Defending free expression and your right to know

The mass media are assigned an important role in political campaigns on popular votes. As the holding of a referendum on a new constitution on March 16 2013 approaches, the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) will be carrying daily media updates on this momentous event until the day after the referendum results are announced. This is aimed primarily at establishing whether the media is communicating pertinent information to the public during the final referendum campaigns. For any views and comments, you can either email us at monitors@mmpz.org.zw or sms us on our dedicated hotline cellphone number 0776 739 522.

The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Daily Media Referendum Watch – 2
Monday, March 11th 2013

Electronic media report for Monday, March 11th, 2013

SUMMARY

THE electronic media carried 16 reports on the constitutional referendum, to be held on Saturday March 16th.

Of these, nine appeared on the national broadcaster, ZBC: ZTV (six) and Spot FM (three).

Private radio stations carried the remaining seven stories.

Six of the 16 reports were on the 'Yes Vote' campaign by the Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac), ZANU PF and the MDC-T, while one was on the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA)'s campaign against the new constitution.

Five were on the administrative aspect of the referendum. The remaining four were on calls for Zimbabweans to maintain peace in the period leading to the referendum and on Voting Day itself.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

ZANU PF voices get more coverage

ZBC promoted campaigns by Copac and ZANU PF for Zimbabweans to vote for the draft constitution in the referendum in the five reports it carried on the issue.

But the station ignored similar calls by other coalition parties and those campaigning against the adoption of the draft such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA).

Among the senior ZANU PF officials reported commenting about the draft were Vice-President Joice Mujuru and the party's national chairman Simon Khaya Moyo (ZTV, 11/3, 8pm).

Khaya Moyo was reported addressing ZANU PF members at Davies Hall in Bulawayo at the weekend, where he ***"took time to touch on aspects of the draft constitution"***, while Mujuru reportedly said:

"As the country heads towards the referendum and elections, the people should not lose sight of the sacrifices that Cde Nkomo and other heroes made to liberate the country" (ZTV, 11/3, 8pm). Mujuru's statements were contained in a speech read on her behalf by Moyo, consoling Gogo MaDube, mother of the late Vice-President John Nkomo.

While ZBC censored the MDC-T's campaign activities, those of the other MDC group, led by Industry Minister Welshman Ncube, was only mentioned in the context of remarks by Zimbabwe Development Party president Kisnot Mukwazhe justifying the party's withdrawal from Copac's awareness programme on the draft during ZTV's current Affairs programme, *The Referendum*.

Said Mukwazhe: ***"I think they did the right thing, to withdraw as a way of raising a concern as they are supported throughout the country and it was not fair to only include them in two of the countries' provinces".***

The private electronic media carried two reports on the MDC-T's 'Vote Yes' campaign and the NCA's resolve to mobilize Zimbabweans to 'Vote No' (ZiFM, 11/3).

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

ZEC receives referendum money

NEWS of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) receiving US$31 million from Treasury to cover the referendum was the most significant development in the electoral body's preparations for the vote.

ZTV (11/3, 8pm) reported ZEC acting chairperson Joyce Kazembe confirming receipt of the money.

Kazembe said her commission had slashed its budget for the referendum from US$85 million to $58 million, adding that what government had released was enough to cover essential costs of the referendum. The ZEC acting chairperson said the outstanding balance of $26.5 million was largely ***"for allowances of the polling officers"***.

The national TV station (11/3, 8pm) also reported Finance Minister Tendai Biti confirming the disbursement and reduction of the referendum budget, as they considered US$85 million to be ***"excessive"***.

But ZTV did not ask Kazembe or Biti to explain when exactly government was expecting to raise the outstanding balance. Neither did the station consider the possible delay in paying polling officers as likely to affect their ability to discharge their duties effectively.

This report was among the three stories ZBC media carried on administrative aspects of the referendum.

The remaining two were on the arrival of SADC election observers and assurances by ZEC's director for public relations Shupikai Mashereni that the electoral body was ready for the vote.

Mashereni said: ***"In short we are saying logistical arrangements have been put in place, the voting ink has been procured and dispatched to provinces. In addition, 12 million ballot papers have been printed and dispatched again to the provinces. Voter education is ongoing nationwide and is ending on the 13th of this month. To complement voter education we have started TV programmes"*** (ZTV's Current affairs programme, *Media Watch*).

