Programming at the ZBC needs to be understood and contextualised within the complex political and economic crisis that engulfed the country from 2000 onwards.

The vote against a proposed new constitution in the referendum held in February that year served as the first clear warning sign for the ruling party that its hitherto unquestioned dominance and presumed unassailability was coming under threat. This was followed two years later by general elections in which, for the first time since independence, a new political party (the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC) gained 57 out of 120 seats in parliament and the opposition candidate (Morgan Tsvangirai) nearly won the highly contested presidential vote.

The ruling ZANU PF party and government made the issue of land and its restitution to its original black Zimbabwean owners by virtually any means the central plank of their efforts to shore up support among the electorate. The state broadcaster was increasingly and more and more openly used to propagate this line as well as a whole new discourse of national/cultural identity, invocation of sovereignty and the pan-Africanist ideology that underpinned it.

With the coming into cabinet of Professor Jonathan Moyo as the new minister of information and publicity in 2000, programming of the ZBC went through fundamental changes.

The ZBC adopted a new mission statement, promising ‘to provide world class
quality programmes and services that reflect, develop, foster and respect the Zimbabwean national identity, character, cultural diversity, national aspirations and Zimbabwean and pan-African values.' It also introduced a new programming structure reflecting local content quota required under the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) 2001. The law states in its Sixth Schedule that a television broadcasting licensee, that is, ZBC Television, must ensure that at least:

- 70 per cent of its drama programming consists of Zimbabwean drama;
- 80 per cent of its current affairs programmes consists of Zimbabwean current affairs;
- 70 per cent of its social documentary programming consists of Zimbabwean social documentary programming;
- 70 per cent of its knowledge-building programming consists of Zimbabwean informal knowledge-building programming;
- 80 per cent of its educational programming consists of Zimbabwean educational programming; and
- 80 per cent of its children’s programming consists of Zimbabwean educational programming.

For radio, the Act requires that at least 75 per cent of the music broadcast must be Zimbabwean and another 10 per cent from other parts of Africa – leaving only 15 per cent for music from elsewhere in the world.

The government, through the department of information and publicity, used the local content provisions to introduce programmes mainly supportive of ZANU PF. Many programmes emanating from outside Zimbabwe were taken off the air. In their place, documentaries about the 1970s liberation war and programmes on land reform such as *Nhaka Yedu* (Our Heritage), *National Ethos* and the *New Farmer/Murimi Wanhasi/Umlime Walamuhla* were introduced and given more and more prominence. All of them focused on issues of land and national identity – ZANU PF’s campaign themes in the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2002 and 2005. These themes ran across all programming formats and genres (for example, children, education, current affairs and gender).

The ‘national identity’ project of the ZBC was a politically driven effort by the ruling party in complete disregard of the diverse opinions that Zimbabweans hold. The redefinition of Zimbabwean national identity and what it means to be Zimbabwean was narrow and those who did not agree with ZANU PF’s philosophy were labelled as
the ‘other’, ‘evil’ or as ‘sell-outs’ representing the interests of the West. Thus, those working in civil society organisations, political opposition parties (in particular the MDC) and white Zimbabweans were either vilified by the state broadcaster or excluded from the airwaves altogether.

Music also featured prominently to promote the ruling party’s policies. Protest songs from the country’s well known artists like Oliver Mtukudzi, Thomas Mapfumo, Lovemore Majaivana, Albert Nyathi and others that had human rights, corruption and abuse of power as their main themes, were blacklisted and replaced with pro-government songs that were supportive of ZANU PF and the land reform programme and critical of Western leaders, especially then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and then US President George W. Bush.

The government, through the office of the minister of information and publicity, Professor Jonathan Moyo, commissioned pro-ZANU PF music albums and jingles that filled the airwaves, leading to a total blackout of other types of music. Moyo himself, using public funds, promoted the production of a series of albums under the label ‘Pax Afro’, intended to ‘communicate the regime’s political messages of a resurrected liberation struggle, ultra-patriotism, land reclamation, anti-colonialism and pan-Africanism.’ The most prominent of these productions was the 26-track double CD titled *Back2Black*.

A study conducted by the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) in 2003 showed that one of the propaganda jingles, ‘Rambai Makashinga’ (Continue Persevering), was being played on average 288 times a day on ZBC’s four radio stations, which amounts to 8,640 times per month. On television, the jingle was flighted approximately 72 times a day, which amounts to 2,160 times a month.

