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Government communication in Southern Africa

Nkanyiso Maqeda and Percy Makombe

Introduction

In Southern Africa, national identity, economic development and state security have been the key guiding principles for governments in the post-colonial period. From the attainment of independence in 1980 and 1994 respectively, governments in Zimbabwe and South Africa sought to control the media and communications, ostensibly to help in nation-building and development. However, these noble objectives have also included a tendency to use media and government communications to increase the concentration of political power in the hands of the ruling elite.

This chapter carries out a comparative analysis of government communication in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The two countries are chosen because of their contrasting situations. South Africa is widely viewed as a thriving democracy characterized by free and fair elections, a free and diverse media, and protection of human rights and freedoms for citizens since the first democratic elections in 1994. Zimbabwe on the other hand has in the recent past been widely viewed as following an autocratic trajectory, characterized by disputed elections, erosion of press freedoms and an assault on the rights of its citizens particularly from the late 1990s to 2009 when a unity government, popularly known as the inclusive government, was formed.

Overview of the political and electoral systems

South Africa

South Africa is a diverse country with 11 official languages and a population of 49 million people. When the National Party (NP) gained power in 1948, it institutionalized racial segregation which became known as apartheid. Apartheid South Africa was characterized by state repression and violence that was central in perpetuating the tenure of the National Party. In the late 1980s, however, the apartheid government began to lose its hold on power as a result of mounting internal pressure and international sanctions leading to talks with opposition parties and the legalization of the liberation movements as well as the release of political prisoners.

In 1994 Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president of South Africa when his African National Congress (ANC) party won 62 per cent of the vote. South Africa employs a proportional representation system under which a party is allocated seats according to the number of people who have voted for it. Parties have a ranked party list system. Members of parliament elect the president who can serve for no more than two terms of five years each. The country is a constitutional multiparty democracy with 13 political parties represented in the National Assembly of Parliament. South Africa is organized around three tiers (local, provincial, national) of government.

Since 1994, South Africa has organized democratic elections whose results have been accepted even by the losers. In a rare feat for Africa, Mandela decided not to seek a second term, thus paving the way for Thabo Mbeki to succeed him after the 1999 elections in which the ANC won 66.36 per cent of the vote, just a point short of a two-thirds majority, a key figure that allows a party to change the country's constitution. Mbeki was succeeded by Jacob Zuma who was elected after the ANC won the 2009 elections with 65.9 per cent of the vote in an election in which the total number of votes cast was 17,680,729, representing 77.3 per cent of registered voters.

The ANC is the biggest party with 264 of the 400 National Assembly seats. Of the country's nine provinces, the ANC controls all but one which is controlled by the largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). The ANC also controls five of the six metropolitan municipalities. South Africa has two houses of parliament (the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces). The Assembly is the most important body responsible for monitoring executive performance and passing legislation.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has a population of approximately 14 million people, uses three official languages out of the eight main languages spoken in the country. The country has an elected president and members of parliament are elected by their constituencies in a first-past-the-post system. The legislature is made up of the Lower House (House of Assembly) and the Upper House (Senate). The House of Assembly has 210 members consisting of 200 elected members and 10 non-constituency members of parliament appointed for five-year terms. The Senate is made up of 66 members with 50 elected and 6 appointed senators. Ten chiefs elected from the Chiefs Council make up the complement for the Senate.

The presidential term is five years, with no limits on the number of terms an individual may contest elections. In the March 2008 presidential vote, Morgan Tsvangirai, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) candidate, received 47.9 per cent of the vote compared to 43.2 per cent for the Zanu PF candidate, Robert Mugabe. According to the Zimbabwe Constitution, for a candidate to assume the presidency, he/she must garner at least 50 per cent plus one vote. None of the candidates achieved this figure in the first round of voting, precipitating a runoff. However, Tsvangirai withdrew from the contest after Mugabe's Zanu PF with the help of the state security machinery, unleashed a wave of violence, making it impossible for Tsvangirai to campaign.

