



On ZBC

May 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 harmonized 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 146 news reports on various national issues in the period under review.

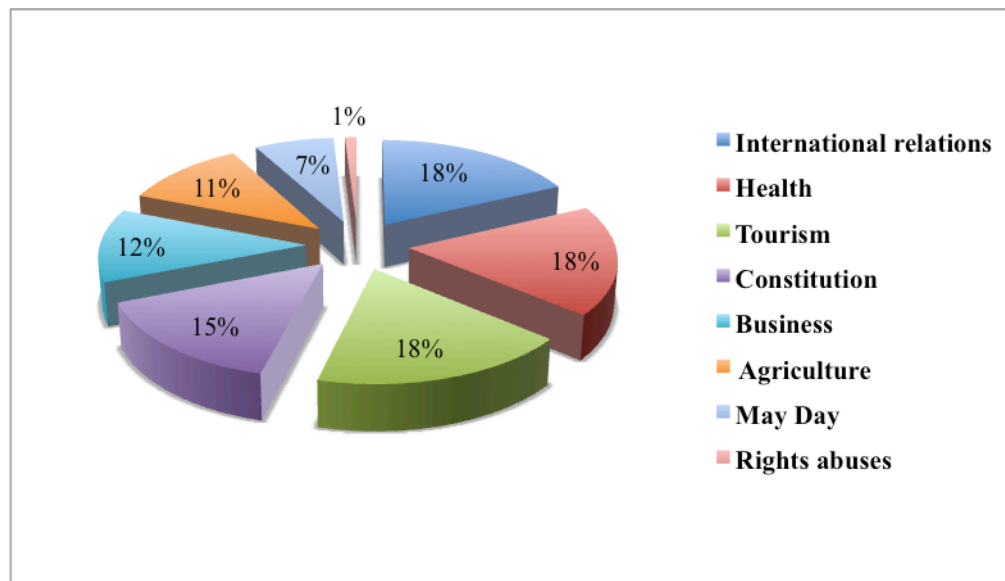
The most popular issues were international relations; health; and environment and tourism, which shared 26 reports apiece. These matters constituted 53% of ZBC’s topical stories.

The constitution-making process and preparations for harmonized elections closely followed, with 22 stories.

Business news (18), agriculture and food security (16), and May Day celebrations (10) also competed for ZBC’s attention.

But the national broadcaster abdicated its public service mandate by ignoring widespread reports of rights violations against a cross section of the Zimbabwean society that appeared in other media. The station only covered two incidents of rights abuses, all of which attributed the violence to members of Prime Minister Tsvangirai’s MDC party. See Fig. 1.

Fig: 1 Distribution of stories on ZBC



CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

ZBC hails signing of new constitution

THE signing of the new constitution of Zimbabwe by President Mugabe on May 22nd and its subsequent gazetting was the highlight of ZBC's coverage of the constitution-making process.

ZBC reported the President as having signed the document in the presence of Vice President Joice Mujuru, Prime Minister Tsvangirai, Deputy PM Arthur Mutambara, MDC-M leader Welshman Ncube, COPAC officials, senior government officials and several invited guests at a colourful ceremony at State House.

The broadcaster reported the event as not only historic, but also having brought the curtain down on the controversial exercise, which started way back in 2009.

In addition, ZBC reported the signing of the constitution as having paved the way for the holding of harmonised elections and quoted several politicians across the political divide all expressing support for the adoption of the new supreme law.

Among these were Mugabe, Tsvangirai, Mutambara, Constitutional and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Eric Matinenga; Information Communication Technology Minister Nelson Chamisa; Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa; and members of the ZANU PF Women's League.

Mugabe was reported describing the new constitution as a purely Zimbabwean baby, which the nation should be proud of and urging Zimbabweans to remain united and peaceful even in the coming elections.