After the 2005 parliamentary elections, a new minister of information and publicity, Tichaona Jokonya, was appointed. Programming changed slightly, with some more diversity and foreign material being re-introduced – mostly old Hollywood productions and Nigerian films in the case of television. With regard to news and current affairs content, opposition parties, civil society organisations and other non-state actors were still locked out of the main programming and largely remained so up to the time of writing.

It needs to be borne in mind that many Zimbabweans, especially the large rural population, do not have or cannot afford access to any other media and rely almost

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71 http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/electoral269.18288.html; Mugabe is quoted as saying ‘The MDC opposition, formed at the behest of Britain in 1999, is on an evil crusade of dividing our people on political lines as they continue to fan and sponsor heinous acts of political violence targeting innocent citizens.’
exclusively on ZBC radio for all their information needs. The kind of programming offered by the state broadcaster over the past few years has resulted in starving them of meaningful information and giving them a seriously skewed view of reality in the country and abroad.

Only a small minority of viewers were able to turn to free-to-air satellite television featuring South African TV channels. An important development in this regard was the ‘discovery’ of satellite TV decoders, known as WizTech, sourced from China and Dubai. They enable Zimbabweans to access encrypted South African channels such as SABC 1, 2 and 3 as well as e.tv without having to pay subscription fees.

\section*{2 Current programming of the ZBC}

Other than the mission statement quoted above which speaks in general terms about what the broadcaster seeks to offer, the ZBC does not have a charter which would spell out its editorial policies, mandate and operational and programming guidelines.

Newsnet Pvt Ltd, the state-owned news company, provides the news content for both television and radio. It also runs all current affairs and talk show programmes on television.

\subsection*{2.1 General programming}

\textbf{Television}

ZTV, the television arm of the ZBC, is responsible for children’s, youth and educational programmes, as well as cartoons, lifestyle shows, music programmes, soaps and drama.

With regard to all these programme genres other than news and current affairs, there was initially hope that the introduction of the local content policy in 2001 would expand the choice of formats and offerings generally. The Broadcasting Services Act stipulates in its Sixth Schedule that 40 per cent of the content offered by the state broadcaster must be commissioned from independent producers. The audio-visual industry in the country blossomed for a brief period with the emergence of a number of local productions, notably two popular soaps, \textit{Studio 263} and \textit{Makorokoza}, as well as a series of other local dramas and comedies. However, due to fiscal constraints within the broadcaster and the economy as a whole, quality local productions dwindled and the ZBC began to rely more and more on repeats. Although the Broadcasting Services Act stipulates that 40 per cent of the content must be commissioned from
independent producers, by early 2009 the ZBC obtained only 10 per cent of its programming from that source.\textsuperscript{74}

The BSA provides for a Broadcasting Fund which is supposed to encourage the growth of the creative arts industries. However, by mid-2009, eight years after the promulgation of the law, this fund had still not been put in place. Over the years, local producers have also expressed concern that the ZBC is ‘political’ in its commissioning and selection of programmes. These concerns were, for instance, raised in the 2004 \textit{Second Report of the Portfolio Committee on Transport and Communication on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings}, which established that:

\begin{quote}
... the selection of material from production houses had rather been biased; implying that production houses that did not hold favour with the broadcaster had found their works rejected ... Many documentaries which had been accepted regionally and internationally had been rejected by the public broadcaster. It was further submitted that in certain instances there was content manipulation in the selection methods and this had largely been on political grounds.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

This and other reports of the portfolio committee, however, did not have any measurable impact on the ZBC’s programming.

In a typical week (18 to 24 May 2009) locally produced news and current affairs make up the largest chunk of programming on ZTV’s schedule (from 06h00 to 00h30) – with a total of three-and-a-half hours per weekday (plus 90 minutes of repeats), including one hour (at 17h30) in Shona and Ndebele. On average 60 minutes per day are dedicated to (foreign) documentaries (half an hour each), including repeats.

