

# A

# the ACCENT

ISSUE 2 ●

MARCH 2022



*By Nigel Nyamutumbu*

**T**HE much-anticipated March 26 by-elections across Zimbabwe's 10 provinces have come and gone.

In what observers had termed a mini general election given the hype created in the days leading to the polling day, the dominant narrative post these elections has been to assess the country's preparedness to hold a free, fair and credible plebiscite come 2023.

Zimbabwean elections have since the turn of the millennium been disputed on a number of accounts including but not limited to documented cases of violence and voter intimidation, vote buying, allegations of electoral fraud and biased media among other issues.

All these issues have persistently recurred each time the country goes for elections with minimum effort

## March 26 by-elections: Critical baseline to upscale advocacy for media reforms

invested in addressing these challenges.

What is evident is that these challenges go beyond the voting process and/or outcome thereof, but are an indicator of a more complex and structural problem of shrinking democratic space and consolidation of power by the elite, mostly directly or indirectly in the executive arm of government.

Part of this consolidation involves tight monitoring and control of the public sphere through weakening of institutions supporting democracy such that power is centralised within a conflated arm of government.

The media, which ideally is collectively a critical arm of the state — the fourth estate as it were — has been one of the institutions that has often been targeted, weakened and in some cases paralysed to play any significant role in governance.

The state-controlled media, which by any measure has the lion share of the platforms of expression, has been embedded with the government.

This conflation of government and the media has at best description weakened journalism or at worst destroyed the craft.

The story angling and presentation of news is brazenly government centric and in the case of elections in favour of the ruling party.

There is shameless disregard of the provisions of the constitution and the electoral law.

Never mind the professional obligations.

That this illegality and unprofessionalism has been perpetuated with impunity demonstrates how the electoral commission's media monitoring committee is also either embedded with the system or ill-equipped to enforce the codes governing media conduct during the elections.

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (Zec), through its media monitoring committee is by law mandated to regulate the media during elections.

Over the years, the electoral commission has been engaging its sister commission, the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) to assist in the discharge of this function.

Yet even with the expertise in media regulation, there hasn't been any attempt to enforce professional reportage and fair coverage of political contestants outside the rhetoric reports with findings, which assert that both the private and state-controlled media are biased.

This balancing act aimed at creating the impression that the media market forces are evenly playing out ignores the fundamental reality that at the end of the day, the ruling party always has an unfair advantage over the opposition in terms of media coverage.

There is evidence to this assertion obtained from reports compiled by media think tanks and knowledge management experts, Media Monitors.

In their empirical monitoring of the coverage of political parties across both privately and state-controlled media, there were findings to the effect that the sitting president and the ruling party had the most space and airtime.

These findings are hardly surprising.

The privately owned media is not only clouded in the market but its insignificant coverage of the ruling party adds to the widening of the platforms for the party, outside those they directly control.

Never mind that this control is illegal.

Not only has this control affected the operations of the media in terms of content generation, it has piled pressure on journalists to openly show allegiance to the ruling party, either to find favour within the establishment or to advance their careers and standing within the system.

There have been cases at which journalists have openly supported political parties or at worst have sought for political office while still serving as journalists.

This has compromised the integrity of the profession and in worst cases the safety of the journalists in question.

There is an obvious conflict of interests when practicing journalists openly participate in political party activities and to seek to represent the party during elections.

One wonders if the electoral commission's monitoring committee is alive to these realities and their impact on the credibility of the media in the conduct of elections.

Their silence and non-committal action against these malpractices is deafening!

Beyond the control and structural weakening of the media, which has directly impacted on the coverage of political actors and media conduct, the conditions under which journalists operate during elections remain unsafe.

Media freedom is often one of the biggest casualties during the election season.

It is unfortunate that during the March by-elections, all political parties that convened rallies and political gatherings were culpable of harassing journalists while on duty.

There were also disturbing remarks attributed to senior politicians threatening journalists or suggesting the barring of certain sections of the media.

This certainly needs to be addressed and there has to be commitment by all political actors guaranteeing the safety of journalists.

Even when the coverage is unfavourable and story angling unfair, harassing or banning journalists is unconstitutional.

Besides there are professional remedies available to those aggrieved by the media.

There are mechanisms that can be invoked in promoting accountability.

By organising themselves and professionally associating within the self-regulatory council, journalists and the media are committing to professionalism and to being held accountable for what they would have published or broadcast.

It is the powerful elite's appetite to further weaken the media as the fourth estate that any attempt to professionalise the sector and hold journalists accountable is being resisted.

In addition, it is the reason why the calls to strengthen the self-regulatory body is a difficult proposition in some quarters.