On 15 September 2008, Zanu PF and the two MDC formations signed a Global Political Agreement (GPA) that created the basis for the establishment of a coalition government negotiated with the facilitation of the then South African President Thabo Mbeki under the aegis of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The agreement created the basis for a coalition government. This transitional arrangement added to the governance structure the position of a prime minister and two deputy prime ministers.

Since independence in 1980, unlike other typical autocratic regimes in Africa, Zimbabwe has consistently held elections when they are due, leading Mugabe and his party to argue that Zimbabwe is a democracy. However, the reality is that President Mugabe and his party have systematically narrowed the democratic space for any opposition group that has dared to challenge them. Welshman Ncube (1991, p. 42) has argued that 'behind the facade of constitutional democracy lay an authoritarian political system characterised by the proscription of democratic space'. One of the defining features of the Zanu PF government, which has ruled the country since independence in 1980, is that it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the party and government. Studying government communication in Zimbabwe is therefore equivalent to studying the communication strategy of Zanu PF. Even though

there is an inclusive government, Zanu PF retains control of the strategic security and information ministries.

Overview of the media landscape and culture

The demise of the apartheid government in South Africa and the arrival of majority rule in 1994 saw the liberalization of the media sector. Freedom of the press is enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa. In their 2010 Press Freedom Index, Reporters without Borders placed South Africa at number 38 out of 178 countries.

South Africa has a vibrant and diverse newspaper industry of 24 dailies and 25 weeklies published largely in English. The highest circulation daily newspaper is a tabloid called the *Daily Sun* which has seen its circulation rise from 78,000 when it was launched in 2002 to over 500,000 in 2010 and it has a market penetration of 51.8 per cent. In December 2010 a new daily, *New Age*, was launched. This paper is owned by the Gupta Group which has strong ties to the ANC and especially to President Zuma, leading to commentators to suggest that the *New Age* is really the *New Agent* for the government.

Print media are important for government communication in Africa as they give governments the ability to reach mass audiences who are potential voters. In March 2011, the South African government announced that it would launch a newspaper because it was being misrepresented by the independent media. Government spokesman, Jimmy Manyi, argued that 'the media is censoring a lot of government information' (*Sowetan*, 2011) and that editors of commercial newspapers should not be left to choose what government information should be printed. He also said that *New Age* newspaper would be published in all the country's 11 official languages and would be distributed nationally. In Manyi's words, 'We want it in the streets in every township and rural areas. It will be bigger than all of you guys (journalists) put together' (*Sowetan*, 2011).

In June 2011, Manyi revealed that the government was still concerned about the negative coverage it was receiving in the media and as part of the strategy to deal with this, the government advertising budget would be centralized and handled by the Government Communication Information Systems (GCIS). Previously the 74 national departments had handled the procurement of their own advertising space and time. According to Manyi, the budget would be centralized so that government could advertise in media that 'pass on our content much more effectively to the public of South Africa' (*Independent*, 2011). In 2011, the South African government had an advertising budget of 1.7 billion rands (US\$220m) of which 52 per cent went to radio and television and the rest to print media. It appears that the government is determined to

use this financial leverage to ensure that journalists report government in a favourable way (*Mail & Guardian*, 2010).

South Africa has a public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), funded through a licence fee and advertising as well as government subsidy. Before independence in 1994, the National Party (NP) used the SABC as a propaganda tool. According to Horwitz (2001, p. 2), appointment to senior positions within the Corporation depended on political ties rather than professional expertise. It was only in the 1990s, as it became apparent that apartheid was becoming untenable, that the outgoing NP government liberalized and attempted to democratize the broadcasting industry. Faced with certain defeat in the country's first democratic elections in 1994, the NP became concerned that one of its major tools for maintaining political power was going to fall into its opponents' hands. The ANC for its part was worried that it would participate in an election in which the NP had effective control of the SABC.

