The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday February 8th – Sunday February 14th 2010
Weekly Media Review 2010-5

Contents

COMMENT

Repressive law used to 'intimidate' private media

This week's attacks on the private media by the chief of police and the subsequent charging, on criminal defamation, of distributors for the foreign-based, privately owned Zimbabwean newspapers, fuels growing cynicism about government's sincerity in implementing media reforms guaranteed under the Global Political Agreement (GPA).

The Standard and *The Zimbabwean On Sunday* (14/2) reported the charging of two directors of Adquest - distributing agents for *The Zimbabwean* stable of newspapers – on February 10, for contravening the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act Chapter 9:23, which criminalises publication of ***"falsehoods prejudicial to the state"***.

Their indictment stemmed from a story published in *The Zimbabwean On Sunday* (10/1): *Mnangagwa plots fight-back: talk of new splinter group*, alleging infighting in ZANU PF over President Mugabe's succession.

Coincidentally, it also came just two days after Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri censured privately owned newspapers and online agencies, where he singled out publisher and editor of *The Zimbabwean* newspapers (Wilf) Mbanga by name, for ***"tarnishing the force's image by reporting falsehoods"*** (*The Herald* 10/2).

Responding to the police's charges against the Adquest distributors, *The Standard* quoted Mbanga describing them as ***"ludicrous"*** and ***"calculated to…intimidate the distributors of the newspaper"*** as they ***"had nothing to do with"*** the circulation of the publication in question, having only taken over the distribution role from Publications Distributors on January 14.

While Article 19 of the GPA recognises the right to freedom of expression and the role of a free and diversified media in a multi-party democracy, MMPZ is concerned that the authorities' overzealous reaction to criticism by resorting to discredited legislation to prevent the media from carrying out its duty to inform the public indicates the true nature of government's intolerance - and makes public accountability impossible.

In fact, despite the failure of the country's current laws to acknowledge the media's right to publish information in the national interest, MMPZ believes that

where allegations of the publication of falsehoods arise, redress should be sought through civil law.
Government has a duty to urgently repeal all repressive media laws, including any criminal restrictions on content, and to activate the newly announced Zimbabwe Media Council without delay, since it offers a potentially more acceptable means of arbitration. (374 words)

THE WEEK'S MOST POPULAR STORIES

Zimbabweans' hopes for signs of some harmony in the inclusive government were again dashed this week by a continuing flood of news stories about the bickering between the coalition parties, eptomised by fierce disagreements over the unilateral promulgation of controversial Indigenisation & Empowerment Act regulations.
However, allegations that ZANU PF was politicising the civil servants' strike offered an intriguing perspective to the stalemate, while other reports on government's untidy attempts at rewriting the country's constitution exasperated civil society. See Fig. 1.

Fig 1: The media's most popular stories

Media	Govt power struggles	Civil servants' strike	Indigenisation & Empowerment Act	Constitutional reforms
Public media	69	47	10	11
Private media	49	16	14	8
Total	**118**	**63**	**24**	**19**

Blame-game stars in talks deadlock

The state-controlled public media continued to exclusively portray the MDC-T as being responsible for the country's problems through its alleged reluctance to fulfill its obligations under the power-sharing accord.
Of their 69 reports on the talks over "outstanding issues", 49 (71%) either discredited the MDC-T's position or accused it of sabotaging the talks by refusing to campaign for the removal of Western sanctions. None investigated ZANU PF's culpability.
In two of these, ZTV (12/2, 8pm) and *The Herald* (13/2) passively reported ZANU PF's central committee "endorsing" the Politburo's decision to ***"stop"*** making any further concessions in the negotiations ***"until illegal Western economic sanctions on Zimbabwe are lifted"***. ZTV reported President Mugabe telling the

committee that the removal of sanctions was ***"solely"*** the MDC-T's ***"responsibility"*** since British Foreign Minister, David Milliband, allegedly ***"made it clear that the initiative…lies with the Prime Minister's party"***.

The remaining 20 reports were either reviews of the coalition's first anniversary or reported negotiators refusing to shed light on the status of the dialogue.

The private media gave a more balanced view by giving space to all parties to articulate their positions on the talks and critically reviewed the coalition's performance on its first anniversary, which they argued, had achieved less than expected owing mostly to ZANU PF's intransigence. They also observed that ZANU PF's imposition of the indigenisation regulations; the resurrection of hate language against Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his party; and escalating political violence were widening divisions in the coalition.

Hidden hand behind civil service strike?

This week government papers restricted themselves to blaming the MDC-T for the civil servants' strike.

They cited as evidence Tsvangirai's alleged failure to honour his pledge to pay civil servants a decent wage (*The Herald*, 9/2), and failure by his party's arm of government, which is in charge of socio-economic ministries, to improve civil servants' working conditions (*The Herald* 12/2); and sanctions (*The Herald*, 10/2).

The Herald gave no information on the magnitude of the strike and its impact on government operations.

However, reports on ZBC did attempt to inform its audiences, observing that it had affected operations at the High Court and some hospitals and schools in high-density suburbs.

The private media also offered some useful evaluation of the strike. They viewed it as a symptom of government's failure to revive the economy, adding that the prevailing political instability made it difficult for the authorities to address the problem (*The Financial Gazette*, 11/2). Studio 7, *The Zimbabwe Times* & *The Standard* (12 & 14/2) reported the strike as assuming a politically-motivated dimension with evidence that ZANU PF officials, traditional leaders and state security agents were coercing teachers to participate.

