



On ZBC

March 2013

“Eye on ZBC” is a monthly summary of how the public broadcaster presented pertinent political and socio-economic issues, especially those relating to the activities of the coalition government, ahead of the constitutional referendum and elections. It will also assess how the broadcaster is monitoring adherence to the Global Political Agreement signed by the country’s three main political parties in September 2008. It is a product of the Media Monitoring Project, Zimbabwe.

SUMMARY

THE national broadcaster, ZBC, carried 254 news reports on various national issues in the period under review.

The most popular issue was Zimbabwe’s constitution-making process, which received coverage in 72 stories.

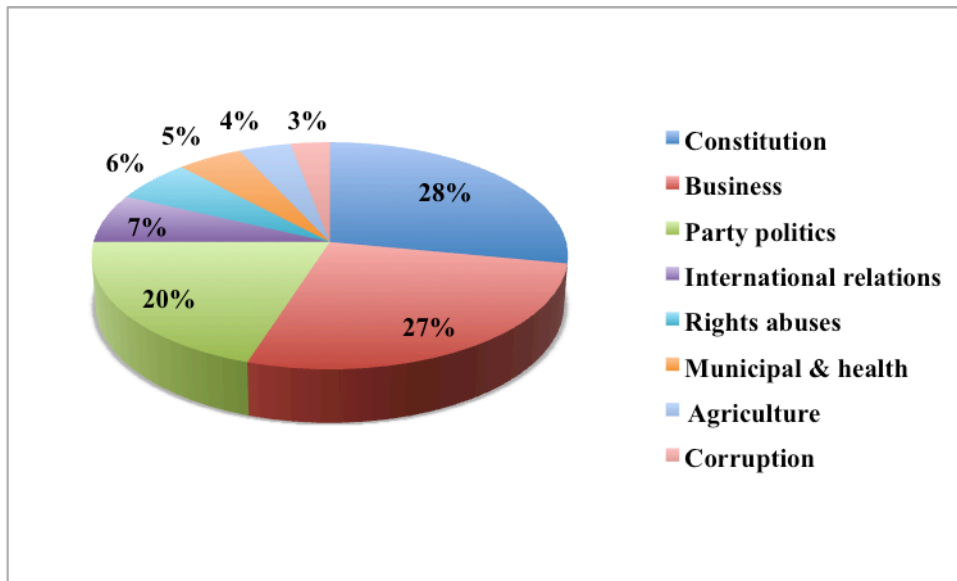
Business news also competed for attention, coming a close second with 68 stories.

ZBC devoted 51 reports to party activities of the three coalition partners. Of the 51 stories, 21 (41%) were on President Mugabe’s birthday celebrations, whose main event was held in Glendale. Twenty-three (45%) were on ZANU PF’s campaign activities, while the remaining seven (14%) were on the two MDC formations [MDC-T (five) and MDC-N (two)].

The state broadcaster’s disproportionate coverage of the political activities of the parties forming the inclusive government, which clearly favoured the ZANU PF arm of government, violates section 19 (d) of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) that stipulates equitable coverage of the coalition parties’ “legitimate” activities.

Other issues that also competed for ZBC’s attention included international relations (18) human rights issues (15); health and municipal issues (14); agriculture and food security (nine) and corruption (seven). See Fig 1.

Fig: 1 Breakdown of story distribution on ZBC



BUSINESS NEWS

Zim's economic woes grab the headlines

REPORTS on the poor state of Zimbabwe's economy and efforts being made to turn the situation around received significant attention on the national broadcaster, ZBC, in the month.

Among the indicators of economic stress were reports of labour unrest in the civil service and parastatals; increase in the cost of fuel, which also triggered other hikes across other sectors of the economy; poor performance of state enterprises, and cash-flow problems at some tobacco auction floors in Harare.

Although ZBC gave widespread coverage to Zimbabwe's economic ills, it did not holistically address the causes of this poor state or provide practical solutions to address the situation.