The task of ensuring that the SABC board is non-partisan and free from government interference is a challenging one, especially as the government has continuously come to the SABC's financial rescue. In October 2010, for example, the Corporation sought a R1-billion (US\$130m) bailout from government having made a R900-million (US\$117m) loss. Appointments to the Corporation's board are made according to the 1999 Broadcasting Act whereby the Portfolio Committee on Communications invites the public to make nominations for appointments. The Committee then draws up a shortlist, conducts interviews and presents its findings to the National Assembly for recommendation to the president.

In 2006 there was an outcry following claims that the then SABC Group Executive of News had created a 'blacklist' of reporters, analysts and commentators who should not be interviewed because their views were believed to be critical of government. Although the SABC at first denied the existence of such a blacklist, they were embarrassed together with the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) when the High Court ruled that there was manipulation of news at SABC between 2005 and 2006. The judge went further and criticized ICASA's failure to take action to correct the anomaly on the pretext that it had no jurisdiction over SABC programme production. According to the judge, ICASA's lack of interest in putting things right meant that 'the SABC may with impunity manipulate and distort preparation of its news and current affairs coverage and publicly lie about it when they are caught out having done so' (Davies, 2001).

Unlike South Africa which has both public and private broadcasters, Zimbabwe has maintained a restricted operating media environment particularly in the broadcasting sector. The country has only one broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). The 1957 Broadcasting Act

granted the State a monopoly over all broadcasting in Zimbabwe. ZBC, then called the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC), was entirely owned by the government. The then Secretary of Information stated that under the Rhodesian Front-led government, the RBC was supposed to 'speak with the government's voice alone' (Saunders, 1999, p. 7). Other voices had to be drowned out because they were regarded as a threat to national security and interests.

According to Saunders, after independence in 1980 there were three main challenges regarding relations between the media and the government, namely:

- How could the national media be changed to meet the needs of national development, reconciliation and, most importantly, the new political reality of black majority rule?
- How could the print media, held in private hands, be freed of white control?
- How could these reforms avoid repeating government domination and manipulation of the media? (1999, p. 7)

However, the change from the minority Rhodesian government to majority rule did not lead to the transformation of the media's function. The new government essentially used the media to strengthen its hold on political power which it framed as being in the national interest.

Since independence, the government of Zimbabwe has continued systematically to use legislation as a tool to manage news output and information access for citizens. Under Section 14(1) and (2) and Section 27 of the Radio Communications of 1994 and Broadcasting Act of 2001, for example, the government has established and maintained a monopoly over the broadcasting services.

Zimbabwe was ranked number 123 in the 2010 Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders, an improvement from the previous year's ranking of 136. This improvement came on the back of the granting of publishing licences to four independent daily newspapers including the previously banned *Daily News* by the Zimbabwe Media Commission.

While the opening up of space for independent media in the print sector has won plaudits, the electronic media sector remains severely restricted and is raised as one of the key outstanding issues in interparty negotiations. Under pressure, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe, which is controlled by the Minister of Media, Information and Publicity awarded two radio licences to two organizations closely linked to Zanu PF party. One was awarded to AB Communications, an organization led by broadcaster Supa Mandiwanzira who announced that he would contest the 2012 parliamentary election on a Zanu

PF ticket and the other to the Zimpapers Group which is closely controlled by the Minister of Information. Zimpapers Groups has Star FM which began broadcasting in June 2012 while AB Communications has ZiFM which began broadcasting in August of the same year.

Trends in government communication

Government communication in South Africa is the responsibility of the GCIS launched in May 1998 on the recommendation of the communications task group (Comtask) appointed by the then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki in 1995 to review relationships between government communication functions at national, provincial and local level (GCIS, 2002a, p. 2). Some of the key recommendations from the Comtask report which were then implemented included the development of a professional communications unit within each ministry as well as a centralized communications service agency which today is known as the GCIS.