There is a one-hour talk show once a week (Fridays 22h00 with a repeat on Tuesdays) called \textit{Amai Chisamba} (‘Amai’ in Shona means mother and Chisamba stands for the name of the host, Rebecca Chisamba), which usually deals with ‘safe’ subjects focusing on Zimbabwean families and communities. Expressing criticism can result in harsh retributive action. For instance, on 16 June 2007 the show broadcast a programme on women and children who were survivors of rape and child sexual abuse, with the director of the Girl Child Network, Betty Makoni, as a guest. She brought along girls being sheltered at her organisation, whose faces were electronically blurred, to narrate their experiences. The Network has been at the forefront of exposing rape abuses perpetrated by ZANU PF militias and other sexual abuses by those in positions of power. As a result, the organisation and its director have on several occasions been

\textsuperscript{74} Interviews with Walter Mufansochiya, ZBH scheduling manager, 25 April 2008 and 20 March 2009.
targeted by the police. The screening of this programme led to the arrest of both Betty Makoni and the host of the show.\textsuperscript{76}

Thirty-minute soaps and dramas make up one-and-a-half hours of a weekday’s programming. Most of these are old foreign-produced programmes, such as \textit{Keeping up Appearances} (UK), \textit{Jewel in the Korean Palace} (Korea) and \textit{Suburban Bliss} (South Africa), often repeated the following day. A local drama is broadcast weekdays from 19h30 to 20h00. On average half an hour per day each is dedicated to music shows and lifestyle programmes (mainly cooking shows). Children are offered various 30-minute slots over the week (foreign and local productions) and a two-hour show, \textit{Star Kidz}, on Saturday mornings.

As prescribed by the Broadcasting Services Act the ZBC is obliged to cover all ‘national events’, frequently resulting in sudden changes to the programme schedule. Such events include, for example, funerals of ‘heroes’ (senior ZANU PF stalwarts) at the Heroes Acre, ZANU PF conferences and presidential trips abroad. The Act also requires the ZBC to make a total of one hour per week of its broadcasting time on each of its channels available for the purpose of enabling the government to explain its mandate to the nation. The effect of these requirements has been a disproportional amount of broadcasting time allocated to programmes dealing with ZANU PF events and political campaigning activities at the expense of a diversity of other happenings (non-state events, civil society activities, opposition party events) which might be similarly regarded as being of ‘national’ importance.

In June 2009, the ZBC announced that it had concluded an agreement with a South African company, Fairmead Consultants, to acquire 104 children’s programmes, 130 assorted documentaries, 156 family movies, 52 karate movies, 100 filler programmes (unspecified) and 52 lifestyle magazine programmes.\textsuperscript{77} The scheduling manager, Walter Mufanochiya, stated:

\begin{quote}
We have received the first lot of programmes we secured from Fairmead and we hope that these will go a long way in turning around the fortunes of the broadcaster. The past few years have been difficult, mainly because we did not have any foreign currency to buy programmes, but we are back now and we intend to reclaim our viewers ... We also want to assure our viewers that ZTV is taking a turn for the better and from now onwards, things are going to be improving.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{76} The two were arrested ostensibly for violating section 197 of the Criminal Procedures and Evidence Act by revealing the identities of under-age girls, despite the fact that their faces were hidden.

It is not quite clear how two more children’s programmes, three more movies or one more lifestyle magazine a week – all of them foreign productions – are supposed to result in a genuine turnaround for the broadcaster.

Radio
Radio Zimbabwe was originally established under the name Radio 4 to offer development programmes, using the two country’s main languages Shona and Ndebele, and to give different groups a platform to air their views. It was best known for promoting and broadcasting a project called Development Through Radio (DTR), initiated and managed by the Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe (FAMWZ). The project created radio listening clubs involving rural women who would gather to listen to programmes by and about themselves. It was hoped that opinion leaders would emerge from the radio listening clubs who would then relay this development information to others. These days Radio Zimbabwe is mainly a music station with five-minute news on the hour from 06h00 to 23h00 and four 20-minute news bulletins a day. Special 55-minute programmes are offered daily for women, the youth and children. Brief talk segments (15 to 30 minutes) are broadcast three times a day. Occasionally the station sells air time to NGOs, for example to the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe (FCTZ) to transmit its 15-minute programme Upfumi Kuwanhu (literally translated ‘Wealth to the People’) every Tuesday. These programmes are broadcast during prime time from 18h45 to 19h00.

