

Govt in no hurry to reform the media before elections

By [Clifford Chitupa Mashiri](#)

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As Zimbabwe's 'media reform ultimatum' draws near, there is nothing to show that media minister Webster Shamu will implement key media reforms, which could bring the long awaited freedom in the country's media space.

There is nothing to show that the media minister is in a hurry to reconstitute the boards of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe and the Mass Media Trust.

This comes at a time when media reforms have taken a centre stage in Zimbabwe's democratisation process, in the wake of a controversial declaration by George Charamba also known as Nathaniel Manheru that 'the next election will be fought in the airwaves'.

The importance of credible and transparent opening of the airwaves before elections which are being aggressively called for by Zimbabwe's "sit-tight" ruler Robert Mugabe, can not be overemphasised.

Despite the so-called GNU, Zanu-pf men head 'key media policy nerve centres' in government, therefore, "any comprehensive media reform can only happen if it gets the blessing of that party" (Wallace Chuma, "Media reform under the unity government - A critical assessment June 2010," Solidarity Peace Trust, 02/06/10).

Except for the Public Order and Security Act (Posa) which is jointly 'controlled' by Zimbabwe's coalition partners, Zanu-pf has virtual control over the Potraz, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Aippa), the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) and the Interception of Communication Act (ICA).

Hopes that the Zimbabwe Media Council could have done a better job in licensing radio and television stations rather than the BAZ have been dashed following ZMC's clampdown on foreign newspapers forcing critics to draw parallels with its predecessor the Media and Information Commission (MIC) led by Mahoso.

In an affidavit, ZMC Chairperson Godfrey Majonga reportedly accused the *Sunday Times* and other foreign newspapers of carrying out newsgathering in Zimbabwe without registration and licensing.

Some people would be disappointed by the MIC's move especially as Zimpapers publications *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail* are viewed as having adopted a 'belligerent line of reporting' by allegedly operating as "a site of struggle between imagined bona fide nationalists (Zanu-pf) and imagined traitors (MDCs) "

MDC moves to seek the nullification of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe would appear hamstrung by legal and

procedural challenges after some experts contended the BAZ was legally constituted.

Meanwhile, Zimpapers which received a commercial FM radio license has indicated the imminent launch of its broadcasting station which detractors have already named 'Chipangano Radio' after the infamous Mbare-based political gang.

Zimpapers Chairman Paul Chimedza has confirmed his group's interest in TV broadcasting amid revelations that 'newspapers worldwide are a dying medium' and read by less than a tenth of the population.

It is significant to note that *The Herald* on Wednesday 29 February 2012 acknowledged a slip in its readership and what it called a small rise in penetration of internet cafes from 4 percent to 5 percent.

"Daily newspaper readership in Zimbabwe fell modestly in the last quarter of last year but The Herald, which still has almost twice as many readers as its nearest competitor, slipped the least according to the Zimbabwe All Media and Products Survey," said *The Herald*.

Despite agreeing to repeal Aippa and Posa according to the Government Work Plan, the GNU has failed to meet one of the benchmarks of the democratisation process.

Several bodies including SADC and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) have called on the Zimbabwe government to repeal the repressive Posa, 'which would be in line with media reform pledges made under the power sharing government'.

However, it is now unlikely the Posa amendment Bill will be resurrected soon due to the absence of Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa abroad until 20th March attending the UN Human Rights Council session in Geneva.

While an acrimonious debate is expected on MDC-T Senator Komichi's motion in the Senate condemning hate speech and the abuse of freedom of speech by the "partisan media" it is unlikely the Zanu-pf dominated chamber will investigate his allegations.

The GNU has been rightly criticised for lacking "a coherent plan of action on reforms" against a background of a "series of half measures meant to placate a restive civil society and the international community."

Source: allAfrica.com

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