The GCIS is led by a chief executive officer (CEO). Political ties seem to be important for appointment to this critical position. The GCIS head serves as the government spokesperson and also chairs the GCIS Executive Committee (Exco) which coordinates government communication. The GCIS has three branches (see Table 11.1) – communication and content management, corporate services and government and stakeholder engagement – each headed by a deputy. The GCIS Exco is composed of the CEO, the deputy CEOs and the chief directors. All those occupying senior positions in GCIS have at least first degrees across the fields of media, journalism, development studies, economics, marketing and political science.

The Communication and Content Management department coordinates the formulation and execution of the National Communication Strategy including conducting research to assess and advise government on public communication needs. The department also monitors media coverage of government and trains government communicators.

The Corporate Services branch is responsible for management support services, providing a project management service to enhance performance in the delivery of GCIS's mandate. It is also responsible for coordinating and implementing effective strategic planning and performance monitoring.

The Government and Stakeholder Engagement branch is tasked with providing leadership and strategic advice to the provincial and local government communication system, providing leadership in the interface of national government communication with provincial communication programmes.

The CEO is the most senior person in government communications and reports to the Presidency and Cabinet. The CEO is also responsible

TABLE 11.1 South Africa government communication structure

Chief Executive Officer		
Deputy CEO Communication & Content Development	Deputy CEO Corporate Services	Deputy CEO Government & Stakeholder Engagement
2010 Government Communication Project Management This was a special position created specifically to manage government communication around the 2010 World Cup Chief Director	Finance, Supply Chain & Auxiliary Services Chief Financial Officer	Cluster Supervision: Human Development; Social Protection & Community Development; Governance & Administration Clusters Chief Director
Communication Service Agency Chief Director	Human Resources Chief Chief Director	Media Engagement Chief Director
Content & Writing Chief Director	Information Management & Technology Chief Information Officer	Provincial & Local Liaison Chief Director
	Internal Audit Chief Audit Executive	
Policy Research Chief Director	Property & Facilities Management Chief Director	

for developing and maintaining an integrated international communication plan that promotes South Africa internationally. This involves working with ministries and South Africa's embassies. This function was developed to improve coordination especially for foreign visits. Previously there had been no clear lines of responsibility for organizing such visits which fell between foreign affairs and various government departments. The visits are now coordinated by the Communication and Content Development branch under the directorate of Communication Service Agency (CSA) in collaboration with Foreign Affairs or in some cases parliament if it is a parliamentary visit. The CSA is responsible for branding government and developing its corporate identity. It is in charge of bulk media buying on behalf of government and also distributes information products.

An important aspect of government communication is the development of government and stakeholder engagement. The provincial and local liaison directorate provides direction on the interface of national government communication with provincial communication programmes. There are GCIS offices in each of the nine provinces. The offices work closely with provincial governments, in particular the Premier's Offices, to ensure the message of government is disseminated in a seamless manner to the public. For example, the government introduced in 1999 Thusong Service Centres (TSCs) whose purpose is to provide general information about government services. They do this through direct information sessions, meetings, and also through provincial and national awareness programmes (Public Service Commission, 2010, pp. vii).

With regards to government-media relations, South Africa seemed to be making positive progress when, in May 2001, editors and senior journalists met Cabinet to discuss the establishment of a Presidential Press Corps (PPC). The PPC was conceived with the aim of providing easy access for the media to the president, ministers and senior government officials to ensure that information published or broadcast by journalists was as accurate and as up to date as possible (GCIS, 2002b).

However, the project got off to a bad start when, as part of the security clearance required for journalists, questions were asked about their sex lives and bank accounts. This provoked an uproar and concern that the government was trying to obtain personal information for sinister motives, leading to an apology from the Minister of Intelligence to the journalists concerned. Although the Corps system was supposed to improve communication and enhance the accuracy of information reported by the media, there was the feeling that this forum would be used by the government to manipulate the media (SADC Media Law, 2003, p. 6). It therefore never took off because of suspicions that the government had sinister motives.

