

## **WOMEN IN POLITICS SUPPORT UNIT**

### **ANALYSIS OF COVERAGE OF WOMEN POLITICIANS BY THE PRINT MEDIA IN ZIMBABWE**

**By Tsitsi Matekaire, Deputy Director/Researcher**

#### **Introduction**

The media plays a significant role in determining how women in politics and decision-making are viewed and perceived by society in general. The media not only plays an important role in shaping the values of society but also reflects those values. Armstrong and Hlapo said, "Many of the attitudes that constrain women in their domestic, economic and social roles are firmly grounded in traditional society and efforts to change the situation of women should imply changes in society as a whole". The media is a chronicler of events, an informer, an educator, a transformative space and a tool to change society. It has the capacity to make a very positive contribution towards social change. Women in politics play a vital role in ensuring the democratic governance of this country and therefore their contribution to this processes need to be analyzed in the appropriate context by the media. Women's issues as raised by the women politicians show the democratic participation of the Zimbabwean woman. There cannot be a real democracy if the voices and issues of 51% of the country's population are ignored or sidelined.

In order to conduct a systematic analysis of how women are covered in the media, Women in Politics Support Unit, WiPSU, initiated an internal data capturing process where a daily monitoring of newspapers would be conducted and any article on women Parliamentarians and councilors would be collected. The articles are analyzed to give an overview of how women are portrayed and the implications of that portrayal on women and women's issues in Zimbabwe.

This media analysis will assist in determining whether or not women's voices and issues are articulated to the public as matters of importance. It can also be used as a basis for assessing what could be done to ensure that women's voices and women's issues are regarded as important.

#### **Scope of this Analysis**

The media monitoring initiative covered the local daily and weekly newspapers from both the independent and state media. The newspapers are the Herald, the Daily News, the Daily Mirror, the Sunday Mail, the Weekly Standard, the Independent, the Financial Gazette, and the Weekly Tribune. The variety of papers would make it possible to analyze the coverage from a comprehensive perspective. Great care and effort were taken such that the margin of error is really negligible. This analysis covered the period September to December 2002.

In order for a report to qualify it has to have reference to a particular woman in elected public office. This means a woman Parliamentarian or Councilor. It would not be adequate for an article to merely refer to Parliamentarians or Councilors without linking it to a particular woman or women specifically. An article covering a woman in her capacity as Minister or Governor would qualify because in the current Constitutional framework, Ministers and Governors are members of Parliament. In some cases women Ministers are in fact elected parliamentarians. These articles would also assist in determining if women get more coverage as Ministers or Governor as compared to their capacity as Members of Parliament or Council.

## General Overview of Coverage

Below is a statistical analysis of the coverage:

- A total of 20 articles were published in the 4 months
- 17 articles covered Members of Parliament including the Ministers/ Deputy Minister and the Governor
- 3 articles covered women Councilors
- 9 out of the 16 Members of Parliament were covered
- 3 out of the 46 urban women councilors were covered

The women parliamentarians can be divided into four broad categories, i.e. Ministers and Deputy Minister, the Governor, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament and Members of Parliament who do not hold another post. The statistical information on the coverage in relation to these broad categories is as follows:

- 1 of the 17 articles referred to the Deputy Speaker
- 7 of the 17 articles referred to women Ministers and the Deputy Minister in their official capacity
- 6 of the articles referred to the Governor
- 4 of the 17 articles referred to Members of Parliament who do not hold another portfolio
- 2 of the 3 articles on women councilors covered the Deputy Mayors of Harare and Bulawayo respectively.

The statistical information above leads to a number of conclusions. The Governor of Manicaland, Oppah Muchinguri, is the most newsworthy woman politician. She is the only woman Governor in Zimbabwe. 33% of all the articles published involved her. 5 of the articles were on issues she dealt with in her capacity as the Manicaland Governor. The second most newsworthy group are the women Ministers and the Deputy Minister. Again, the articles were of the women in their official capacity. However, the coverage of women Ministers is quite low considering that Zimbabwe has 4 Ministers and 1 Deputy Minister. There was an article on at least each of them but the most covered woman Minister is Flora Bhuka, the Minister of State for the Land Reform Programme who is also the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus. This is probably due to the fact that the land reform process is a top government agenda and therefore a topical issue in the political, social and economic sectors. The media does not appear to regard women Councilors as newsworthy because only 3 articles referred to them.

