



Defending free expression and the right to know

**The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
Monday September 27th – Sunday October 3rd 2010
Weekly Media Review 2010-38**

SUMMARY

THE death of ZANU PF's deputy political commissar Ephraim Masawi grabbed most attention in the state-controlled media during the week, especially in defence of ZANU PF's decision to declare him a national hero without consultation.

While these media showered praise on Masawi's contribution to the liberation struggle, the private media reported the indignation of the two MDC formations over ZANU PF's monopolization of the conferment of national hero status.

Both the government and private media publicized news that the Constitutional Parliamentary Committee (Copac) had cancelled outreach consultative meetings, scheduled for Harare this weekend, adding fresh controversy to the chaotic outreach programme.

While the print media and online publications gave significant coverage to government's economic reconstruction efforts, private radio stations paid little attention to the issue. Fig 1 illustrates this.

Fig 1: Topical issues in the media

Media	Masawi's death	Economic issues	Constitutional reforms	Human rights
State papers	15	38	10	2
Private Press	5	11	21	15
ZBC	103	44	23	0
Private radios	2	2	13	3
Online agencies	7	7	11	8
Total	132	102	78	28

Media report fresh bout of Copac chaos

REPORTS of the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee (Copac) postponing the resumption of its consultative meetings in Harare were the most significant aspect of the media's coverage of Zimbabwe's troubled constitutional reform programme.

The news came at a time when ZANU PF and the two MDC formations were reportedly at each other's throats over the direction constitutional reforms should take (ZTV, 5/10, 8pm).

The national public TV station (5/10, 8pm) passively quoted Copac co-chairmen Paul Mangwana and Douglas Mwonzora saying that the outreach meetings, which were supposed to be held on October 8 and 9, had been postponed by a week due to ***"inadequate preparations"*** and ***"insufficient resources"***. The broadcaster did not view this as an indication of the confusion that has characterized the outreach since its inception, or ask the officials to explain why they had planned to restart the meetings without proper preparations. Neither did it question the wisdom of setting aside a Friday for the outreach meetings, when a significant number of Zimbabweans would be at work.

ZTV (5/10, 8pm) also quoted Mangwana claiming that ***"some political formations"*** were now calling for a "people-driven" constitution-making process to be abandoned in favour of a negotiated one between the parties. Mangwana described the alleged proposal as ***"a sudden U-turn"*** that violated Article VI of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) compelling the coalition parties to facilitate the crafting of a constitution involving all Zimbabweans. The broadcaster did not ask Mangwana to disclose the identities of the parties and when they made the call. It only emerged on SW Radio Africa & *ZimOnline* (27 & 28/9) that it was Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai who reportedly called for the compromise while speaking at a public accountability seminar in Harare.

The private media viewed the postponement of Copac's outreach programme in Harare and similar problems in other provinces as evidence of mayhem in Zimbabwe's constitutional reforms.

They also reported the resumption of parliamentary business on Tuesday, October 5 as having affected Copac's outreach activities. In Manicaland, Studio 7 (4 & 5/10) reported most outreach meetings as having been cancelled, as MPs on outreach teams returned to Harare to resume their parliamentary duties.

The same station (4/10) quoted Mwonzora saying the police's failure to guarantee the security of Zimbabweans during Copac's meetings was the main reason why Copac had postponed its outreach in Harare. Mwonzora also said the coalition parties had failed to sign an agreement denouncing violence, which he argued, was a key requirement meant to prevent the recurrence of violence.

So shambolic was the process that the MDC-T described it as a “***circus***” and urged Zimbabwe's coalition parties to convene an urgent meeting to chart the way forward (Studio 7, 5/10).

Political conflict erupts over 'hero's' death

THE unilateral decision to confer national hero status on the late ZANU PF deputy political commissar Ephraim Masawi revived fierce debate in the media about the need to review the procedure.

The government media initially ignored the debate, and the resolution by the two MDC formations to boycott Masawi's burial, until President Mugabe "**clarified**" the criteria used to award the status in his graveside speech at Heroes Acre in Harare (*The Herald & Chronicle*, 1/10 and ZBC, 1/10, 6 & 8pm).

None of the government media's reports examined the validity of concerns by the two MDCs that the conferment of national hero status was monopolized by ZANU PF, nor viewed ZANU PF's unilateralism as a violation of the spirit of the Global Political Agreement (GPA).