The status quo has been serving certain interests. There is method to the madness.

Zimbabweans, however, have a greater obligation to resist this capture and defend journalism.

The perpetuation of partisan journalism in the March 26 elections should provide impetus to media stakeholders in Zimbabwe with solidarity from the region and beyond to sustain momentum around advocacy for media reform.

***\*Nigel Nyamutumbu is a media development practitioner currently heading the secretariat of a network of nine media professional associations and support organisations, the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ). He can be contacted on +263772 501 557 or njnya2@gmail.com.***



By Mlondolozzi Ndlovu

**T**HE Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (Zacras) recently held a conference on community radio sustainability.

The activity provided solutions for community radios in terms of discussing the sustainability models that can be adapted for the survival of the newly licensed community radio stations.

Community radio is the final layer in the three tier broadcasting matrix, which Zimbabwe subscribes to.

A community radio is a localised radio platform, which covers a specific grouping of people or geographical location.

Zimbabwe after years of consistent lobbying has licensed community radio stations. To date 14 have been licensed while one is now operational.

However, after the licensing and subsequent launches the reality has appeared that these community radios need support for full effect. This is from government, corporates and the community.

Broadcasting is expensive.

This is why the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation, after launch, was cushioned by the licensing law, where everyone with a television set

# A case for govt support for new community radio stations

had to pay.

Even to date, after the emergence of other channels and possible alternatives, ZBC is still reliant on television licences.

It is a reality which makes relevant the case for a conversation around community radio stations and the need to reflect on how we can make them grow into viable platforms.

## Loans

Besides issuing licenses, the cost of content should also — to a degree be shouldered by government.

One way this could be done is through content and equipment loans.

In the 2021 budget, the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services got \$1,5 billion.

There can be considerations made to loan some of the funds to community radios.

The money can be repaid after a period of time with advertisements generated from the airing of the same content.

It is not new for loans to be given to content creators.

After Zimbabwe's independence, Nigeria bought newspapers under the *Rhodesian Herald* and donated them to government.

This shows the importance of financial injections into the media.

## Advertisements

Government departments and

parastatals are among the biggest advertisers in local media.

A simple perusal of *The Sunday Mail*, a state-owned newspaper, shows that there is more advertising from government departments than from the private sector.

For community radios, the legal basis for such advertisements is there.

Section 264, of the 2013 constitution says there should be devolved governance.

This means that provinces and districts should be allowed to self-determine on which areas of development.

So, under devolution, it should become law that a rural district council should advertise vacancies and tenders in their local media and through community radio stations, before they go to national platforms.

## There should be a national community radio policy

Research and development is central to any sector.

Government should not just license community radios and leave it at that.

There should be a national community radio policy, which gives an outline of how the government envisions the growth of community radios.

This should help guide the funding and implementation of projects.

## Foreign investment

There is a need to revisit the law which prohibits foreign investment in local broadcasting, the Broadcasting Act of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe is pursuing a policy position in which it is saying "Zimbabwe Is Open for Business."

This business should not be limited to mining and agriculture, but the media too should not be left behind.

If a company can invest US\$1 billion in a mining venture, how does a media entity become different?

Similarly, community radios are not for profit, but they have operational costs.

There are people with big pockets, who may want to donate equipment from outside the country.

The editorial independence of a platform should not worry authorities as it is clear that the community through committees and boards should determine how radios function.

That mechanism exists to ensure that there are no external influences.

It is not true that everyone who donates to a media platform will, in return, demand influence, there are diaspora-based individuals who may feel a connection to their rural areas

and consider donations.

There are also some benevolent individuals and organisations who may have excess resources.

If the country's healthcare is partially funded by donors, what is the worst that could happen if community radios are also supported by donations?

### **Training and exposure**

Radio, like any other platform, has its conventions.

These conventions were informed by many years of practice and observation.

Government should consider facilitating attachments for community radio personnel at ZBC and other radio stations under its purview.

This will allow hands-on experience and ensure that there are no elementary mistakes in the process of learning the ropes.

This will save funds, in comparison to the regular method of engaging consultants who may end up charging money which community radios do not have.

### **Equipment duty**

Zimbabwe in 2019 removed duty

on solar products.

This was meant to support the adoption of clean energy and it has worked as the uptake of solar has grown.

Similarly, the country invited independent power producers and gave them all five year tax exemptions after setup.

The same may be considered for community radios.

Government should consider scrapping duty on equipment used by community radios when they import.

This will allow them to adapt to technology, which is ever changing.

The existence of community radios assists communities with access to nuanced and relevant information.

This allows better co-ordination in times of disasters among other benefits, as such, conditions should be made to ensure that they exist for long.