One positive issue was the use of photographs by the newspapers. Of the 21 reports, 19 of them had photographs of the women concerned. A photograph in a newspaper makes an article more eye-catching and appealing to the reader. It also gives a face and profile of the person concerned.

The reports' focus was wide and varied. The women were covered in relation to their official duties, (this relates more to the Ministers and the Governor), in relation to their constituency work, in Parliamentary Debates, in their personal lives, and in relation to their political parties. One report focused on a 'clash' between two of the women politicians.

Not all the newspapers cited above published reports on the women politicians. The breakdown of the reports according to the papers is:

- The Daily News, published 11 out of 20, i.e. 55%
- The Daily Mirror published 7 out of 20, i.e. 35%
- The Herald published 1 out of 20, i.e. 5%
- The Weekend Tribune Published 1 out of 20, i.e. 5%

There is a great challenge for the papers to report more on women and for those who have not to question their own internal policies and their views on women and their political participation. Even for the Daily News the figures are not impressive because it means they published an average of only 3 articles on women in politics and decision making a month. Women's issues are a long way to go before they are realized to be of national importance.

### **Reports on Women Politicians' Official Work**

The reports feature mainly the Governor, the Ministers and Deputy Minister. There are two articles each on the women Parliamentarians without portfolio and the Deputy Mayors. They are summarized below:

1. *The Deputy Speaker's reading out of a ruling that the opposition chief whip in Parliament had been found in contempt of Parliament. Daily News, 11 October.*

Whilst the story carries pictures of both the Deputy Speaker and the opposition chief whip, it only makes a passing reference to the fact that the Deputy Speaker read out the ruling. Otherwise, the story is really about the chief whip's behavior that resulted in him being charged with contempt of Parliament.

2. *The Minister of State, Science and Technology, Dr. Olivia Muchena calls on the business community to invest in research and technological development. The Herald, 14 October.*

The Minister made the call in order that there be a critical mass of scientific and technological skills for the advancement of agriculture and industry. The article explained that the call was in line with government policy promulgated in June 2002 that seeks to coordinate all initiatives in this field and supervise the implementation of the policy as well as develop a regulatory framework. The report carried a picture of the Minister.

3. *The Minister of State for the Land Reform Programme, Flora Bhuka calling for the establishment of a revolving fund to facilitate the acquisition of agricultural inputs to cater for the new farmers. The Daily Mirror, 23 September.*

The Minister pointed out that the District Development Fund could be used to acquire the requisite equipment such as discs, trailers and combined harvesters. She expressed that her Ministry would provide training courses to the new farmers so that they equip themselves with farming skills and ultimately produce better yields. The report carried a picture of the Minister.

4. *Rural farmers plead with the Minister for Rural Development and Water Resources, Joyce Mujuru to reduce electricity costs. The Daily News, 23 October.*

The article alleged that some farmers in Masvingo had pleaded with the Minister to reduce the costs of electricity on the basis that they could not afford the water and electricity charges.

5. *The Governor for Manicaland Oppah Muchinguri suspends preferential food distribution to the disabled amid allegations of abuse of the facility. The Daily Mirror, 18 December.*

The move was allegedly taken to ensure that everyone had a fair share of the scarce food supplies

6. *The Governor of Manicaland lambasted the Police and traditional leaders for allowing corruption to take place at food distribution points in the Province. The Daily Mirror, 10 December and the Daily News, 9 December.*

The Minister castigated officials for practicing corruption in the distribution of food and thus disadvantaging the public. Two newspapers carried the story.

7. *Tourism improves in Manicaland. -Daily Mirror, 12 November.*

The story carried a picture of the Governor of Manicaland. The article gave information on the improvement of tourism in the Province. However, the story did not, besides the picture of the Governor, show the link between her and the improvement.

8. *Villagers blame their MP, Shiva Mahopac over incomplete road project. -Daily News. The Daily News, 13 December.*

The Deputy Minister/ MP explained that the project remained incomplete because the government had not allocated funds for its completion.