Editorial sanity

Despite an obvious editorial shift by the government papers from their initially fairly balanced coverage of the strike, which this week saw them blame the MDC-T component of government, *The Herald's* editorial (10/2), *Govt, employees: Showdown won't work*, provided a surprisingly professional, dispassionate assessment of the industrial action, devoid of partisan political rhetoric that so often pollutes its commentaries. Basing its argument on factual evidence, *The Herald* advised government and strikers to recognize ***"the financial facts"*** and act with understanding in seeking a "winning" solution to the strike.

Indigenization law sparks outrage

The negative consequences of forcing foreign owned companies to cede 51 percent ownership to indigenous blacks through recently gazetted regulations to the Indigenisation & Empowerment Act remained unexplored by the government media.

Their coverage basically focused on the ZANU PF arm of government's perspective, supported by pro-ZANU PF analysts and organisations, such as the Affirmative Action Group (AAG), who they quoted defending the controversial law as progressive.

Only *The Herald* (12/2) report: *Mixed reactions to indigenization regulation*, gave a balanced view of the matter. For example, while it quoted Indigenisation Minister Saviour Kasukuwere defending the new law, it also quoted MDC-T Economic Planning and Investment Minister Elton Mangoma accusing him of having acted unilaterally and not following ***"proper procedure"*** when he gazetted the regulations.

It quoted Mangoma: ***"There is no reason why we should be threatening investors in this country…Empowering one individual to hold 51 percent is not empowering the rest of the people of Zimbabwe."***

The private media reported the regulations as fuelling divisions in government and raising concern among international companies and investors, who were reported saying they would severely undermine government efforts to attract investment and revive the economy if not radically revised.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS – A QUIET WEEK

The media provided precious little informative updates on the constitutional reform programme.

The government media's reports focused mainly on calls for greater women involvement in the process (ZTV, 11/2, 8pm); ZANU PF's outreach activities (*The Herald*, 8/2) and an announcement that the national outreach programme would start "before April" (*The Herald*, 15/2).

The private media restricted themselves to analyzing the implications of a delayed constitution-making process.

THE MOST QUOTED VOICES

State media distort MDC-T voice

This week MDC-T voices were the most quoted in both the official and private media in the week's most popular stories, which dealt with power sharing, indigenization regulations, the civil servants strike and constitutional reforms.

However, the state media quoted the MDC-T mostly to reinforce its perspective that the party was betraying its sanctions "responsibilities" or their pledges to offer workers "a fair wage".

MDC-M and “alternative” sources, which again included ZANU PF’s Jonathan Moyo, were generally quoted criticising the MDC-T for allegedly prevaricating over sanctions. Only the business community was adequately quoted expressing their reservations about the Indigenisation Act.

Once again, the private media heavily favoured MDC-T sources in their stories on these issues as shown in Fig.2.

Individually, Zimbabwe Teachers’ Association president Tendai Chikowore; Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his deputy Arthur Mutambara, were the most quoted in the public media. They were quoted 10 times apiece, followed by Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa and Public Service Minister Eliphas Mukonoweshuro (eight each); Progressive Teachers Union (PTUZ) leader Raymond Majongwe (seven) and President Mugabe (five).

Chikowore, Mukonoweshuro and Majongwe were mostly quoted commenting on the strike; Mugabe and Mutambara were mostly calling for the removal of sanctions, while Chinamasa was giving updates on the inter-party talks.

MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa was the most dominant voice in the private media. He was quoted 17 times, followed by his boss Tsvangirai (10) and Mukonoweshuro (five).

They were all talking about the problems plaguing the coalition.

There was no gender balance in the media’s sourcing of the week’s most popular stories. Only 18 out of the 145 sources quoted in the official media were female. The private media only sourced 13 (11%) female voices out of its 131 sources. Tendai Chikowore (12) and two ZANU PF officials Oppah Muchinguri and Olivia Muchena (four each) were the most quoted women in the media.

Fig 2: Most quoted groups in the media

Media	**Govt**	**ZANU PF**	**MDC-T**	**MDC-M**	**Alternative**	**Business**
Government media	19	36	46	21	25	9
Private media	3	16	51	12	37	12

QUOTES OF THE WEEK…

“China is the way, China is the life. Even America is now looking East. China has dwarfed the United States of America and Japan” – Deputy Prime Minister Mutambara praising ZANU PF’s “Look East” policy (*The Herald*, 8/2).

“It’s all there for people to see. ZANU PF has refused to negotiate…and says it is sticking to its destructive congress resolutions not to pull Zimbabwe out of the mess it put Zimbabwe in…These talks have collapsed and that is the truth.” – Nelson Chamisa (*Financial Gazette*, 11/2).

"Every minister administers laws under his ambit and does not necessarily have to consult" - Indigenisation Minister Saviour Kasukuwere defending his alleged failure to consult his MDC colleagues before gazetting indigenisation regulations (*The Herald*, 12/2).

Ends/

The MEDIA UPDATE was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw

Feel free to write to MMPZ. We may not able to respond to everything but we will look at each message. For previous MMPZ reports, and more information about the Project, please visit our website at http://www.mmpz.org/