

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday March 9th - Sunday March 14th 2010
Weekly Media Review 2010-9

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THE WEEK'S TOP STORIES

NEWS of South African President Jacob Zuma's visit to persuade Zimbabwe's coalition parties to resolve the increasing number of disputes within the alliance dominated the private media's coverage of the widely reported power-sharing quarrels during the week.

The government media however, censored news of Zuma's visit until March 15, a day before his arrival. Their reports on power-sharing emphasized ZANU PF's position that sanctions were the only outstanding issue under the Global Political Agreement (GPA); downplayed divisions in the coalition and discredited MDC concerns over the ZANU PF arm of government's unilateral actions. Although ZANU PF's controversial indigenization policy and constitutional reform issues remained topical, reports warning of imminent food shortages and the precarious state of the country's health delivery system also began to attract the media's attention. See Fig. 1.

Fig 1: Popular stories in the media

Media	Power sharing issues	Health & sanitation	Food security	Indigenization policy	Constitutional reform programme	Chiadzwa diamond mining
Public media	65	29	15	32	35	6
Private media	38	12	10	16	13	7
Total	103	41	25	48	48	13

State media distorts news of Zuma's visit

THE government media's deliberate blackout on news of the visit to Zimbabwe by South African President Jacob Zuma and the distortion of the purpose of his visit, once again exposed them as dishonest and unreliable sources of news.

Instead of reporting Zuma's visit as a direct consequence of the coalition's failure to resolve their power-sharing disputes, or as having been partly prompted by an appeal from the main MDC formation for the SADC facilitator's intervention, *The Herald*, (15/3) (and ZBC the same evening) gave prominence to SA deputy ambassador Mlulami Singapi saying that although the visit was aimed at **"all-around facilitation of the completion"** of outstanding issues under the GPA, Zuma was also coming as **"a brother visiting his brothers"**.

Even on Zuma's arrival, *The Herald* (18/3) reported that he had **"jetted into Zimbabwe...to review progress a month after the inclusive Government celebrated its first anniversary"**, and then quoted an "official" source saying, **"There is a general understanding that all issues on the GPA have been dealt with."** In order to promote this misinformation, the paper then censored news that Zuma had also met Zimbabwe's Attorney-General, the Governor of the Reserve Bank and the MDC-T's deputy agriculture minister, all of whom have been long-standing sources of dispute.

Earlier, *The Herald's* Eagle Eye columnist (13/3) dismissed MDC concerns over President Mugabe's unilateral seizure of powers from MDC-run ministries on the grounds that he was empowered to do so, but ignored the fact that he had also violated Article XX (p) of the GPA, which requires him to "consult" his coalition partners before allocating ministerial portfolios.

In contrast, the private media continued to report Mugabe's unilateral actions as having deepened divisions in the coalition; speculated that Zuma was likely to reiterate his suggestion for early elections as a way of resolving the dispute; and quoted commentators defending decisions by the IMF, Switzerland, Britain and America to extend sanctions against ZANU PF and withhold support for Zimbabwe until the arm of government under ZANU PF control honoured its obligations under the GPA.

Hunger and disease stalk the nation

THE government media carried a number of informative and disturbing reports about the country's precarious health delivery system despite efforts by the inclusive government to revive it.

They cited as evidence fresh outbreaks of typhoid and diarrhoea and the continuing measles epidemic and reported health officials blaming persistent water shortages and poor sanitation in many urban centres.

The Herald (10 & 12/3) & ZTV (14/3, 8pm) reported five people dying from typhoid in Mabvuku, while the *Sunday News* (14/3) reported at least 75 children as having died from measles since its outbreak last September, citing government and council officials.

The *Chronicle's* front-page lead story: *Hunger looms in Mat South* (9/2) reported the province facing serious food shortages and in need of **"over 9,000 tonnes of food aid per month"**, while ZTV (8 & 13/3, 8pm) reported people in Mashonaland Central and Manicaland provinces as **"facing starvation due to poor rains"**, citing preliminary results of government's crop assessment.

Similar stories also appeared in the private media quoting preliminary food assessment results by international relief agencies, local NGOs and independent farmer organizations.

Constitutional reform scandalized

NEWS that the parliamentary constitutional consultative outreach programme would finally begin on April 10 was smuggled into the public domain in a front-page lead story in *The Saturday Herald* (13/3) publicizing ZANU PF's suggestion for a two-term limit to the tenure of the presidency that avoided discussing whether previous terms should be counted.

It was one of several stories in which the government media publicized ZANU PF's own outreach activities and promoted its position on selective constitutional issues.

The next day *The Sunday Mail* seized on the MDC-T's official position paper affording equal rights to minorities, including gays and lesbians, to scandalize this basic democratic right as anathema to African culture. Under its page-one lead headline: *'Gay Rights Furore!'* it predicted a clash between the MDC-T and ZANU PF, whose thematic talking points on the constitution states that **"the constitution should specifically outlaw homosexuality, lesbianism, sodomy etc."**

It reported ZANU PF's paper stating that same-sex marriages should not be allowed **"...as this is taboo in African culture..."** The newspaper claimed the Kariba Draft was **"also clear and straightforward on gay rights"** without attempting to make a distinction between same-sex marriage and the right to personal sexual activity. While the paper also reported various international covenants protecting the privacy of individuals, it also quoted an unidentified "human rights activist" criticizing the National Constitutional

Assembly's "pro-gay" position, saying it was afraid of incurring **"the full wrath of Zimbabweans who are vehemently opposed to homosexuality..."**

Mature, dispassionate opinion could not be found on this important issue of human rights.