Debate on the matter was restricted to promoting the ZANU PF arm of government's sentiment blaming 'illegal' Western sanctions for the economic tailspin, while touting the party's crafted policies such as the controversial black empowerment programme and the Look East policy as the antidote to the problem.

For example, while the national broadcaster presented the indigenization programme as a panacea for economic growth, it did not balance this with concerns by various stakeholders about the way the programme is being implemented, which they feel discourages investor confidence.

In one report, ZTV (4/3, 8pm) simply reported "**economic activists**"

commending Mugabe for insisting that Zimbabweans should form consortiums to wholly control the economy.

Among the activists were ZANU PF Director in the Department of Indigenisation and Empowerment Kurai Masenyama and Upfumi Kuvadiki Communications Manager Privilege Gwiba, who were reported saying the empowerment drive ***“is just the first step towards achieving 100% shareholding by indigenous Zimbabweans in blue-chip companies”***.

This followed Mugabe’s appeal for ***“indigenous people”*** to organize themselves into groups and form companies to participate fully in the mainstream economy (ZTV, 4/3, 8pm).

He made this call while speaking at the 21st February Movement celebrations in Bindura on March 2nd. The President reiterated that he wanted to see Zimbabweans being owners of the means of production than being mere workers.

In another, ZTV (9/3, 8pm) reported Indigenisation Minister Saviour Kasukuwere repeating his threats that ***“no bank will be spared under the indigenization programme”***.

ZBC’s coverage of the cost of living and its effects on ordinary Zimbabweans was more considered. It blamed the rise in the cost of public transport and other goods and services on the recent fuel hike by government, reportedly effected as a way of raising money for forthcoming harmonized elections (ZBC, 11/3, 8pm).

The national broadcaster, for example, carried critical reports on the way public transport operators had allegedly taken advantage of the increase in the price of fuel to fleece the commuting public.

In one of the reports, ZTV (29/3, 8pm) reported rural and urban commuters appealing to government to ***“stop the wanton increase of fares by unscrupulous bus operators”***, with rural commuters accusing transport operators of hiking fares just before the Easter holidays ***“to capitalize on desperate travellers”***.

The travellers appealed to the relevant authorities to ***“come to their rescue and put in place measures to curb the exorbitant fare increases which further erode their meagre incomes”*** (ZTV, 29/3, 8pm).

One of the travellers was quoted: ***“We are having transport problems because they have hiked fares. Some have trebled and we do not have such kind of money. We are saying government should look into the issue and even bring back ZUPCO buses”***.

The fares were reported to have doubled, with buses travelling to Gutu charging \$20 up from \$8, Bulawayo buses charging between \$15 and \$20, while those plying the Murehwa route had increased the fare from \$3 to \$8.

ZBC ignores alleged irregularities in referendum results

ZBC gave widespread coverage to the 'successful' holding of the referendum on March 16th, which drew Zimbabwe closer to the conclusion of the long-drawn constitution-making process.

However, it failed to scrutinize the administration of the vote itself and allegations of irregularities raised mostly by the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and Prime Minister Tsvangirai's MDC party.

According to figures released by ZEC's Chief Elections Officer, Lovemore Sekeramayi, 3 079 966 people voted for the adoption of the draft, a historic turnout, while 179 489 voted 'No'. A total of 56 627 ballots were rejected, bringing the total number of votes cast in the referendum to 3 316 083 (ZBC, 19/3, 8pm).

After ZEC's announcement of the results, which surprisingly showed an unexpected high turnout especially given the private media's depiction of massive voter apathy during vote casting, ZBC mostly responded by publicising congratulatory messages from a wide cross-section of Zimbabwean society, the region and the international community, endorsing the referendum as having been 'credible' and 'peaceful'.