In 2001, the government established a Presidential Participation Programme to provide a platform for face-to-face interaction with the citizens. Initially Cabinet decided that the *imbizo* (a forum for dialogue) activities should include at least one period a year of intense interaction between government and the people. However, during 2002 the Cabinet decided that there should be at least two *imbizo* periods a year to promote interactive governance and communication.

During the *imbizo*, senior officials from the three tiers of government at national, provincial and local level engage with citizens from all over South Africa. Senior officials who participate in the *imbizo* 'Focus Weeks' include the deputy president, Cabinet ministers, deputy ministers, premiers, local government representatives, Members of Executive Councils (MECs) in the provinces, mayors and other senior government officials. The president

then makes extended visits to the provinces and the communities have an opportunity to speak about their concerns as well as give feedback on the government's programme of action. This space is important as it is unmediated. It is a deliberative approach that tries to generate feedback in a bottom-up approach. As argued by Hartsliel (2005, p. 9), 'the *imbizo* qualifies as a rapid and cost-effective way of policy evaluation that could potentially lead to policy change, cancellation thereof or even the introduction of new items on the policy agenda.'

A new programme called the public participation programme (PPP) replaced the *imbizo* in November 2009. The programme still supports the president's initiative for government to serve and engage with the public. For example, in his public participation engagements in 2010, the Minister of Police visited communities in KwaZulu Natal over two days. He met interfaith organizations, youth groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business as well as political organizations and urged them to support government in fighting crime. He also made an appearance at the trial of a serial killer who had terrorized communities in KwaZulu Natal. Later in the day he handed over a house to a local family whose shack was destroyed by rains leading to the death of the parents. The minister also had one-on-one interviews with the media.

Through its PPPs, the government seeks to demonstrate that it is in touch with people's concerns and that is willing to discuss with different stakeholders what needs to be done and how things can be improved. The handing over of the house presented an excellent media opportunity and created the perception of a concerned government. The presidency also introduced in September 2009 a toll-free hotline to the president's office for people to call and discuss their concerns. By September 2010, it was claimed that 30,500 complaints had been resolved by this means (SA Goodnews, 2011) and publicizing actions to solve these problems gave the impression that matters raised by the citizens were being attended to by the government. One criticism of the hotline and PPP, however, is that they create the impression that dialogue is only important with the national executive and unwittingly undermine the participation that should take place between the electorate and their representatives in all three tiers of government (local, provincial and national).

In Zimbabwe, when the country achieved independence in 1980, one of the key ministries was the Ministry of Information, Posts and Telecommunications. It was headed by a minister and the top civil servant was the Director of Information with a team composed of a Deputy Director, Under Secretary and Assistant Secretary. This ministry housed various departments including the ZBC, the NEW Zimbabwe African News Agency (New Ziana), the Zimbabwe Information Services (ZIS), the Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers) and the Telecommunications and Post Offices.

Responsible for all government communication from the other ministries, the ministry also dealt with the accreditation of local and international journalists who wished to work in the country. In addition to managing the information output of government, the ministry had regulatory and supervisory functions for communication entities including overseeing the telecommunications and post offices.

A Department of Information and Publicity ran a parallel operation from the president's office. This department was set up in 1980 with the primary role of serving the information and publicity needs of the president and Cabinet. It was headed by the Principal Press Secretary reporting to the Permanent Secretary who, in turn, reported to the Chief Secretary. Although the Ministry of Information's wide-ranging functions meant it was difficult to manage, the two structures served the government of the day relatively well primarily because there was no serious opposition and very few alternative channels of communication. According to a former Director of Information at the Ministry:

It was always a big challenge to manage and oversee the many units, which with the benefit of hindsight were not closely related to the co-function of managing government information. We had a huge staff complement to carry out functions ranging from Post and Telecommunications to servicing information needs of Ministries. Coordination was certainly a challenge, but we met all our key objectives. (Interview with Bornwell Chakaodza, 13 November 2011)

There is no doubt that the media monopoly helped the government as Zimbabweans could not access alternative information elsewhere. For example, people knew next to nothing about the genocide in Zimbabwe between 1982 and 1987 in which 20,000 civilians were killed by government soldiers in Matabeleland and Midlands on the pretext of crushing armed rebels.