### **Levies**

Every commercial media business in Zimbabwe pays taxes and license fees.

Government can create a direct funnel, in which five percent of all taxes paid by businesses in media and communications can be directed to community radios.

If political parties can be funded through the Political Parties (Finance) Act, surely there is room to explore funding of community radios.

If the government adopts the above mentioned ideas, community radio stations will survive beyond just the licensing period.

***\*Mlondolozzi Ndlovu is a community radio expert and media trainer who works for the Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations. He writes in his own capacity.***





# Southern Africa: A gaze into likely media violations in 2022

By *Tabani Moyo*

**W**E are entering the third year of living in the age of Covid-19, a pandemic that has changed our ways of living in a manner never budgeted for in the history of humankind.

In an age of pandemics, it is a risky enterprise to project the year ahead with accuracy as the environment is fast-paced in all its facets.

Suffice to note that in an era of law unpredictability, such as the one we are in, it is even a daunting task to project beyond a single day as new variants are breaking forth at a faster pace with scientists still to find a lasting solution to the crisis.

In the middle of such complexities, I will take the risk of projecting broadly how expression will be one of the easy targets from a multiplicity of angles and try to propose the way forward for the Southern Africa region on the same.

## **Journalism under siege**

In the year 2022, it is highly likely that the press will experience another wave of attacks in the region.

Gauging from the 2021 Reporters Without Borders Index, the attacks and threats on media freedom are going to escalate.

Only three Southern African countries made progress according to the

2021 Index, namely, Botswana, Malawi and Zambia, moving up by one, seven and five steps, respectively, compared to previous rankings.

Namibia retained its position as the best ranked African country in promoting media freedom, though it dropped by one point on the rankings to number 24 compared to its position at 23 in 2020.

The bulk of the countries drifted in the wrong direction or remained stuck in their previous unfavourable rankings.

South Africa moved backwards by a single step in 2021 to number 32, Zimbabwe fell four steps backwards to position 130, while Mozambique plunged to 108.

Mauritius' standing and that of Madagascar deteriorated by five and three steps to 61 and 57, respectively.

Lesotho moved two steps backwards to number 88, while Tanzania and Eswatini remained unchanged at 124 and 141, respectively.

Suffice to note that these trends show that journalism is a soft target for regimes in southern Africa, a scapegoat and a victim in the fight against the spread of the pandemic.

Back to the RSF rankings, what is worrying is that Southern African countries are concentrated between the rankings of between 100 and 180 categories — this is dangerous.

If the region continues on this trajectory, the year 2022 is likely to register more attacks against journalism and expression in the region.

While Namibia is a shining beacon, for now, developments in the country relating to its proposals to introduce a cyber security law and failure to move with speed towards enacting an access to information law, can tip the scale in the wrong direction.

## **Elections and attacks on expression**

In 2022, Lesotho will be holding its general elections. These will be held concurrently with local government elections, which were postponed in 2016.

Angola is due to hold its general elections in August 2022.