Instead, these media approvingly reported Mugabe as having "**set the record straight**" that "**only**" those Zimbabweans who sacrificed their lives to liberate the country from white colonial settler rule would be buried at the national shrine. Mugabe said: "**Nharaunda ino, tinoda kutsanangura zvakaivonaka, inharaunda...yevarwi veChimurenga. Haisi nharaunda yevanhu vanongonzi vatsvene...pano patiri panodiwa veChimurenga saka kana tava kuda vatsvene vamwe vanogona zvakati kuti...tada magamba orudzi urworwo tots vagawo rimwe gomo ndipo potoisawo vatsvene verudzi irworwo...** [This heroes acre, we want to explain clearly, was exclusively built to bury those who fought in Zimbabwe's liberation war. It is not for those who had excelled in other sectors such as religion, agriculture and manufacturing. If we want to honour such people, we should find another heroes acre...]"

Although the government papers (1/10) reported Mugabe's comments in reference to complaints by the MDC formations, they discredited these concerns as "**futile**" without viewing ZANU PF's intransigence as straining coalition relations.

ZBC (1/10, 8pm) quoted ZANU-PF spokesman Rugare Gumbo justifying his party's unilateralism on the grounds that it "**does not consult youngsters who do not know the history of the liberation struggle**" (ZTV, 01/10, 8pm).

While the government papers (1/10) buried the fact that the two MDC formations had boycotted Masawi's burial, ZBC all stations (1/10, 8pm) gave it headline publicity. They widely quoted war veterans, little-known political parties, such as the Zimbabwe Democratic Party, and pro-ZANU PF commentators, such as Gabriel Chaibva and Goodson Nguni describing the move as proof that the MDCs were unpatriotic and served the interests of their "**Western masters**" without rational corroboration.

The private media aired a variety of views on the issue. Although they quoted ZANU PF defending itself over the selection of national heroes, most Zimbabweans they quoted criticized this. The *Zimbabwe Independent* (1/10) for example, quoted the MDC formations condemning ZANU PF's actions and also that Masawi did not deserve national hero status. The private weekly viewed ZANU PF as violating the spirit of the GPA, as the country's three political principals had allegedly agreed to review the conferment of national heroes in the ongoing power-sharing talks.

ETHICAL STANDARDS SACRIFICED

ZIMPAPERS' tabloid daily, *H-METRO*, distinguished itself recently for its tasteless and insensitive front-page picture of the body of a pregnant woman who had allegedly committed suicide following a domestic dispute.

The paper, which specializes in salacious "human interest" stories mostly about sex, crime and human relationship scandals, overstepped the ethical bounds of even the "gutter press" with this crude attempt to shock its readers into buying the publication. The picture of the young woman's corpse still hanging from the rafters of a Harare high-density home, dominated the front page of the paper's September 27 edition under the headline: *Pregnant Woman Hangs Self*.

Adding insult to injury, the paper shamelessly advertised the story as an "**exclusive**" on its front page and identified the protagonists without even explaining whether the woman's next-of-kin had been notified.

While immoral and irresponsible behaviour inevitably attracts public attention because it is a reflection of how our society behaves, those media specializing in such stories, need to understand that such a lack of respect for certain social values is grossly offensive and upsetting to those who must obviously be grieving over such unfortunate tragedies.

Such gruesomely graphic and insensitive publicity was clearly motivated by the paper's desire to sensationalize what was evidently a personal human tragedy that should have been reported with sensitivity and respect for the families, friends and relatives affected by the incident.

MMPZ condemns such irresponsible and unethical conduct in our media and calls on *H-Metro*'s editors to exercise restraint when covering such misfortune in future. Maybe it would be instructive if the editors first consider how they would feel if it had been their sister, or cousin, or even their daughter that had attracted such unkind publicity.

MISLEADING AND SENSATIONAL STORIES

MMPZ has observed a recurrence of misleading and sensational stories in both the government and private media this week.

Some examples were:

- Claims by *The Herald* (28/10) that MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai was **“forced to cancel”** an address at a memorial service for the late Crispen Mandizvidza at Stordat Hall in Mbare after party supporters **“snubbed”** him.

According to the MDC-T, Mandizvidza died from injuries sustained during disturbances that rocked Copac’s outreach meetings in Harare. In order to sustain its claims, the paper ignored comments by MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa that the party had postponed the service, as they were awaiting post-mortem results.

- Allegations that lawyers representing High Court Judge Chinembiri Bhunu in a case in which he was suing MDC-T treasurer Roy Bennett for defamation were having problems serving him with summons (*The Herald*, 30/9). The paper gave the impression that Bennett was being elusive despite the lawyers being told that Bennett was **“overseas”** on unspecified business.
- Speculation that MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai would step down from party leadership next year in line with the party’s original constitution that allows an incumbent to hold office for a maximum of two five-year terms (*The Financial Gazette*, 30/10). The weekly claimed to **“exclusively reveal”** that the MDC-T had passed a resolution that its next congress, at which Tsvangirai would step down, would be held after Zimbabwe’s presidential elections, anticipated next year. Although Tsvangirai is expected to step down in line with his party’s constitution, the *Gazette* did not back up its predictions beyond the vague reference to the party passing “a resolution”.

