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The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday February 22nd – Sunday February 28th 2010
Weekly Media Review 2010-07

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COMMENT

Tsvangirai's sanctions comment fuels state media propaganda

THE recent furore over Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's sanctions comments reignited debate over the power of television to selectively quote politicians and the weakness of politicians who make public statements that can be used to support issues they do not necessarily agree with.

MMPZ was attracted to this issue following attempts by the Prime Minister's Office to "clarify" government media reports that quoted Tsvangirai calling for the lifting of Western sanctions while addressing journalists soon after meeting Danish Minister for Development Co-operation Soren Pind.

SW Radio Africa (3/2) quoted the PM's spokesman, James Maridadi, denying Tsvangirai had called for the removal of sanctions, saying:

"Never did the Prime Minister refer to them as sanctions, but restrictive measures. The media quoted him out of context, but he reiterated that the West should acknowledge the progress of the government by lifting restrictive measures, once certain prerequisites have been met."

However, a ZTV report (1/3, 8pm) clearly showed Tsvangirai declaring: ***"Well, the issue of sanctions debate is a very contentious one in Zimbabwe. We want all sanctions removed"*** (1/3, 8pm).

What is not in dispute however, as pointed out by Maridadi, was the station's selective portrayal of Tsvangirai's comments to suit a particular editorial slant by omitting the context in which he made his comments.

A lengthier clip of Tsvangirai's "offending" statement, carried in a subsequent report on ZTV (3/3, 8pm) angled on analysts' commendation of the Prime Minister's stance, provided the proper context for his remarks.

It showed Tsvangirai qualifying his call for the removal of sanctions, saying: ***"...but you see the thing is that it's not up to us, it's not up to what we say here in Zimbabwe but what we do that will convince those who have imposed those sanctions; that they have their own benchmarks to assess whether we have made progress or not.***

The EU has got its benchmarks; we believe there is progress in the country to be rewarded, therefore...rewarding it would have to be about removing any sort of impediments that will allow the country to move forward. Any support that will come to the country will be welcome."

MMPZ advises political spokespersons to be honest in repackaging statements made by their bosses - and for the government media to desist from selectively quoting sources to satisfy their partisan editorial slant.

THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

COVERAGE of President Mugabe's 86th birthday celebrations competed with key national issues in the government media, coming second only to the controversial sanctions debate in the number of stories devoted to these topics. The contentious indigenisation discussion came third in both the public and private media.

The private media also gave priority to the sanctions story followed by reports on constitutional reform and the uproar over government's intention to indigenize the ownership of all the country's big commercial enterprises. Mugabe's birthday only attracted five stories. Online publications focused on the continuing trial on terrorism charges of MDC-T treasurer Roy Bennett. They contributed nine of the 13 stories that appeared in all the media on this topic.

Fig 1: The media's most popular stories

Media	Sanctions debate	Indigenisation policy	Mugabe's birthday	Constitutional reforms	National reconciliation
Public media	66	19	42	10	4
Private media	23	15	5	18	7
Total	89	34	49	28	11

ZANU PF youth demo revives hostilities

THE European Union's decision to extend sanctions for another year continued to provoke an outpouring of condemnation in the government media demanding that the Prime Minister and his party call for them to be called off.

ZANU PF officials inside and out of government and their allies were quoted denouncing the "illegitimate Western economic sanctions" at every opportunity. Deputy Prime Minister, Arthur Mutambara's criticism of Tsvangirai for not denouncing sanctions continued to attract government media coverage.

But it was the ZANU PF youth demonstration outside the American Embassy threatening Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai with unspecified retribution if he failed to call off the sanctions within three weeks that breathed new life into the government's media's publicity for the cause. These media reported the demo and ZANU PF's defence of the action but avoided exploring its likely effects on the unity government.

The Herald & Chronicle (25 & 27/2) simply reported ZANU PF youths as having issued an "**ultimatum**" to Tsvangirai to call for the removal of sanctions by March 24 or "**risk action from the youths of Zimbabwe**".

Sanctions was also the most popular story with the private media. But they focused on commentators' efforts to discredit ZANU PF's allegations that the country was suffering from full Western economic sanctions.

The private media also viewed ZANU PF's threats, including the comments of deputy youth secretary Edwin Chakanyuka that "**if the demonstrations don't work we will do what we did in June 2008**" (*The Standard*, 28/2), and renewed state media insults against the MDC-T, as evidence of widening divisions within the coalition and undermining national reconciliation.

Indigenization regulations a legal reality

DURING the week the parliamentary watchdog, *Veritas* (22/2), managed to do what all the media have failed to achieve in the ongoing war of words over the government's controversial private enterprise indigenization regulations: To provide a definitive explanation about their legal status.