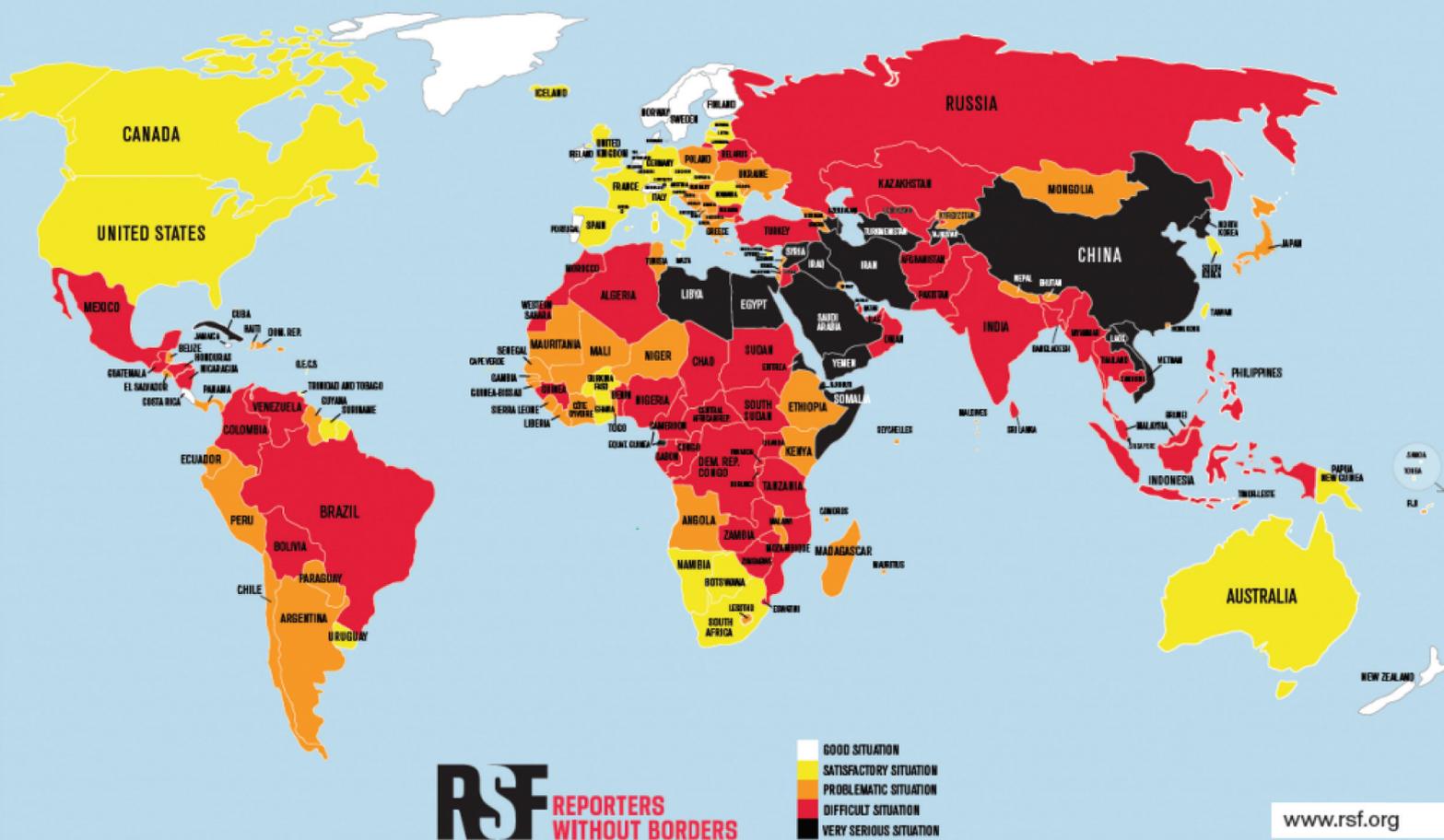
Eswatini, Madagascar and Zimbabwe are scheduled for elections in 2023, while Zimbabwe held the National Assembly and local government by-elections on March 26, 2022.

Elections in fragile states are a matter of life and death for both the citizens and journalists, as these are high stakes national, and by extension, regional processes.

Wherein, generally they are supposed to be an expression of a country, society or a people's free choice and an entry into a contract of governance, elections are a complex process in the majority of fragile and somewhat broken states.

In all these countries, journalists report in the line of fire and this increases the need to emphasise the safety and security of journalists and ensure that citizens always have access to information.

In this regard, the year 2022 could



# FREEDOM OF THE PRESS WORLDWIDE 2021

be a defining one in terms of setting the tempo for elections and democracy in the highlighted SADC member states.

The implications of this are huge.

Many a time, the true character of our respective countries in the region is tested during such processes, with many failing the test thereby proving that they are democracies gone rogue.

## Possibilities of internet shutdowns

Tied to the electoral processes is that leaders in failed states will resort to internet shutdowns or disruptions, particularly in cases where the ruling elites face tight competition from opposition political parties.

Trends of 2021 showed beyond doubt that despotic regimes are now more even inclined towards retaining power by hook and crook, including shutting down the net.

In the year 2021, three countries shut down the internet; namely the Democratic Republic of Congo on March 21, during presidential elections; the Monarch of Eswatini shut down the internet twice on June 29 and October 15 in response to protests.

The Zambian government shut down the internet on August 12 during the general elections.

These were some of the 14 governments globally that resorted to shutting down the internet in response to internal pressures.

As such, the year 2022 will be a fertile ground for monitoring how the governments will respond to electoral pressures.

## Application of fake news laws

As new Covid-19 variants emerge, regional governments are likely to consolidate undemocratic laws that were enacted at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 and probably add new laws that clawback on the enjoyment of expression.

The enactment of fake news regulations, which started with South Africa and triggered the same motions in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, require concerted efforts towards their repeal.

Governments in the region will

conveniently cite the outbreak of new variants as justification for coming up with even more retrogressive laws.

In 2022, in the wake of the Omicron variant detected in the region, and the negative response by European nations and the United States, governments will invest in more laws that will further weaponise the pandemic and crackdown on citizens.

Such a negative response was deemed to be punishing the region for its openness and transparency in the use of advance to dictate the deadly virus.

### **Deepening of the media sustainability crisis**

While the media, particularly print, have been able to innovate and survive these challenges, the Covid-19 pandemic presents an existential threat to an industry that is already limping in the SADC region.