On less contentious issues *The Herald*, (12 & 13/3) and ZTV (9, 13 & 14/3, 8pm) quoted government officials and ordinary people calling for the protection of women's rights and those of children with disabilities.

A November referendum?

The private media continued to report ZANU PF coercing Zimbabweans to support its views on a new constitution (SW Radio Africa, 12/2 & *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*, 14/3) and quoted constitutional committee (COPAC) co-chairpersons confirming the outreach programme would begin in early April and that the referendum could be held in November following pledges of funding by donors (*ZimOnline* & Studio 7, 9 & 13/3).

Indigenization debate continues

The official media continued to promote ZANU PF's indigenization regulations, citing ZANU PF, black empowerment organizations and government officials.

This was reflected in 27 of their 32 stories on the matter.

The remaining five quoted Zimbabweans expressing reservations on the regulations.

The Herald (12/3) reported Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai as defending the regulations. But it did not explain what he really meant when it reported him telling a business symposium the regulations **"promote Zimbabwean interests and must not scare away foreign investors"**.

"The idea was not to criminalise foreign investment," the paper reported him as saying.

A *Chronicle* report: *Bulawayo residents suspicious of Indigenization Act* (13/3) and a *Sunday News* story quoted Zimbabweans' criticizing the regulations as retrogressive during a public hearing on indigenization regulations, organized by the parliamentary portfolio committee on Budget, Finance and Investment Promotion in Bulawayo.

The private media continued publicize diverse views on the indigenization regulations that included follow-up stories on the private radio stations (SW Radio Africa and Studio 7).

THE MEDIA'S MOST POPULAR SOURCES

The government media's sourcing continued to favour ZANU PF (See Fig. 2). Party sources were quoted more than twice as much as its MDC partners. While the government media appeared to have sought a variety of independent views on power-sharing, constitutional reform, indigenization laws and Chiadzwa's controversial diamonds, these were mostly in the context of defending ZANU PF's position.

Individually, President Mugabe continued to attract most attention in the government media.

He was quoted 17 times, followed by Indigenization Minister Saviour Kasukuwere (13); Harare City Council's health services director Stanley Mungofa (nine); Foreign Affairs Minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi (eight) and Copac co-chairman Edward Mkhosi (seven).

Mugabe was quoted defending ZANU PF's policies and downplaying friction in the inclusive government. Mungofa was quoted commenting on the typhoid outbreak, while Mumbengegwi appeared criticizing the West for extending sanctions against ZANU PF. Mkhosi was quoted giving updates on the constitutional reform programme.

Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and MDC-T secretary-general Tendai Biti were the most quoted in the private media (12 times each).

They were followed by MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa; Kasukuwere; Jacob Zuma and the IMF's Dominique Strauss-Khan, who were each quoted five times.

Tsvangirai and Chamisa were mostly quoted criticizing ZANU PF's unilateral actions, while Biti was quoted telling Zimbabweans not to expect "outside help" anymore. Zuma appeared commenting on Zimbabwe's inter-party talks and Strauss-Khan on the IMF's decision to withhold support for Zimbabwe until the political situation improved.

Fig 2: Most quoted voices

Media	Govt	ZANU PF	MDC-T	MDC-M	Alternative	Foreign diplomats
Public media	23	89	30	11	14	22
Private media	3	15	38	6	58	30

Stranger than fiction

THE prominent publicity *The Herald* (12/3) gave to comments by an unnamed American **“military expert”** criticizing Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai for suggesting that SADC and AU “peacekeepers” would be needed to monitor any elections before the promulgation of a constitution guaranteeing their integrity, once again exposed the paper’s biased agenda of attempting to discredit the MDC-T leader at every opportunity. It gave this so-called “news” undeserved front-page lead status ahead of much more important news about Finance Minister Tendai Biti releasing \$100 million to rescue some of Zimbabwe’s most dilapidated essential infrastructure.

The paper’s feeble excuse for not identifying the “military expert” **“for diplomatic reasons”** when he was allegedly addressing journalists at the American Embassy, and their failure to explain the circumstances of his address, fuelled suspicion that he was selectively quoted out of context to promote the impression that even the West disagreed with the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, *The Zimbabwean On Sunday*’s story, ‘MDC Media Blackout’, (14/2) also raised more questions than answers. It claimed, without substantiation, that state media editors had been summoned to a meeting in Harare **“last week”** where they were instructed to censor all MDC activities except those portraying the party in negative light. Although this is quite likely to have been a true tale and was based on one **“frustrated editor who attended the meeting”** and another **“source who preferred anonymity...”**, it did not disclose who convened the meeting, where it took place, or who issued the instructions.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“The cost of this crisis to the people of Zimbabwe is becoming too great to bear. Despite our patience, the talks to resolve the outstanding issues...have achieved no significant results and thus I am now scheduling urgent consultations with the guarantors of the GPA.” – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai (SW Radio Africa & Studio 7, 11/3).

End/

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