9. *Flora Bhuka, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus states that women Parliamentarians were working together for the advancement of women-Daily Mirror, 8 November.*

The story quoted Flora Bhuka saying that women Parliamentarians were putting aside their political differences to raise the status of women in Zimbabwe. The Deputy chair of the Caucus concurred with her.

10. *Trudy Stevenson on the hiring of foreigners in the health delivery system. The Daily News, 17 October.*

The Member of Parliament called for better wages for locals instead of employing foreigners who would do a disservice to the population especially women. This was in light of reports that Cuban doctors in Bulawayo were removing women's wombs.

11. *Priscilla Misihairambwi appointed Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee. The Weekend Tribune, 14-15 September.*

The report acknowledged the appointment of the MP making her one of the two women MPs to chair parliamentary committees in the current Parliament.

12. *Deputy Mayor of Harare, Sekesai Makwavarara receives 12 ambulances on behalf of the City from a local manufacturer. The Daily News, 16 October.*

The story narrated a hand over ceremony officiated by the Deputy Mayor

13. *Deputy Mayor of Bulawayo, Margaret Sibanda, takes part in a Clean Up Campaign. The Daily News, 9 October. .*

The newspaper showed a picture, which was not accompanied by a report.

14. *Councilor Monica Chigudu appointed alderman for Masvingo. The Daily Mirror, December*

She becomes the first woman alderman for the City of Masvingo.

In light of the fact that Zimbabwe has 16 women Parliamentarians, (including the Ministers/Deputy Minister and the Governor), and 45 urban women Councilors, the 14 media reports over a period of 4 months shows that there is very little coverage of women's voices and ultimately women's issues. The Minister responsible for Small and Medium Enterprises, Sithembiso Nyoni, was not covered in her official capacity during the same period. This results in the dilution of the voice of women politicians as a sector. There is need for the media fraternity to capture more often the voices of women politicians who are not necessarily Ministers.

Notwithstanding the limitation referred to above the quality of the reports is quite impressive. The reports concerning the Governor and Ministers/ Deputy Minister captured the policy issues involved and how the woman sought to tackle the issues. The reports on Governor Muchinguri, Minister Bhuka and Minister Muchena speak to this. The seriousness of the issues is well captured and the reader will begin to appreciate the role of women in decision-making positions and processes. Governor Muchinguri, for example, was very clear that she abhorred corruption in food distribution and would take necessary steps to ensure its eradication. Food distribution is currently a sensitive issue in Zimbabwe and the fact that she was able to talk about it shows her capabilities as a leader. The women were portrayed as women who know what they are talking about and have a plan on how to achieve it. This is instrumental in raising the confidence of the public in their capabilities.

The articles on the villagers complaining about the high costs of electricity and the improvement of tourism in Manicaland to some extent portray the manipulative nature of the media. Both stories made no effort to link the Minister and Governor respectively to the issues raised in the reports. No comment was sought from the women concerned. Thus, the media can destroy the credibility of a leader without giving her a chance to say her side of the story.

Surprisingly, there was only one article on women Parliamentarians contributions to debates in the House. This is the report on Trudy Stevenson's comments on the Cuban doctors, which she made during the report of the Portfolio Committee on Health and Child Welfare on Health Sector Reforms. The fact that the media was able to capture this is an indication that women Parliamentarians are taking women's issues to the national agenda, thus linking women to the gender agenda. It also highlights the importance of women to be part of these processes so that women's issues are articulated. Women Parliamentarians are contributing on women's issues, as can be seen in the Parliamentary Hansard. The fact that a lot of these issues are not reported on is an indication that the issues are not given priority by the media.

The report on a constituency complaining that the road project was still incomplete demonstrates the high expectation of constituencies on their MPs to deliver. It also shows the need for communities to be educated on how MPs work so that they do not make demands that the MP on her own will not be able to deliver.

The fact that there were only two reports that featured the work of women councilors is an indication that women councilors are not considered to be at the center of national debates. This is unlike the numerous stories that were published on the conflicts between the City of Harare as a council and the Minister of Local Government and general problems surrounding both urban and rural councils. It was however impressive that the media was able to capture the Deputy Mayor of Harare in a serious manner and also portray her as a woman how could articulate issues of concern at local government level.

