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State of South Africa's Media

A Media Monitor's Perspective



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1. About MMA

MMA is an NGO that has been monitoring the media since 1993. We aim to promote the development of a free, fair, ethical and critical media culture in South Africa and the rest of the continent. The three key areas that MMA seeks to address through a human rights-based approach are, media ethics, media quality and media freedom.

In the last seventeen years we have conducted over 120 different media monitoring projects – all of which relate to key human rights issues, and at the same time to issues of media quality. MMA has and continues to challenge media on a range of issues always with the overt objective of promoting human rights and democracy through the media. It is also important to note that MMA has also actively sought to encourage ordinary citizens to engage in the process of holding media accountable through the various means available – all of which can be found on MMA’s website. (www.mediamonitoringafrica.org)

2. General Note to the Overview

It is noted that one of the flaws in the ANC critique has been the generalisation of media as being almost all identical – and in particular all “mainstream” print media, which obfuscates the diversity and differences within these media. Such generalisations do not allow for nuance and in depth discussion. Nevertheless the brief for the overview was to cover issues relating to media’s performance in a generalised manner and this has been followed in the overview that follows. Throughout the report when the term “the media” is used it refers to and includes, print, radio (public and private) as well as television (public and private). Where analysis focuses on one sector, print or broadcast for example, it is specifically stated.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview, from an MMA perspective of key criticisms made in the ANC’s discussion document on the media (ANC discussion document 2010- *Media Transformation, ownership and diversity*). The discussion examples and analyses have been drawn from a variety of MMA’s existing research conducted over the last 17 years. MMA is happy to provide more detail on any of the areas or copies of the full reports on request. MMA acknowledges the work of those who contributed to the existing research and in particular thanks to Prinola Govenden, Shaun Molokwane, and Sandra Banjac for their contributions to this overview.

3. The Challenge

The notion of a Statutory Media Appeals Tribunal as suggested by the ANC is based on a series of assertions as to existing problems with the print media.

One of the most challenging aspects of the discussion document’s critique of the content of the print media is that it is vague and difficult to monitor and evaluate. For example, it says a “... cursory scan on the print media reveals an astonishing degree of dishonesty, lack of professional integrity and lack of independence.” (ANC Discussion Document point 58) Measuring these three elements in media could potentially be done, but not by content analysis alone. It would require a significant study involving a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods carried out across a substantial sample of media. To then be able to make an informed claim to the extreme of, an “astonishing degree” would require a comprehensive study and not a “cursory glance”. To our knowledge a comprehensive study of this nature has not been carried out in South Africa. No evidence for these claims is presented in the document.

The issues raised in the ANC discussion document are diverse and varied. Comprehensive studies and research, as well as media monitoring projects will have to be conducted to critically analyse the validity of some of these claims against the media. This overview focuses on elements in the ANC discussion document that can be fairly assessed by an overview drawing on MMA's seventeen years of monitoring experience and by looking at selected aspects of key human rights related areas that MMA has worked on..

It must be noted that there are several points within the document that should be welcomed and that warrant further detailed investigation, including issues of the effectiveness of the self regulatory system. These are listed below, however these issues are beyond the scope of this overview:

- The problem of concentration of ownership in print media;
- The need for diversity in ownership and control of print media;
- Commercial imperatives and sensationalism at the expense of the public interest;
- The challenge of monopolistic behaviour;
- The need to strengthen the current self-regulatory system of print media;
- A need for equal participation and accessibility in the print media environment; and
- The importance of media freedom protection and promotion, to be accompanied with responsibility and ethical reporting.

Among the concerns expressed by the ANC that can be fairly assessed are the issues of the print media being biased, unfair, inaccurate and unethical. These can be seen in point 56 which refers to, "fairness of reporting", as well as comments made to the media on the document by ANC representatives. These include allegations of the media violating citizen's rights to dignity and privacy – rights issues and serious ethical concerns.

In addition the document also alludes to and briefly engages with the role of the media in society, and asserts that it must, "contribute to the transformation of our country. Building social cohesion and promoting values of a caring society." (ANC Discussion Document Point 56). While no evidence of the role of the media in this regard is presented in the document, the role of the media can be assessed to some degree, by examining how our media have covered some key events.. These include, elections, gender, racism and xenophobia, HIV, children and most recently coverage of the World Cup..