While the official media mainly acted as platforms for the ZANU PF arm of government in defending the law (reflected by 11 of the 12 stories they carried on the subject), there has been little effort to give a dispassionately informed analysis about the legal status of the regulations themselves. Most of the private media's stories focused on the negative effects of such regulations and the MDC-T's claim that they could not be enforced.

But according to the *Veritas* report, the indigenisation regulations were properly promulgated in terms of Section 21 of the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act and will remain part of Zimbabwean law "**until they are properly repealed by another statutory instrument gazetted by the Minister of Youth and National Development and Economic Empowerment**".

As a result, Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's statement dismissing the regulations as "**null and void**" on the grounds that neither he nor Cabinet had been consulted, as required by the Global Political Agreement before being

gazetted, was not legally accurate because Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere had no legal obligation to do so.

Similarly, Tsvangirai's assurances that people would not be punished if they disobeyed the regulations was "**legally invalid**" since he had no power to "**exempt anyone from the law**".

Said Veritas: ***There is nothing in Section 21 of the Act obliging the minister to consult the Prime Minister or President before making the regulations; all he has to do is to consult an advisory body called the National Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Board.***"

And although it was "general practice" for all key regulations to be submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Legislation, including consideration by Cabinet, adds Veritas, this was "**merely practice and not a legal obligation**".

Said the report: ***The problem is that the Act, passed when ZANU PF had a majority in Parliament, gives the Minister inordinately broad powers to make regulations, and he has exercised them to the full at a time that is most unpropitious for the recovery of the economy and damaging to the inclusive government.***"

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

The media published seven incidents of political violence and intimidation. They included:

- An alleged attack on six ZANU PF youths by suspected MDC-T supporters in Epworth (*The Herald*, 23/2).
- The hounding of General Agriculture and Plantation Workers' Union (GAPWUZ) secretary-general Gertrude Hambira and the raid on her organisation's offices in Harare by state security agents over the publication of a report exposing violations of farm workers' rights under ZANU PF's violent land reform programme (*ZimOnline*, *The Standard & Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 27 & 28/2); and
- Alleged death threats against ZimRights director Okay Machisa by unidentified people (*Studio 7 & The Zimbabwean*, 25/2).

THE MEDIA'S LOUDEST VOICES

ZANU PF officials remained the government media's favourite source in this week's topical issues compared to their MDC counterparts. (See Fig. 2).

The private Press and online agencies tended to balance opinion of the two groups, although private radio stations discriminated against ZANU PF sources by largely ignoring their contributions. However, all the private media gave widespread publicity to independent voices commenting on problems affecting the coalition.

Fig 2: Most quoted groups in the media

Media	Govt	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M	Alternative	Business
Government	13	90	10	5	3	4

media						
Private media	3	15	20	3	41	1

T-shirt TV presenters boost Birthday Boy's image

FOR the second consecutive week President Mugabe was the most quoted individual in the government media.

He was quoted 27 times, followed by ZANU PF's Rugare Gumbo (10), ZANU PF ministers Olivia Muchena (seven) and Saviour Kasukuwere (four), and MDC-T's Douglas Mwonzora (six).

Mugabe was quoted mostly in the context of criticising the West for interfering in Zimbabwe's domestic affairs and defending ZANU PF's policies such as its indigenization programme. Kasukuwere and Muchena were mostly quoted defending indigenization, while Copac co-chairman Mwonzora commented on constitutional reforms.

In fact, not only was Mugabe's voice the most heard in the official media, TV presenters (numbering at least 10) tried to ensure he was also the most visible by wearing T-Shirts bearing his portrait when presenting the three evening news bulletins leading up to his lavish birthday bash on February 27, in defiance of all professional journalistic practice. MMPZ waits to see whether the news presenters will also, in the spirit of Article 19d of the GPA that demands ***"balanced and fair media coverage"*** to all coalition partners, wear T-shirts emblazoned with Tsvangirai's picture when he celebrates his birthday later this month.

Kasukuwere and lawyer Beatrice Mtetwa were the most quoted voices in the private media. They were quoted 10 times. Nine of Mtetwa's comments appeared in online agencies. Kasukuwere was quoted justifying the government's indigenization policy, while Mtetwa was giving updates on Bennett's trial. Analyst Eldred Masunungure and MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa came second (each quoted four times) discussing problems bedevilling the coalition government.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"The debate around indigenization is dead... We are not about to re-open the debate. It is law now..." – Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere (*New Zimbabwe.com* & *The Standard*, 26 & 28/2).

"I am not interested in investing in Zimbabwe at the moment until things normalise. Neither will I hazard sending my investors to Zimbabwe under the current circumstances. It is not proper to do so and it does not make

business sense at all” - Louis Venter, representative of Anglo-Rand Financial Services (*The Standard* 28/2)

Ends/

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