### **Women in their Political Parties**

It is important that women in politics be recognized and appreciated as politicians and be seen to be playing a role in the politics of the day, either in their constituencies or in their political parties. This will be useful in assessing the kind of politics that women are involved in and to determine the influence they have in the policy of political parties. There were three reports on the involvement of women MPs in the election processes. In September the country ran the rural district council elections throughout the country.

The reports are summarized as follows:

1. *The ruling party wins 153 of the 158 contested rural district council seats in Manicaland Province, Daily Mirror, 3 October.*

Without making any reference to the role of the Governor, the story had a picture of her but the story was about the ruling party winning the rural elections in her Province.

2. *MP for Makokoba, Thokozane Khupe happy that her party had won the Council by-elections. Daily News, 1 October.*

The story talked about how the woman MP had confidence that the people of Bulawayo had voted for the opposition party members in the City's by-elections.

These two reports show that women politicians also have a say in the election processes. However, the stories would have been more powerful if they were more informative on the women's views of the election processes. The story on the Manicaland Governor, Oppah Muchinguri, is an example of this. It does not say what role she played in the election campaigns yet it carries a photograph of her. Women are the majority of voters and are usually responsible for the campaigns of the males in their parties. It is important for their role in elections to be highlighted and they be encouraged to stand for office. Women have also been relegated to the sidelines in the politics of their own parties. The media can play a significant role in uplifting their status by reporting more positively on them.

### **Women as Victims of Violence**

Public and politically motivated violence has been on the increase in Zimbabwe since the time of the Parliamentary elections in 2000. Women too have suffered violence but it has often gone un-reported. Violence is a hindrance to women's participation in politics either as political leaders or as citizens. Women in elected office have also suffered violence. There was just one article on this issue summarized below:

1. *Hilda Mafudze, MP for Mhondoro subjected to violent treatment, Daily News, 16 September.*

The report alleged that Hilda Mafudze had been subjected to violent treatment by a group of people from one of the political parties at the nomination court in Chegutu during the run up to the rural district council elections. She was reported as saying she had to lock herself in her vehicle and that her detention had led to members of her party failing to register for the elections.

Her experience is an example of the violence that women in elected office face in the political arena. In the past three years the political scene has been wrought with violence. Women have been victims of this politically motivated violence but in most cases the matters go unreported.

### **Women Portrayed as Perpetrators of Violence**

There was one article published on this issue.

1. *Governor allegedly chases Mutasa MP from function. Daily News, 2 October.*

The story reported that the Governor for Manicaland had chased away Evelyn Masaiti, the MP for Mutasa from a function that was held in the MP's constituency. The Governor denied the allegations stating that on that day she had been actually in Harare attending Parliament.

There have been misconceptions and stereotypes in our society that women do not support each other. The story reinforced those stereotypes. It gave the impression that women cannot work amicably especially if they are from different political parties. This is somehow refuted by the report referred to earlier where the Chairperson. A portrayal of women supposedly fighting as enemies of each other reduces public confidence in women as leaders.

## Profiling of Women Politicians

Only one story was published on women politicians and their social life.

*1. Sithembiso Nyoni- A fighter for rural folk, the Daily News, 7 September.*  
WiPSU

Sithembiso Nyoni, the Minister for the Informal Sector and non-constituency MP was profiled in the report. Her life and family were highlighted.

The story was carried in the Children's Page of the Daily News. This can lead to two conclusions: that there is a deliberate effort to ensure that the younger generation is aware of prominent people in our society or that the story is not considered serious enough for the more mature reader. However, on a positive note the story highlights the life and experience of a woman politician and should be encouraged even for the older and more serious readership.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the media reports show that there is need for a lot of work to be done for women politicians to be reported on more often and in a positive manner that will bring out the fact that they are able and effective leaders. The challenge lies with the media to begin to recognize women politicians, their voices, their contributions in decision-making, their highlighting of women's issues and the work they are doing in their capacities as representatives of communities. There is need to highlight the women Councilors and the nature of women's political participation, which is greater at local government level.

The media houses should not use the current polarization in our society to divide women but to accurately report on women politicians and women's issues. It is a great challenge to the media houses in this country.