What is clear from our perspective is that our media in several respects is not living up to its responsibilities. In most instances there are no simple answers, mostly shades of grey, but collectively it is our view that the media is progressively albeit gradually getting better in each of these areas and that not only reflects South Africa's developing democracy but it also suggests an ongoing positive trend in media that runs across print and broadcast, community and commercial media.

The structure of the overview is as follows:

1. **Balance and Fairness**- Case studies are Elections as well as gender coverage,
2. **Ethics**-Focusing on Gender as well as Children's coverage.

3. **Accuracy**-With particular focus on HIV/Aids reporting.
4. **The role of the media in social cohesion**- Coverage of race, racism and xenophobia as well as the soccer World Cup 2010.
5. **Conclusion**

4. Balance and Fairness

Let's Briefly consider the first issues: Balance and Fairness. Balance, fairness, accuracy and ethical reporting. These are key tenets of good journalism. If our media are failing in these it would require something radically different to a Statutory Media Appeals Tribunal to rectify. So how have our media fared on these criteria?

4.1 Elections

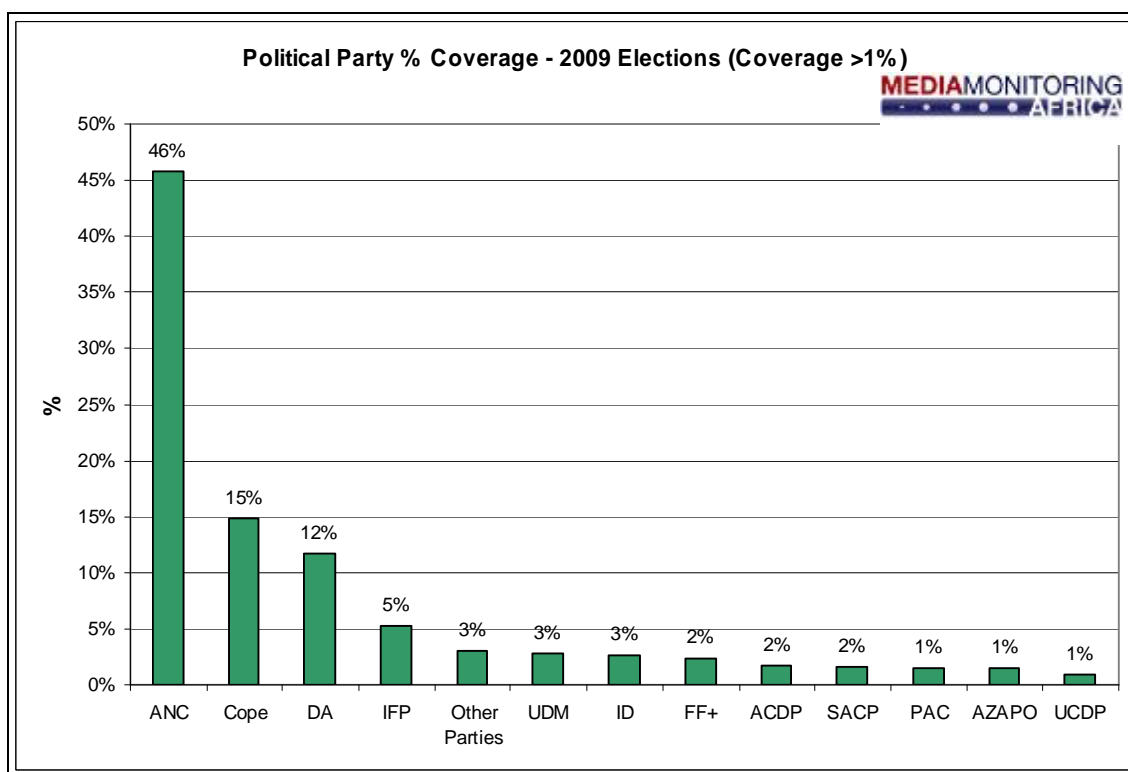
At no time is the role of the media more important than during elections. Not only is this the acid test for freedom and fairness of media coverage, but the media's pivotal role in democracy is most visible during this period. For this reason Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) has monitored the media's coverage of all democratic elections in South Africa. This means that we have monitored over 60 000 elections items across more than 70 different media, including print, community, commercial and public service radio, as well as television. (For more details go to: www.mediamonitoringafrica.org). On average, we monitor for a period of months in the run up to the elections as well as a few weeks after the elections.