The media in Southern Africa has over the years been facing a myriad of problems such as dwindling advertising revenue and declining sales for the print media amid the rapid shift to digital and online platforms.

Many industries have been impacted by the outbreak of Covid-19.

However, the collapse of media in the region could have a serious impact on freedom of speech and democracy.

A free and unfettered media is one of the pillars of democracy, thus, the collapse of media organisations poses a threat to democracy.

For countries to continue to develop, there is a need for plurality and diverse media platforms so that citizens are kept well informed for them to make informed choices and decisions.

While an argument can be made that the gap created by the closure of print publications is being filled by online platforms, however, statistics show that only 34% of the re-

gion's population has access to the internet.

This leaves 66% of the regional population without enough sources for news and other information, much to the detriment of democracy.

There is an urgent need for genuine dialogue among stakeholders in the media ecosystems to forcefully push for a tangible framework upon which the media can be considered for relief support to recapitalise and sustain its operations.

### **Global leadership on retreat**

The detection of the Omicron variant in Botswana in 2021, further highlighted the grave danger that we are existing in as humankind.

Developments at the global level show that leadership and democracy are regressing at a frightening scale.

This has emerged at different stages on a significant international scale.

The most worrying being Brexit and the subsequent gaining of traction among nations towards inward-looking polity and rising nationalism.

This has been worsened by the rise of right-wing politics across Europe and the Americas.

Worse off, the open clash between America and China triggers economic global tremors.

The growing dominance of nations such as Russia and China in global diplomacy further threatens the democratic dividend that was achieved through decades of solidarity and collaboration by the peoples of the world.

To this end, in the year 2022, though the bulk of the nations remain inward-looking, the realisation should be that the pandemic calls for outward-looking leadership — as we are not safe until every corner of the planet is safe.

In this regard, there is a need to deepen a people-centred approach towards development and broaden the scales of solidarity in 2022 than before.

### **The entrenchment of mass surveillance**

In the quest to track the levels of vaccinations and consolidate the struggles against the pandemic and the push for smart cities, the governments of Southern Africa are likely to increase mass surveillance.

At the beginning of 2021, in February, Citizen Lab, a Toronto-based research organisation, conducted research on the use of spyware.

It detected that there were seven African countries using the Circles spyware to snoop on citizens' communications.

Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana, are among the seven African countries from the SADC region.

The number of countries and scale of surveillance is likely to increase, especially with Eswatini facing unrest due to protests and the growing dominance of China in the region.

### **Shrinking civic space**

A dangerous trend in the form of restricting or shutting down civic organisations is gaining ground, starting with Uganda in East Africa, while Zimbabwe is in the process of crafting a law to empower the government to shut down civil society organisations that are performing checks and balances on officialdom.

This is in addition to the arrests, assaults, detention, and abductions of civic actors in the region.

Case in point being the deteriorating situation in Eswatini, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

In 2022, with elections looming large, civic space is bound to shrink further.

### **Enactment of repressive cyber-**

## security laws

The Sadc heads of government in Maputo, in August 2020, made a resolution to take “pre-emptive measures against external interference, the impact of fake news and abuse of social media particularly in electoral processes”.

In the wake of the resolution, there seems to be a dangerous regional consensus to crackdown on free expression online.

A number of Southern African countries have since begun or accelerated cyber security law-making, which we found somewhat problematic, as the proposed pieces of legislation have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and of the media in Southern Africa.

To illustrate this, countries such as Botswana, Eswatini, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe have already passed cyber security and cybercrime laws, while countries such as Namibia and Lesotho are in the process of crafting legislation on cyber security and cybercrime.

While Namibia is working on the wording of the same.

There is a need for countries in the Sadc region to adopt a Human Rights-Based Approach.

Such an approach will ensure that enacted or proposed legislation, take into account the urgent need to balance cybersecurity needs with the need to protect and promote the fundamental right to privacy.

Sadc member states should further ensure that the enacted and proposed domestic laws are aligned with the African Union (AU) Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection & the ACHPR's Revised Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression and Access to information.

## Way forward

In such complex times, where there is increased coordination among states and governments in the region on the need to attack

expression, CSOs need to redefine solidarity, collaboration and rooting their shield in people-centred advocacy.

This entails that CSOs take proactive steps in mainstreaming expression with the broader human rights rubric while targeting new players that have the power to influence decision making by wayward regimes in the region.

There is a need for establishing new means upon which the various stakeholders take up the responsibility of ensuring that citizens of the region enjoy their unfettered enjoyment of their rights to expression, access to information and media freedom while they perform their role as an agency to defend the same.