The praise reportedly came from the US and Namibian Embassies; Zimbabwe's main parties; senior government officials; co-chairpersons of the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac); and some political analysts (ZBC, 19, 20 & 21/8, 8pm).

For example, there were no attempts by the national broadcaster to inform its audiences on how ZEC had administered the vote, including how the commission had conducted and managed post-voting procedures as a way to infuse transparency in national processes and ensure the citizenry is informed and empowered.

ZBC (20/3, 8pm) even censored allegations by NCA chairman Lovemore Madhuku that his organization did not recognize the referendum results on the grounds that the figures were "**doctored**" by ZEC. Madhuku made the claims during a news conference in Harare.

The national broadcaster also censored similar claims by MDC-T secretary-general Tendai Biti, who claimed that exit polls conducted by his party's polling agents indicate the referendum figures were "**tweaked**" by between 10 and 15% (the *Zimbabwe Independent*, 29/3).

Speaking at a public discussion hosted by the Sapes Trust in Harare, Biti alleged discrepancies between ZEC's figures and those collated by MDC-T agents, whom he claimed, "**covered all the polling stations nationally**".

Biti said that he was dismayed that some constituencies and districts recorded a higher voter turnout than the population ordinarily resident in the areas according to the last census statistics: "**We did not announce our own set of results out of respect for ZEC and (Justice) Rita Makarau but we are**

fairly convinced by our parallel processes” (the *Independent*, 29/3).

Notably, ZBC’s only interest on the NCA’s news conference – where the organisation made its claims that the referendum results had been **“doctored”** – was on the attack on Tsvangirai by Madhuku and other **“former members of an alliance that campaigned against the 2000 draft constitution together with the MDC”**. These included Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe Secretary General Raymond Majongwe, MDC 99 President Job Sikhala, and former Highfield MP Munyaradzi Gwisai.

The broadcaster (20/3, 8pm) widely reported Madhuku and company accusing Tsvangirai of **“betraying them”** by supporting the draft constitution. They also described the MDC-T leader as **“a sell-out”** who had even **“failed to please the party’s western masters who wanted him to achieve regime change”**. In addition, the group was reported calling for the immediate holding of harmonized elections, which they predicted would **“mark the fall of Mr Tsvangirai’s political career”** (ZBC, 20/3, 8pm).

Chihuri threatens NGOs

NEWS of Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri and other senior police officers warning civil society groups, particularly Zimbabwe Peace Project director Jestina Mukoko, against **“interfering”** with the country’s governance issues raised fresh doubts over the authorities’ political will to conduct elections in an enabling environment.

In one such incident, ZBC (7/3) passively reported Chihuri declaring that **“plots by NGOs and Western nations to destabilize African nations will never succeed”**. Chihuri said this during an event for a returning contingent of officers from UN mission abroad.

ZBC (7/3) reported the Police Commissioner-General accusing NGOs of **“working with hostile nations to achieve regime change in democratic nations”**. Chihuri also insisted that calls by NGOs for Zimbabwe to allow Western observers to observe its elections **“must never be entertained”**, adding that African nations **“can conduct their own elections and observe them without any fear or favour”**.

ZBC did not raise questions over Chihuri’s political utterances, which violate provisions in both the police charter and the country’s Constitution that prohibit public officials from being partisan in discharging their duties.

Neither did it seek comment from the NGOs so they could give their own side of the story.

Rather, the broadcaster allowed Chihuri to present Mukoko as a fugitive when it reported him at the same event issuing a public appeal for the human rights activist to hand herself over to the police to answer charges of **“operating a private voluntary organization without registration”** and **“contravening the Broadcasting Services Act Chapter 12:06”**.

Other senior police officials such as Superintendent Jeremiah Murenje and Assistant Commissioner Charity Charamba were also subsequently aired making further public appeals for Mukoko to surrender herself to the police (ZBC, 7 & 8/3, 8pm).

The ‘Eye on ZBC’ Report is produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Mobile: 0776 739 522 or Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw

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