Balance and fairness are key to elections media monitoring. For MMA fairness is one element of overall balance. To determine Balance MMA asks three questions of media 1. Is there a spread of different political parties covered? 2. Is the coverage fair or is it biased clearly in favour of or in opposition to a particular party, and 3 When items are deemed unfair, is there a pattern to the bias, i.e. does it clearly favour or disfavour one particular party? For the purpose of the media monitoring, MMA incorporated these elements into a Balance rating and compared media scores against each other. These criteria are essential as they serve to highlight any clear trends of intentional bias for or against a party or individual or entity. It is expected that during an election period there will be some biased items where a party will make allegations against another, and the media fail to counter balance this in the same story.

On the issue of fairness we can take some pride in the knowledge that on average over 80% of all elections items monitored since 1994 were fair. In 2009 this figure was 84% across the 56 different media monitored. Amongst the lowest performing media were some print media, but it is also to be noted that other print media were also amongst the highest for balance ratings.

Where bias does occur it tends to clearly favour or clearly oppose the ANC and DA, and in the 2009 elections Cope. The ANC received the lion's share of coverage across all media monitored for all elections, averaging 47% in the 2009 elections, with COPE on 15% and the DA on 12%. See graph below. The ANC has the most biased items with only a few more items being clearly biased against, than for the ANC. Given its majority in government however and that it was the subject of most political parties' attacks, as well as its dominance in coverage, this is hardly surprising. Overall it is clear that there is no evidence in the media monitored of any intentional systematic bias for or against the major political parties. MMA has however highlighted that there is cause for some concern around the extremely low coverage afforded to the smaller parties, which may be

proportional to seats in parliament but is inadequate in terms of voters making an informed choice.¹



At the end of the period MMA used a series of eight criteria to assess media coverage of elections. While overwhelmingly balanced MMA found that far too often media failed to adopt a citizen’s agenda in reporting on the elections. This MMA understood to be to report on issues of immediate relevance to citizens and provision of information they needed to make informed choices. Instead in many cases media opted for easier follow the leader stories and reported on camping trials, as well as political party rallies. If anything then the media may be accused of not being sufficiently critical of political parties and instead allowing parties to determine the elections coverage.²

4.2 Gender

On a linked issue, women account for 52% of our population yet on average only 23% of news sources in South African media. On a fundamental level the media therefore perpetuate gender inequality.³ The degree to which media can be said to be fair and

¹ It is worth noting that MMA’s findings around fairness have been mirrored by other monitoring groups using different methodologies including commercial organisations as well as the HSRC and ICASA’s own monitoring. While the media coverage can be said to be fair and balanced regarding the majority political parties MMA has consistently highlighted the media’s failure to cover core elections issues in sufficient depth and diversity. These include issues of poverty, HIV/Aids, gender based violence, education, health, crime and children.

² See appendix A, attached from final weekly report by MMA during elections or go to this link to download the MMA’s Elections report:
http://www.mediamonitoringafrika.org/index.php/resources/entry/national_and_provincial_elections_2009_a_win_or_a_place_citizens_come_last/

³ . (During the most recent elections analysis some of the most inequitable media were public service broadcast stations)

accurate must therefore be interrogated. This figure is in line with the global average of women in the media, which is 22% according to the most recent Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) for which MMA is the data analyst. At 23% average South Africa is actually slightly better than the global average. Clearly we have some way to go in realising gender equality and balance, but our media are not much different to media throughout the world. This is no reason to be complacent however as we can and should expect our media to outperform global media in terms of gender equality.