He said: ***“The sovereignty that we have must be defended. Our nation to be sovereign rejects interference and if there is interference we must fight it. No more colonialism direct or indirect. No more interference with our affairs. We have done this on our own. We have demonstrated we can do it. Some people in SADC wanted to impose themselves, we said no we can do it, in fact we can do it better than others.”***

Chinamasa also endorsed the new constitution: He declared that ***“while the Lancaster House Constitution gave Zimbabweans political freedom, the new constitution allows for the total control over resources through various programmes such as the indigenization and empowerment policy”***.

Similarly, ZBC recorded Tsvangirai stressing that unlike the 1979 Lancaster House Constitution that retained the privileges of the white minority; the new constitution was good for all.

However, ZBC could have done much better by also seeking comment from members of the public, including those organisations that held strong reservations with the new constitution such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA).

By so doing, ZBC not only gave a simplistic, one-sided view of the matter. It also violated its public service mandate and several regional and international protocols such as African Charter on Broadcasting of which Zimbabwe is a signatory; the European Broadcasting Union; and the World Radio and Television Council, which recommend public broadcasters to serve as platforms for diverse views.

For instance, Article 19 of the African Charter on Broadcasting (2003) demands that public broadcasters should serve the public interest and avoid one-sided reporting and programming with regards to religion, political beliefs, culture, race and gender and calls for the guaranteeing of the editorial independence of public broadcasters (Pp: 201-202).

Apart from its failure to seek alternative views, ZBC also failed to clearly explain what the gazetting of the new constitution entailed and when the charter would be fully operational. Neither did it say whether, in the light of the new constitution, it was still feasible to hold national elections by June 29 this year, a position both the station and the ZANU PF arm of government still vigorously project as almost non-negotiable.

Instead, the station simply made brief reference to Attorney General Johannes Tomana’s counsel that the gazetting of the document ***“means the new constitution is binding”***.

Tomana advised: ***“There are specifications in the new constitution which comes into effect with the gazetting while other remaining sections will come into effect after the election of the country’s president in the forthcoming harmonised elections”***.

ZBC did not ask Tomana to identify and differentiate those sections that automatically come into being with the gazetting of the new constitution and those that would become active after the election of a new president.

Neither did it carry its own investigations on the matter.

Zim makes positive strides in health sector

WHILE ZBC's coverage of the constitution-making process and Zimbabwe's preparations for harmonized elections was one-sided, its handling of other issues of less political nature such as the state of the country's health delivery; business; agriculture and food security; and environment and tourism was fairly balanced and informative.

Under Article three of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), the coalition parties agreed to ***“give priority to the restoration of economic stability and growth in Zimbabwe”*** and to ***“lead the process of developing and implementing an economic recovery strategy and plan”***, including the health services sector.

To this end, ZBC assessed the adequacy of measures by the inclusive government to resuscitate the health sector.

The station devoted 26 stories to the issue, 12 (46%) of which were on efforts by government and other stakeholders to combat diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and cancer. Six (23%) were on poor service provision by the country's municipalities such as Harare, which promoted the outbreak of diseases such as cholera and typhoid. Four (15%) were on women and children's health. The other four were on general health issues.

On efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, ZBC (17/5, 8pm) recorded National AIDS Council's Monitoring and Evaluation Director Amon Mpofu disclosing that Zimbabwe has become one of the first African countries to register a milestone achievement in the fight against HIV/AIDS. This came after the country had achieved a 95% universal access to anti-retroviral drugs for adults.

Speaking during a meeting with a visiting five-member Tanzanian health delegation, Mpofu however said more still needed to be done to achieve universal access for children.

In other reports on HIV/AIDS, ZBC (10/5, 8pm) reported visiting UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director Jan Beagle commending government's commitment to fight HIV and AIDS through community involvement in most of its programmes. Beagle, in the country for a three-day visit, reportedly toured the Beatrice Road Infectious Disease Hospital where she expressed satisfaction with government's efforts to provide improved health care facilities. She said her recent visit to Bindura had shown that the strength of the country in fighting HIV and AIDS has been the involvement of communities as well as traditional leaders in creating maximum awareness in fighting the disease.