Spot FM targets ‘mature’, middle-class audiences and broadcasts in English. The station has a three-minute headline news service on the hour from 06h00 to 24h00 and a half-hour bulletin at 13h00 and 18h00. Its programme schedule follows a traditional pattern of 30-minute slots interspersed with music. Spot FM offers six talk shows per day discussing mainly entertainment and lifestyle topics, sports information and half-hour programmes such as Book Review, The Nationalist Leader, Wheels of Justice, Women in Business, Business Talk and the like. From 11h03 to 12h00 Spot FM broadcasts a regular women’s programme.

Power FM is a youth radio station broadcasting mainly in English. The station offers music almost exclusively, some of it in the form of requests, plus half an hour of birthday greetings, 15 minutes of sports and a five-minute quiz a day. Five minutes of news are broadcast nine times a day.

National FM focuses on social and developmental issues and broadcasts in 17 languages.
2.2 News

A special report was commissioned for this survey from the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ)\(^78\) to assess news and current affairs programmes aired on the ZBC and two of the foreign-based, Zimbabwean-run private radio stations (SW Radio Africa and Studio 7) for a three-week period between 13 July and 2 August 2009.

Obviously, this is a comparison between two very different outputs, in respect of purpose as well as volume. The foreign-based stations were set up with the express intention to provide an alternative to the information disseminated by the government via the state broadcaster and to give a platform to those whose voices were habitually excluded from it. And while the ZBC runs a round-the-clock service with a large number of regular news slots providing extensive space for whatever it wants to put across, the private stations are on air for a couple of hours a day only, and thus need to make very careful choices. Nevertheless, comparing the two does help to show up more clearly how partial the state broadcaster’s coverage of what is happening in the country (and beyond) on a day-to-day basis really is – both in terms of selection and treatment.

ZBC news coverage focused on socio-economic issues which featured in 31.2 per cent of stories broadcast during the period under review, followed by stories on the inclusive government (20 per cent) and news about communities and development (9.3 per cent). The private stations, on the other hand, put more emphasis on human rights issues (17.6 per cent of stories) and the debate surrounding the development of a new constitution for Zimbabwe (16 per cent). By comparison, only 8 per cent of ZBC stories dealt with the constitutional debate and 0.8 per cent with human rights issues. Twenty-four per cent of stories on private stations reported on the inclusive government and 16.8 per cent covered socio-economic issues.

The distribution of sources follows a similarly distinctive pattern. The main sources used by the ZBC were government (11.9 per cent), MDC ministers (13.2 per cent) and ZANU PF ministers (11.6 per cent). While the ZBC quoted the ZANU PF party in 9.8 per cent of its stories, statements from the two MDC formations were included in only 4 per cent. The private radios quoted MDC sources in 16.2 per cent of their stories and ZANU PF in only 1.4 per cent. The main sources of information for the private stations (37.3 per cent) are ‘alternative’ voices, that is, civil society representatives, and ‘legal voices’ (9.9 per cent).

This assessment of ZBC news bulletins during the period under review shows

that in party-political terms – on the face of it – the broadcaster seemingly provides ‘balanced’ news, even giving ‘preference’ to MDC ministers. A closer look reveals a somewhat different picture. The weeks examined here saw the start of national conferences to review Zimbabwe’s constitution and the launch of ‘national peace days’ promoting national reconciliation. On many of these occasions MDC officials ‘were mainly cited in the context of reinforcing the notion of a united government’ – quotes that conveyed a message which is in the interest of ZANU PF.79

None of the ZBC’s stories on the inclusive government ‘openly exposed the tensions in the new government and their effects on its stability.’ According to the MMPZ, government officials quoted were ‘depicting it as united and focused on the source of the country’s problems and the requisite solutions.’ In contrast, most of the private stations’ stories on the inclusive government ‘cited analysts noting the problems plaguing the coalition since its inception, which they mainly traced to ZANU PF’s disdain for the global political agreement.’

In July and August 2009 several MDC members of parliament were prosecuted and convicted of what were described as trumped up charges (such as the alleged theft of a cell phone) and consequently suspended from the national assembly – the widely suspected purpose being to reduce or wipe out the slight MDC majority in the house. In the weeks monitored there was no mention of such suspensions and their implications on ZBC channels.

During the same period Prime Minister Tsvangirai called upon then SADC Chairman and President of South Africa Jacob Zuma to intervene against ‘unilateral decisions’ by President Mugabe – again without any coverage by the state broadcaster.

