticised the MDC-T and the West on political and economic developments in the inclusive government.

MDC-T Manicaland provincial chairman Pishayi Muchauraya (four) topped the charts in the private media, followed by Prime Minister Tsvangirai (three times).

Muchauraya was quoted complaining about the resurgence of political violence in Manicaland, while Tsvangirai was talking about lack of progress in the implementation of the GPA.

**Fig 2: Voice distribution in the media**

| Media         | ZANU PF | MDC-T | MDC-M | Govt | Alternative | Unnamed |
|---------------|---------|-------|-------|------|-------------|---------|
| Public media  | 49      | 15    | 4     | 13   | 14          | 4       |
| Private Media | 7       | 34    | 3     | 2    | 15          | 9       |

## What they said...

***“...We want a unitary system of governance that is central with the President at the top. We don’t want a Prime Minister or anything like that because that can only cause chaos and divisions”*** – Goodwills Masimirembwa, member of ZANU PF’s constitutional mobilisation team, addressing party supporters in Harare (*The Herald*, 1/6)

***“The totality of the action taken against me are self-evident, companies remain under the control of an administrator. My only hope is that the government will do the right thing and reverse it, the consequential action taken on the false premise of externalisation”*** – exiled Zimbabwean businessman Mutumwa Mawere (*The Herald*, 31/5).

Ends/

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