In a related development, ZBC (14/5, 8pm) reported Zimbabwe's tuberculosis rate among people living with HIV as declining due to the early initiation of patients on anti-retroviral therapy. This report was based on observations by Beatrice Road Infectious Disease hospital matron Sophia Chikondo, who

praised the government and various partners for their efforts in ensuring that treatment is available for people living with HIV.

In other reports, ZBC (23/5, 8pm) reported that the Cancer Association of Zimbabwe (CAZ) had become the ninth institution in the country to offer cervical cancer screening services, raising hopes that the development will see a reduction in the number of women who are losing lives due to cervical cancer.

In an effort to help eradicate cervical cancer, ZBC (19/5, 8pm) reported Zimbabwe as having adopted a screening method called Visual Inspection with Ascetic Acid (VIAC) to help detect the infection. The station recorded CAZ's Knowledge Manager Tafadzwa Chigariro and Sister Lynn Mpunzwana, who conduct the VIAC testing procedure, saying that the response by women from all walks of life has been overwhelming.

ZBC (19/5, 8pm) stressed that if detected early, cervical cancer can be treated. In the past, ZBC observed, women would go for Pap smear, which helped detect pre-cancerous cell developments. However, with advancements in technology, ZBC indicated that all women of childbearing age are encouraged to undergo VIAC screening. According to ZBC, about 32% of cancers detected in women are of the cervix.

TOURISM

Zim steps up preparations for UNWTO

REPORTS on Zimbabwe's preparations to host the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) General Assembly with Zambia in August also attracted significant attention on ZBC.

The national broadcaster reported that Zimbabwe was fully prepared for this historic event, mostly on the strength of assurances by Tourism and Hospitality Industry Minister Walter Mzembi and his Zambian counterpart Sylvia Masebo and other stakeholders such as the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) and Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe (HAZ).

But there was no attempt to present a detailed blow-blow account of the preparations, considering that the event is just three months away.

ZBC (17/5, 8pm) merely reported Zimbabwe and Zambia as having concluded deliberations on the programme of events and activities, most of which were said to be awaiting implementation. It (22/5, 8pm) also reported efforts to market the UNWTO gala as having been boosted by support from US Ambassador to Zimbabwe Bruce Wharton and his counterpart in Zambia Mark Storella, who this month joined the two countries in promoting the event.

The broadcaster (17/5, 8pm) reported Mzembi disclosing that he had held a number of meetings with his Zambian counterpart to agree on the way forward as well as individual countries' roles before, during and after the event.

Mzembi reportedly said that his ministry had used the South African Tourism Fair Indaba to promote the UNWTO meeting in the region and abroad. The minister added that the fair also helped in raising pertinent issues affecting tourism in the region among them poor performance of airlines, impact of information and communication technology on tourism and the issue of visa regime.

The same story reported African Sun Chief Executive Shingi Munyeza disclosing that Zimbabwe's hotel industry had stepped up efforts to renovate infrastructure in line with global standards and that the re-training of employees' skills was currently underway.

Earlier, ZBC (10/5, 8pm) reported the Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe (HAZ) indicating that the hotel industry had the capacity to sustain requirements of the UNWTO and that the sector was ready for the event.

In other reports, ZBC (13/5, 8pm) recorded Mzembi indicating that government was working on modalities that would see the resort town of Victoria Falls being accorded the cyber city status by May 24th, to enable it to meet UNWTO standards of conducting the forthcoming General Assembly on soft copies.

According to Mzembi, the initiative was being taken to cater for the expected increase in air traffic after the completion of the expansion of Victoria Falls International Airport, as well as the anticipated congestion on the Internet hotspots available in the resort town. He said the cyber city status was an initiative that will enable Internet users to access it for free from any part of the town.

Notably, there was no follow-up yet up to Mzembi's promise to confer Victoria Falls cyber city status by May 24th by the state broadcaster as the month ended.