In 2000, when the MDC presented a real challenge to the incumbent Zanu PF party, government management of information was radically restructured to deal with the new threat. The Ministry of Information was moved from being an independent ministry and placed as a department in the Office of the President, thus joining the strategic Ministry of State Security, which is also located in the President's Office. In 2000, despite the fact that the newly appointed Information and Publicity Minister, Jonathan Moyo, was a complete novice in the party (something unusual for Zanu PF which sets great store on members' seniority and history), he was put in charge of a full ministry with a seat in cabinet and direct access to and control of all public media houses.

All ministries channelled their communication or received their cue from the new Department of Information and Publicity. As a result, the government message was centralized and disciplined. They chose the issue of 'land' as their central theme. The opposition MDC were portrayed as puppets of the West who were opposed to the just cause of redistributing land to the majority black Zimbabweans. This message was repeated continuously through state media, and party and government communications. This blitzkrieg was possible only because the Minister of Information could literally direct the editors of all public media on what to publish and broadcast.

During Minister Moyo's era several young journalists who wrote openly partisan stories were rewarded with promotions while those who tried to remain professional were either demoted or removed completely. This model has been maintained to date.

In reorganizing the Ministry of Information, Post and Telecommunications, Moyo took away functions that did not directly involve the management of information and news and placed them elsewhere. For example, Post and Telecommunications were removed to form a new Ministry of Communications and Transport.

Moyo's second step in reorganizing government communication involved changing the personnel of the boards of directors for media institutions considered key for transmitting government propaganda namely, Zimbabwe Newspapers (print), ZBC (television and radio), NEW ZIANA (news agency) and the Community Newspapers Groups and the Mass Media Trust. The selection of these new boards was carried out by the minister who ensured that only those who held favourable views about the government were appointed. The result was that government could directly control information and communication output from several strategic bodies.

The third step saw new editorial appointments in the various media houses. Several editorial changes were instituted at *Zimpapers*, resulting in the removal of veteran journalists such as the editors of the *Herald*, the *Sunday Mail* and the *Chronicle*. According to one journalist: 'Terror tactics were used to flush out senior journalists to replace them with sycophantic greenhorns who were prepared to tow the line' (interview in Harare, 2005).

The people that the minister trusted were posted to key editorial positions. For example, Munyaradzi Hwengwere, who had served as the Principal Press Officer in the Department of Information in the president's office, was posted to the ZBC as Head of television news. He was so trusted by the minister that he had a level of editorial independence few journalists could afford. He revealed that after 2002, realizing that urban audiences had been put off ZTV news because of the one-sided nature of the coverage, he sought to reattract the audiences by bringing in MDC voices and faces into the news. In his words: 'We developed a three legged news format. First we would have

a government or Zanu PF voice, then an MDC voice and then end with an analyst who was invariably pro-government. I could afford to do this because I was trusted' (Hwengwere, interview, 24 October 2011).