Notably, ZTV's *Media Watch* programme comprised one of the three current affairs programmes the electronic media carried to discuss the constitutional referendum. The others comprised *The Referendum*, which featured Mukwazhe, and Star FM's *The Solution*.

The Solution featured ZANU PF MP Anastancia Ndlovu urging women to support the draft and Zimbabwe Youth Council official Innocent Katsande encouraging youths to do the same.

Only the private electronic media reported civic groups, such as ZimRights, expressing concern over ZEC's alleged refusal to accredit them on the grounds that they were "under police investigation", and complaints by the MDC-T over the electoral body's decision to restrict the number of international observers to observe the referendum (SW Radio Africa and ZiFM 11/3).

Print media report for Tuesday March 12th, 2013

SUMMARY

THE print media carried 12 reports on the constitutional referendum, scheduled for Saturday March 16th.

Of these, nine appeared in the private media, while the remaining three were contained in the state-owned newspapers.

Four of the 12 reports were on the ongoing 'Yes Vote' campaign by Zimbabwe's main political parties and some civic groups, such as the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe. Two were on those expressing reservations about the draft, particularly the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA).

Five were on the administrative aspect of the referendum. The remaining one was on calls for Zimbabweans to observe and maintain peace during voting.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

MDC-T gets fair coverage in state papers

THE state-owned print media gave fair coverage to Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and his party's campaign for Zimbabweans to vote for the draft in the referendum.

But it suppressed concerns by some Zimbabweans, led by the NCA, who are campaigning for the rejection of the draft.

On the other hand, the private Press gave equitable coverage to those supporting the draft and those who opposed it.

This was reflected in all three reports the private print media carried on the campaign activities of Zimbabwe's main political parties and civil society organizations campaigning for and against the adoption of the proposed constitution.

The state-owned Herald only carried the one report on calls by Tsvangirai and MDC-T national organizing secretary Nelson Chamisa for party supporters to 'Vote Yes', while addressing a rally in Harare's high-density suburb of Sunningdale on Monday night (*The Herald*, 12/3).

Tsvangirai said there were ***"a lot of positives"*** in the draft that Zimbabweans could not afford to let slip away. He claimed that the draft had ***"the best Bill of Rights that no other country in the world has"*** (*The Herald*, 12/3). The PM added that the draft also gave power to provincial leaders to set their own developmental priorities; recognized women's rights and accorded citizenship to those people who are currently categorized as aliens because of their foreign parentage.

While the *Daily News* (12/3), for instance, reported a youth organization, Youth Agenda Trust, encouraging youths to vote for the draft, *NewsDay* (12/3) publicized the reasons why NCA chairman Lovemore Madhuku and others with similar sentiments were opposed to the draft.

Madhuku was reported as having told journalists at an election workshop organized by the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists in Harare that the draft ***"was not new"*** and that it would not be ***"very different from the Lancaster House Constitution"*** (*NewsDay*, 12/3).

Madhuku said: ***"When one looks at the fundamental features of the Constitution, they will find that the President has wings right across the other arms of State, the Legislature and the Judiciary"*** (*NewsDay*, 12/3).

He added: ***"Constitutional reforms are about changing that framework. But in the draft constitution the President is compelled to appear before Parliament and answer questions. He has no limit on the number of ministers he should appoint and he still has a lot of influence in appointing commissioners, ambassadors, security chiefs, the Attorney-General and has the final say over the appointment of judges"***.

The same daily reported Bulawayo lawyers Abraham Mateta describing the Copac draft as ***"a disgrace to Zimbabweans"*** because ***"it treated the disability issues as a welfare subject not as human rights concerns"***.

The private dailies also carried adverts (one each) by the Parliamentary Select Committee and the MDC-T urging Zimbabweans to vote for the draft and explaining why they should do so.

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The Herald (12/3) reported Finance Minister Tendai Biti confirming the disbursement and reduction of the referendum budget, as they considered US$85 million to be ***"excessive"***.

But the daily did not ask Kazembe or Biti to explain when exactly government was expecting to raise the outstanding balance. Neither did *The Herald* consider the possible delay in paying polling officers as likely to affect their ability to discharge their duties effectively.

This report was among five stories the print media carried on the administration of the referendum.

Of these, two appeared in the state Press, while the remaining three were in the private dailies.

The private dailies' reports were mostly on speculation that the recent fuel increase was part of government efforts to raise money for elections (*Daily News*, 12/3).

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