In addition, stakeholders in the region should invest and support efforts towards establishing a regional platform upon which, and through people to people solidarity, the region's citizens coalesce and share ideas on activism, which will become a shield to counter retrogressive steps by Sadc member states.

There is a need for further coordination towards regional lobby and advocacy to keep these threats in check at a higher level through the United Nations and African Union special mechanisms.

The value will be unlocked through pushing for enforcement of resolutions and commitments by member states.

However, due to the varied nature of activism and advocacy, the processes can at times be long and frustrating.

Deliberate steps should, therefore, be taken towards continuously building a new crop of leaders and activists to sustain the pushback against the assaults against expression in Southern Africa.

Suffice to note that in 2022, humanity will continue to be on trial, hence the need for collective responses to ensure the verdict is in our favour.

**\*Tabani Moyo is the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) regional secretariat director. He can be contacted at [tabani@misa.org](mailto:tabani@misa.org). Misa is a regional non-governmental organisation with members in eight of the Southern Africa Development Community (Sadc) countries. Its Regional Governing Council (RGC) chairperson is Golden Maunganidze (Misa Zimbabwe chairperson); deputy chairperson, Nkoale Oetsi Tsoana (Misa Lesotho chairperson) and treasurer, Salome Kitomary (Misa Tanzania chairperson) For more information pertaining to Misa's work, visit [www.misa.org](http://www.misa.org)**



# South African media treat fire as foe — its ecosystem benefits get lost in the blaze

*By Izak Smit, Dian Spear  
and Marina Joubert*

**F**IRE can destroy infrastructure and livelihoods, and claim lives. Yet fire is inevitable and has helped to shape ecosystems over millennia.

In South Africa, fire plays a part in shaping savannas, grasslands and heathlands, or fynbos, each within their own natural cycles, creating habitats for many species and reducing the risk of runaway wildfires.

Some areas may burn as frequently as every second or third year, while others may burn only every couple of decades.

Some burn at a high intensity, others much cooler.

Certain systems burn in winter, for example grasslands and savannas, and others mostly during hotter conditions, such as fynbos.

But many people don't understand these natural patterns. This often results in mistrust and fear and may lead to unhelpful and even damaging attitudes towards fire and fire management.

The media are the dominant source of information on wildfires in South Africa and beyond.

They influence the views, opinions and memories of the public and pol-

icymakers and the way society understands and responds to fire.

The public's opinion is important because the fear of negative public perceptions may act as a barrier to the planning of prescribed burns.

These burns are necessary to manage the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

We used media content analysis to analyse 390 online, print and broadcast media clippings that related to fires within and surrounding South African National Parks over a two year period.

By identifying the prevailing narratives and potential biases the public is exposed to through the media, we hope to promote more informed, balanced and constructive attitudes towards fire.

Scientists' involvement in media reporting on fire leads to more nuanced and balanced messages.

It can reduce fear and create appreciation of fire's benefits. However, we found that scientists' voices weren't well represented in the media.

This limits their influence over public opinion and policy development.

## **The biases**

We found three main biases in prevailing media narratives.

Overstating the negative effects of fire: The media seemed to lack awareness of the social and ecological benefits of fires.

They typically used words like "fighting", "destruction", "deadly" and "victims", which would be apt to report on war. Yet they were talking

about vegetation fires.

The public was bombarded with stories mentioning or implying the losses, destruction or threat of fires to infrastructure, human health or lives and vegetation, without mention of the benefits of fires.

We acknowledge that fires can have very negative, sometimes even fatal effects. But this almost exclusive focus on negative aspects may give rise to the second bias.

Focusing on reactive fire management through fire suppression: We found that reactive fire suppression, which refers to "fighting" unwanted fires, was mentioned three times as often as proactive fire management.

Proactive fire management can reduce the risk of wildfires and includes creating fire breaks, removing alien vegetation and prescribed burning.

This bias may create the impression that reactive fire-fighting is the preferred, or even the only, tool for fire management.

But most experienced fire managers prefer to be proactive.

With all logistics in place, proactive fire management can be conducted under environmental conditions favourable for achieving ecological and safety outcomes. But the public might not be aware and open to this if they are constantly exposed to stories about putting out fires.

Lacking fire ecology concepts: Important fire ecology concepts, such as fuel load (how much material there is to burn) and fire regime (how often, in which season and at what intensity an area burns), were

almost totally absent in our study.

Communities with a better understanding of these concepts and of the benefits of fire will be more fire-resilient.

They will know that fires are inevitable where urban and wild areas meet in fire-prone biomes and require proactive management rather than reactive responses.