Rights violations decline

A DECLINE in the number of human rights violations reported in the media appeared to be linked to the end of the Constitutional Parliamentary Select Committee's outreach exercise in most parts of the country.

The media reported six new incidents. Only two incidents were related to Copac's outreach. Five of the incidents appeared in the private media. The remaining one was reported by Zimpapers.

Among them were:

- The alleged assault of Chief Serima by MDC-T Deputy Youth and Indigenization Minister Tongai Matutu and six other party activists in Gutu. *The Herald* (28/9) quoted a Masvingo provincial police spokesman saying the chief was assaulted for allegedly reprimanding Matutu and his colleagues from singing MDC-T songs in public, arguing that its was **"disrespectful"**.
- Threats against Zaka villagers by war veterans leader Jabulani Sibanda that he was **"sent to warn all sell-outs in the area that ZANU PF is ready to kill them if they fail to join the party before campaigning starts for next year's elections"** (*The Zimbabwean* [30/9] and which SW Radio Africa reported that evening), and
- The alleged assault of MDC-T Manicaland provincial chairman Patrick Chitaka by war veteran Saul Nzuma during a constitutional outreach meeting in Buhera (*Daily News*, 2/10).

MOST POPULAR VOICES

THE death of ZANU PF's deputy political commissar Ephraim Masawi presented the state-controlled media with yet another opportunity to flood their news reports with ZANU PF voices.

Out of the 267 times that the coalition parties were quoted, ZANU PF was heard 254 times (95%). The MDC-T was quoted nine times (3%) while the smaller MDC formation was accessed just four times.

These media selectively quoted political commentators (eight times), who defended ZANU PF's unilateral conferment of national hero status.

On the other hand, the private media gave reasonable space to all three parties to express themselves on various national issues, particularly about national heroes.

Out of the 61 times these parties were quoted, the MDC-T was heard 31 times (51%) while ZANU PF was quoted 26 times (43%). The remaining four voices belonged to the Arthur Mutambara-led MDC.

ZANU PF was mostly heard defending its monopoly on the selection of national heroes, while the two MDC formations opposed it.

The private media gave a platform to independent political commentators and civil society on various topical issues. These included calls for a review of the selection of national heroes to accommodate Zimbabweans who have excelled in various fields and those who did not belong to ZANU PF.

Individually, President Mugabe was the most quoted in the government media.

He was heard 38 times, mostly paying tribute to Masawi.

Senior ZANU PF officials such as Didymus Mutasa (10), Amos Midzi (nine) and Dickson Mafios (seven) stepped on each other's feet showering praise on Masawi.

Prime Minister Tsvangirai was the preferred source in the private media. He was quoted 15 times; mostly questioning the credibility of Zimbabwe's constitutional reforms and condemning politically motivated violence.

Copac co-chairmen Douglas Mwonzora and Paul Mangwana (eight times each) and MDC-T spokesman Nelson Chamisa (seven) competed for attention too. Mwonzora condemned the violence, while Mangwana bemoaned administrative problems plaguing Copac's outreach. Chamisa criticized ZANU PF for monopolizing the selection of national heroes.

What they said...

“The absence of MDC at the burial of Masawi left many mourners baffled, with political observers asking why the MDC formations should seek to author a history they are not part of... Even if they were allowed to choose who is a national hero, would they know whom to select? Were they in the trenches in Morogoro, Tembwe and did they witness the horrors of Chimoio and Nyadzonya?” – ZBC reporter Judith Makwanya commenting in a news report (ZTV, 1/10 8pm).

“They (MDC formations) remain an appendage and extension of British and American imperialism in Zimbabwe. This is why they are so distasteful whenever we talk about the national heroes” – pro-ZANU PF commentator Gabriel Chaibva (ZTV, 1/10 8pm).

“Our problems emanated from misgovernance, the violent land reform and RBZ printing worthless currency...” – Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai dismissing claims that Zimbabwe’s economic meltdown was caused by the West’s targeted sanctions (SW Radio Africa & *The Zimbabwean*, 30/9).

Ends/

The MEDIA UPDATE was produced and circulated by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare, Tel: 263 4 741816 / 778115, E-mail: monitors@mmpz.org.zw

Feel free to write to MMPZ. We may not be able to respond to everything but we will look at each message. For previous MMPZ reports, and more information about the Project, please visit our website at <http://www.mmpz.org/>