Similar structural changes were instituted in relation to the ZBC. The board and senior management of ZBC were appointed by the Minister of Information in consultation with the president. However, as in the print sector, several veteran journalists and broadcasters were removed from ZBC and replaced by individuals loyal to the governing party. The following account from a senior journalist at *Zimpapers* illustrates the strategy of intimidation adopted by the government. According to MM:¹

To the best of my knowledge, Jonathan Moyo never set foot in Herald House during his tenure but through his 'special' people (three names supplied), knew the building, its occupants and the goings on therein like the back of his hand. Because of patronage, these three never did an honest day's work while the professor was still minister. Theirs was a simple task: be the eyes and ears of the minister and you will be rewarded handsomely. Even their respective editors were powerless before this dreaded trio. In return, they would make daily trips to 'debrief Professor' at Munhumutapa Building. They would also be handed by Mrs Mukabeta, Moyo's then personal assistant, a floppy disc with stories to populate the front page. (Interview with author in Harare, 21 May 2011)

Under Moyo, government information dissemination became highly centralized and organized. This coordination and clarity of message was achieved through regular contacts with the editors and journalists. According to SS, a senior journalist at *Zimpapers*:

The minister used to have regular meetings with editors and desk editors to discuss policy issues. For example, when Dr Gono was appointed governor of the Reserve Bank, there were a series of meetings on what the media needed to do. In fact I must say, when there was something important happening, the minister would call editors to discuss the issue, e.g. pulling out of the Commonwealth and Silver Jubilee Celebrations. (Interview with author in Harare, 21 May 2011)

The media did not operate independently in deciding the story of the day nor could they report or hold alternative views as the minister determined the level of journalists' salaries and the lengths of their contracts.

Having used legislation to reduce significantly the capacity and ability of the private and international media to provide alternative information for the people of Zimbabwe, the government then literally took over the public media

to ensure that the media was entirely partisan in its coverage of what was happening in Zimbabwe. During Moyo’s tenure from 2000 to 2004, there was tight control of the content and output of the public media.

International media correspondents such as the BBC’s Joseph Winter and the *Guardian*’s Andrew Meldrum were expelled from Zimbabwe after government refused to renew their operating licences. A total of six private media houses were shut down. The situation continued even after Moyo had left his role as minister until the signing of the Global Political Agreement in 2008 and the formation of the coalition government in February 2009. Since then there has been an easing of attacks on the private media. However, the Zanu PF section of government retains great influence and control over the output of the public media.

Zimbabwe’s government communication is managed through the Ministry of Media, Information and Publicity, headed by a minister who also holds a full-time role as Commissar in the Zanu PF party (see Figure 11.1).

In principle, the role of permanent secretary is that of an impartial civil servant. However, in Zimbabwe the lines have been blurred as the Permanent Secretary actively speaks as spokesperson for one of the political parties in the inclusive government.

Below the permanent secretary there are five directors: Director of Urban Communications, Director of Rural Communications, Director of International

FIGURE 11.1 *Structure of government communication in Zimbabwe*

Relations and Director of Administration, Director of Content and Director of Media Services. The ministry has a staff complement of ninety, mostly based at the national office but has some additional staff at each of the country's ten provinces. Staff roles include press liaison, protocol, information dissemination, managing the president's press engagements, writing speeches, vetting and authorizing media house visits.

In general, the ministry operates in a highly secretive manner and does not easily release basic information to the public. While the secrecy is understandable for the Ministry of State Security, it is somewhat incongruous that the ministry in charge of government's public relations and communications is inaccessible. For example, on the government website which lists all of Zimbabwe's thirty-two ministries, the ministry's link is one of only two ministries that is not active and therefore information cannot be accessed.

All the other thirty ministries' links are active and contain basic information such as functions, roles, staff and programmes. Initially the problem with the link was perceived by the author to be a technical issue; however, attempts to acquire information proved that this was not the case. One director in the department was approached for information and their response was to require detailed security information about the writer, what the information would be used for, insisting that such information was covered under the Official Secrets Act. Even senior journalists and senior staff from other government ministries could not give basic information about the ministry and it was thus impossible to get reliable information on the structure and number of staff in the ministry.

At least two of the directors and a number of officers at national and provincial offices are retired army personnel. This is a typical trend in Zimbabwe where at all strategic institutions, serving or retired military personnel with a ZANLA liberation background are employed. ZANLA was the military wing of the Zanu PF during the war of liberation against colonialism.