### Scientists counter the biases

We found that the three biases outlined above disappeared when scientists had a voice in news reporting. Science voices reflected on both positive and negative effects of fires. They highlighted proactive fire management and included critical fire ecology concepts.

As in some other studies, the voices of scientists were poorly represented (only in 8.7% of all stories).

Our analysis shows that the stories and angles that the media typically prefer — emotive, shocking, newsworthy, graphic, heroic — result in reporting biases. We argue that these biases aren't helpful for educating the public and nurturing appropriate attitudes towards fire and fire management.

### Way forward

Africa is often referred to as the fire continent — this is unlikely to change.

Scientists, fire managers, journalists and the public must work together to learn to live with fire and create fire-resilient communities where the risks that fire poses are well managed.

This requires improved understanding of fire behaviour specific to the landscapes where people live.

Fire must be allowed to play its natural role where possible, instead of being suppressed.

Experts and skilled land managers must be given room to proactively reduce fire risk.

The inevitability and importance of fire in the continent's fire-prone landscapes means the public must be aware of, and guard against, biases in mass media fire reporting.

— *The Conversation*

**\*Kyle Smith, Tercia Strydom, Johan Baard and Marna Herbst also contributed to this article.**





## *By International Committee To Protect Journalists*

**O**N February 12, 2022, at around 5pm, Namibian police briefly detained freelance investigative reporters John Grobler and Nrupesh Soni for allegedly trespassing at GoHunt Namibia Safaris' farm in the Omaheke region, east of Windhoek, the capital, because they used a drone to film elephants on private property, according to the journalists, who spoke to CPJ via messaging app, and local media reports.

The pair were investigating the alleged illegal sale of pregnant wild elephants, which were purchased during a controversial government auction, to unknown groups in Dubai, according to the same sources.

As part of their investigation, the journalists used a drone to fly without permission over the privately owned farm, where the elephants were being kept.

On their way back to Windhoek, the journalists were stopped by wildlife rangers who mounted a roadblock in the town of Gobabis, about 60km west of GoHunt Namibia Safaris' farm, said Grobler.

The farm's owner, Gerrie Odendaal, told CPJ via messaging app that the rangers stopped the journalists after he lodged a trespassing complaint with the police and wildlife author-

# Nambian investigative journalists charged for 'trespassing'

ities, saying the journalists violated his privacy when they flew the drone over his property and recorded footage without permission.

"Imagine someone doing that and taking pictures while you are in a swimming pool having fun! That is when I decided to alert the police and the wardens in the area and that is how a roadblock was mounted for them," Odendaal said, who added that the Namibian government permits the international exportation of auctioned elephants.

The United Kingdom, among other countries, has condemned the export of wild African elephants bought through government auctions, alleging that it violates the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, a treaty that limits where and how wild elephants are exported from countries such as Namibia, according to a National Geographic report.

Transportation of pregnant elephants is also illegal under section 2(1) of the convention's transport guideline for endangered species.

Police arrived at the roadblock and took the journalists to the Gobabis police station, where they were detained for about four hours, said Grobler, who added that police disabled his vehicle's car security system, searched it without his consent, and later seized Soni's drone and its memory card "for the investigation".

The journalists were released the same day after police recorded their statements and warned them that they were being investigated for alleged trespassing, according to Grobler and Soni.

In addition to using a drone to fly over Odendaal's farm and recording visuals and photos of elephants, the journalists are also accused of using the drone to "willfully disturb the specially protected game without a permit or written authority issued by the Minister of Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism," according to a police statement reviewed by CPJ.

If convicted of trespassing, the journalists could face a fine of 1,000 Namibian dollars (US\$67), imprisonment for a year, or both, according to Section 2 of the Trespass Ordinance 3 of 1962.

As of March 28, 2022, Grobler and Soni were still under police investigation and Soni's drone and memory card had not been returned, Grobler said.

When reached via messaging app, police spokeswoman chief inspector Kauna Shikwambi refused to comment on the investigation, saying the matter would soon be before court. A court date has not been set yet, according to Grobler.

Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism spokesperson Romeo Muyunda did not respond to CPJ queries sent via messaging app.

On January 8, 2010, Grobler was assaulted in retaliation for his work by four men in a bar who cut his face with a broken piece of glass and kicked him repeatedly in the head, as CPJ documented at the time.



# 'A rush of relief': Tanzanian investigative newspaper allowed to publish after five-year ban

By Muthoki Mumo

**I**N 2017, Simon Mkina was the publisher and chief editor of the muckraking Tanzanian newspaper *Mawio* when authorities announced that they were suspending the publication for "jeopardising national security" by reporting on two former presidents' alleged links to mining misconduct.

Mkina was forced to lay himself off, along with 57 other employees, and he became a freelance journalist.