When the first day of a national constitutional conference descended into chaos created by ZANU PF supporters, ZTV news featured an ‘analyst’ who explained the party’s actions as agitation for a ‘home-grown constitution amid revelations that there was an external hand in the process’ (without substantiating his claims) – the ‘analyst’ was ZANU PF Governor Martin Dinha.

Continuing human rights violations against MDC members and supporters remain largely unreported by the state broadcaster. High profile arrests or court appearances are either not reflected in the news at all or rate a mere mention among other general crime or court cases. ‘The private radio stations carried 20 stories on alleged human rights abuses as compared to six featured on ZBC. The private radio stations recorded six new alleged incidents of rights abuses. The ZBC ignored these reports.’

On closer examination it becomes clear that ZBC news broadcasts are used as partisan instruments to shore up the position of ZANU PF in the inclusive government

and to project an image of the party still being largely in charge. The constant reference to President Mugabe as ‘Head of State and Government and Commander-in-chief of the Defence Forces’ ignores the power-sharing provisions [of the agreement between the parties] by promoting the idea of Mugabe as having a monopoly on executive power in the unity government\(^{80}\) – with little mention of the fact that he shares this power with the MDC’s Morgan Tsvangirai as prime minister.

Titles and modes of address used in ZBC news have long been indicative of the stance of the broadcaster and continue to be so. MDC members of government are habitually referred to as ‘Mr’ and ‘Mrs’ in the bulletins, while ZANU PF officials are always ‘Comrade’ – a term that denotes membership in the party of liberation and the ranks of anti-colonial struggle heroes. Not according this honorific to members of other parties subtly suggests that they played no role in this struggle.

### 2.3 Current affairs

The MMPZ in its report for this survey notes that the ZBC’s current affairs programmes ‘generally offered a diversified and more measured assessment of the country’s political and socio-economic evolution’ than its news coverage.

In a specific focus on some of ZTV’s current affairs programmes, the MMPZ found that two of them (The Legislator and Face The Nation) included a range of opinions on the topics discussed, while three (The Melting Pot, Madzindza and Media Watch) were essentially used to reflect and reinforce ZANU PF views. The programme Talking Farming basically aims at building the knowledge of resettled indigenous farmers in terms of Zimbabwe’s land distribution policies.

On radio, the ZBC’s Spot FM devoted 45 minutes every working day (Monday to Friday) between 09h15 and 10h00 to STERP, the government’s Short Term Emergency Recovery Programme of March 2009. ‘However, almost all the programmes turned out to be bland public relations platforms for the coalition that lacked critical examination of its programmes.’

In the period under review and ‘as has become the norm ahead of the country’s annual Heroes Day commemorations [on 11 August], the station punctuated its programming with Heroes/National Events slots every Monday to Friday between 10 am and 2pm and in the evening between 6pm and 10pm. The programmes profiled the lives and contributions of the late nationalists to the country’s struggle for independence.’

In contrast, according to the MMPZ report, SW Radio Africa’s current affairs slots

of 30 minutes a day provided an analytical perspective to topical subjects throughout the week. The programmes were in the form of interviews with public figures and discussions by analysts.

3 Feedback and complaints procedures

The ZBC does not have any feedback and complaints procedure. In the 1990s, ZBC-TV used to air a programme called *Facts and Opinions* that gave viewers a platform to raise concerns about the broadcaster. However, this programme was dropped after the transformation of the ZBC beginning in 2000.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

Despite the formation of a government supposed to be inclusive of the different sides of the political spectrum, the ZBC has hardly changed its approach or perceived role as the voice of ZANU PF and its narrowly defined nationalist stance. Up to the time of writing this report, the ‘inclusive’ government had taken no decisive action to correct this.

Programme offerings – both on radio and TV – are extremely poor and do not serve the diverse interests of the audience. The ZBC is failing almost completely to provide what is commonly expected from a public broadcaster: quality information, education and entertainment.

On the basis of new legislation for the ZBC, the broadcaster should:

- In a process of public consultation, develop a programme charter that adheres to public broadcasting principles and promotes public interest programming;
- Develop a code of conduct and establish an effective internal complaints mechanism through which citizens can express their concerns about content that they find inappropriate or unacceptable;
- Consult widely with stakeholders and the public at large to develop an appropriate local content policy;
- Develop a professional and mutually beneficial relationship with local audio-visual production companies;
- Set up a commissioning unit that will ensure diversity of output.