The Ministry of Information's main functions include government communications and the administration of all legislation relevant to the media namely, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the ZBC Commercialisation Act and the Broadcasting Services Act. In practice, the minister has extensive influence by law and through political pressure in the selection of the boards of trustees and senior managers.

Communicating the message

The Urban Communication directorate actively uses ZBC television and radio to engage urban communities. The government also relies on music galas

where groups of the country's popular musicians are sponsored to perform overnight on selected occasions such as Unity Day and President Mugabe's Birthday. All these music shows are free for revellers and are broadcast live on the national television station and invariably contain political messages that reinforce the country's national flag but also include political slogans and messages of the Zanu PF party (Chikowero, 2011, pp. 291–313).

The Rural Communication directorate relies on the Community Newspapers Group and the Film Production Unit. Before the economic challenges of the post-2000 period the Community Newspapers Group had six newspaper titles based in six out of the country's ten provinces. These focused their coverage on community issues in the local areas. Funding has since become a challenge leading to the collapse of three of the newspapers, while the remainder are just getting by. This marks a complete change, as the group had received generous funding during the period 2000 to 2004 under Minister Moyo when they were actively used to disseminate political information. Similarly, soon after independence, government relied on the Film Production Unit to produce communication messages on its programmes and development issues which were transmitted in the rural areas through mobile cinemas. This programme is however suffering from funding constraints.

The International Communication Directorate has been one of the most active, particularly since 2000 when the country came under criticism from the international media and diplomatic circles for its controversial policies that included the sometimes violent land reform programme, state sponsored violence and torture of opposition leaders and activists and a sustained assault on human rights and press freedoms. In managing the fallout in the SADC region and Africa Union (AU), Zimbabwe closed ranks with like-minded countries, while in the international arena Zimbabwe put extensive effort in dividing the United Nations Security Council by ensuring Russia and China remained on their side to veto any resolutions against it as happened in 2008.

To push this policy the government's international communication relied on international consultants based abroad. They also identified and relied on selected intellectuals who wrote extensively in the local, regional and international media and attended international conferences to robustly defend the government's policies. The main frame of argument was the pan-Africanist view that Zimbabwe was being persecuted for carrying out land reform by imperialists spearheaded by Britain using a puppet opposition at home.

The Media Services Directorate is focused on fielding questions from the media and also organizing press conferences and preparing statements for senior government officials, including ministers, in particular the president, while the Content Directorate's main focus is on monitoring media output from the various media outlets to track how the government is being

covered in the various media. The directorate leans on the state-controlled media houses editorial teams if their output does not reflect the required message.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe's government communication is intrinsically linked to the partisan political agenda of Zanu PF. The party views communication as being so strategic that it has invested heavily in organizing communication and employing only the most trusted personnel, particularly those with a ZANLA military background. It appears that the national agenda is defined through the eyes of a political party. The structure of government communication is organized to service the critical target audiences to ensure Zanu PF retains political power.

In that regard, the nature and practice of government communications in Zimbabwe does not encourage tolerance. It is about the control and maintenance of political power at all costs. Even though there has been a government of national unity in Zimbabwe since February 2009, the voices that have been amplified in government communication are those linked to Zanu PF.

There are fears that South Africa is following Zimbabwe's path, as the government has sought to control the public broadcaster and threatened to introduce a media tribunal and a Protection of Information Bill. While these are worrying developments, it is fair to say that South Africa's government communication encourages citizen engagement and political participation. The South Africa government has been much more willing to engage with the public and appreciates that there has to be constant communication with the people, hence the development of public participation platforms such as *imbizo* and the presidential hotline which people can call to criticize the government and demand accountability. The quality of citizen participation in a democracy is enhanced when there is an engagement between the people and its government and this appears to be happening in South Africa even though there have been some autocratic moves to try to control the public broadcaster and to cut the advertising budget to media that are critical of the government.

Note

- 1 The person's real name is not disclosed for fear of reprisals.

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