The ban was only supposed to last two years, but it stretched on as officials failed to lift it even after a court found it "illegal" and "irrational"

Then, in February, the government made a U-turn.

Nape Nnauye, Tanzania's recently appointed Information minister, announced that he was restoring the licences of *Mawio*, as well as newspapers *MwanaHALISI*, *Mseto* and *Tanzania Daima*, just a handful of the outlets that were banned or suspended from publishing online and in print under former President John Pombe Magufuli.

"If I have come saying that our intentions are good, let's begin by turning a new page," Nnauye said in a February 10 meeting with editors in Dar es Salaam, the Tanzanian commercial capital.

Nnauye said he was acting on orders of the new president, Samia Suluhu Hassan, who succeeded Magufuli after his death a year ago.

The new government, which has also suspended newspapers, aims to work in concert with members of the press to reform Tanzania's media laws, said Nnauye.

Reached by CPJ for comment about details of the reforms, government spokesperson Gerson Msigwa said that they would be announced at a later date.

CPJ spoke to Mkina about his plans for restarting his publication, and what the lifting of the ban means for press freedom in Tanzania.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Q: What was your reaction to learning that *Mawio's* licence was restored?**

**A:** I heard the breaking news from social media. I felt a rush of relief at the possibility of being able to go back into publishing and to do what I love the most. It feels like freedom was restored after almost five years' delay.

**Q: What was the impact of the years-long ban on *Mawio*?**

**A:** The biggest impact [was] to the public.

Their rightful freedom of information was infringed. [In 2017], a lot of people came to our office [to express their concerns].

Some institutions, including lawyers' organisations and human rights organisations, wrote in protest of the



Tanzanian  
President  
Samia  
Suluhu  
Hassan

banning of the newspaper.

On social media there were many stories from our readers who were just blaming the government for this decision.

The public, from the country and outside, were crying for the newspaper to get back on the street.

When the paper was banned, did the staff continue working as journalists?

We had to close the office because there was no other business we were doing apart from writing.

Reporters, editors, designers, proofreaders, and all other support staff, including drivers, were forced into redundancy.

In the main office in Dar es Salaam, we were 27 [staffers]. And we had reporters in all regions, including Zanzibar.

So in total, about 57 people were made redundant because the newspaper was closed.

The impact is multiplied beyond these 57, because they have families.

Very few of the reporters were able to continue working in journalism, it was difficult finding other jobs.

**Q: You continued to work as a journalist, publishing in places like South African weekly *The Mail & Guardian*. What was it like going from being an editor to a freelancer?**

**A:** It was not very easy. The thing is: you have to survive.

You have to raise your kids.

There is no other business I know that I can do better than journalism. But it was not only about surviving, I love the profession.

**Q: Can we expect to see *Mawio* back in circulation soon or are there any remaining hurdles?**

**A:** It will take some time for *Mawio* to go back into publishing, as it needs huge capital.

We need to start afresh.

We need a printing budget, which is more than 100 million Tanzanian shillings [US\$43,300] for a few months, before the newspaper even stands on its own feet financially and generate revenue.

We need equipment and to hire the team. So there is hard work to be done.

We have already started doing some of this work — looking for a team and new offices.

**Q: What will be *Mawio's* place in the Tanzanian news market once it reopens?**

**A:** If we get back, *Mawio* will continue uncovering news that is not covered elsewhere in the mainstream media.

We will do forensic journalism, investigative journalism.

I can't say what specific subjects right now — but in every story, there is always an investigative aspect if you want to dig deeper, whether it is social, financial, or governance issues.

**Q: How would you characterise the press freedom environment since Samia became president almost a year ago?**

**A:** President Samia has taken a great drift from what I can call the dark ages for media freedom in Tanzania.

She has started to show good signs towards freedom of the media and there is a clear flow of information to the general public.

But much work remains to be done.

Our country still has some controversial media laws, which in an actual sense would hinder our working environment.

Still, I hope President Samia will work to rectify them.

It is crucial now that relevant legislation, including the Media Services Act [a 2016 law found inimical to press freedom by a regional court] be transformed.

***\*Muthoki Mumo is CPJ's sub-Saharan Africa representative. She is based in Nairobi, Kenya, and has a master's in journalism and globalisation from the University of Hamburg.***

The Accent publication is an initiative of MAZ and the Accent. The views expressed in the publication are of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of MAZ or the publication



**the ACCENT**

38 Harvey Brown, Milton Park, Harare, Zimbabwe, Tel: +263 (0) 8677108362,  
Mobile: +263 772 501 557, Email: media.alliance.zimbabwe@gmail.com, njnya2@gmail.com