A review of media coverage of gender reveals some broadly positive trends. In the 1999 general elections women accounted for 10% of all news sources about elections. In 2004 that figure had more than doubled to 23%. It should be noted that this dramatic shift could not be attributed to an agenda by the media alone, in that it reflected broader changes in South Africa at the time. It does however indicate that it is a very positive shift. In 2005 during the 16 Days of Activism campaign MMA's monitoring found that for the first time since MMA had been monitoring, there were more female voices in the news than men. Female voices accounted for 55% of all voices during the period, an increase of 9% over the 2004 period. While this trend has remained tied to the 16 Days of Activism period in November and December of each year, it does nevertheless indicate a positive shift in media coverage around gender.

South Africa has one of the highest levels of gender based violence in the world. While still dramatically under reported there has also been some significant shifts in the manner in which these crimes are reported. In the mid 1990's it was common place for reports on rape to be reported from a male perspective and to be reported on largely by men. It was also common place for reports of gender based violence to be trivialised. Thus cases of severe domestic violence were reported as lovers' spats or lovers' tiffs. Such reports are now the exception and are quickly addressed even in tabloid media. For example, Media Monitoring Africa recently sent a complaint to the Sunday World on its article (23/05/2010, "Hands of stone' socks baby mama") that sensationalised and trivialised (apparently for purely entertainment purposes) a case of gender based violence perpetrated by a celebrity. See article below.

'Hands of Stone' socks baby mama

NGWAKO MALATJI
FORMER boxing world champ Lehlohonolo Ledwaba still keeps himself in shape allegedly by using the mother of his child as a punching bag.

Actually, it only happened once. That was last week, when he suspected that she was sparring with another man.

Our source says Ledwaba called Dinos Bokala, who works in Jozzi, but her

gadget rang constantly and remained unanswered.

This incensed the former IBEF super-bantamweight champ, who went to wait for her at the spot at which she usually arrived by taxi.

It is alleged that when she arrived, Ledwaba asked



FURY: Lehlohonolo Ledwaba

her where she'd been and why she'd ignored his calls.

When she tried to explain, it is said he unleashed a barrage of 'take-fives'. And later on, he lay in front of bemused onlookers. She suffered bruises to her face.

Bokala, who has been with Ledwaba for more than 15 years, says: "I was coming from town and my phone rang a couple times but I could not hear it."

When I got out of the taxi, I found him waiting for me and while I was trying to explain, he lashed out at me with his fists in front of my neighbours."

But Ledwaba denies the assault.

"I regret that this happened in the street. I didn't beat her. It was a minor tiff between people in love," he says.

■ malatji@sundayworld.co.za

MMA stressed to the Sunday World in its complaint, that gender-based violence is a very serious and sensitive issue in South Africa, and the media has a responsibility to report on it as such and not in a manner that condones and normalises violence against women. MMA argued that it was deeply worrying that the article reported such a serious issue as a "tussle" and in a highly insensitive manner (through the use of boxing metaphors), and failed to highlight the seriousness of the issue in the headline as well as the opening lines of the article. The Editor of the Sunday World issued an apology (06/06/2010) saying "Sunday World views the abuse of women and children in a serious light. We concede that our approach to the story could have created the impression that we do not. It definitely was not our intention to trivialise the issue, and we sincerely regret it if such an impression was created". See apology below.

Media must condemn abuse

MEDIA Monitoring Africa notes with concern the sensationalising and trivialising (apparently for purely entertainment purposes) of gender-based violence in your May 23 article *'Hands of stone' seeks baby mama*.

Gender-based violence is a very serious and sensitive issue in South Africa, and the media has a responsibility to report on it as such and not in a manner that condones and normalises violence against women.

Even though the rights of women are enshrined in South Africa's constitution and in a number of laws, violence against women remains a continuing challenge.

It is therefore deeply worrying that this article reports such a serious

issue as a "tussle" and reports it so insensitively (through the use of boxing metaphors), and does not highlight the seriousness of the issue. I refer here to the headline as well as the opening lines of the article.

Ethical reporting is critical to highlighting and curbing gender-based violence.

Prinola Govenden

Media Monitoring Africa

■ *Sunday World* views the abuse of women and children in a serious light. We concede that our approach to the story could have created the impression that we do not. It definitely was not our intention to trivialise the issue, and we sincerely regret it if such an impression was created. – *Editor*

In general terms it is fair to suggest that there are challenges within our media, print and broadcast in terms of balance and fairness but the trend is towards greater fairness and balance and not less.

5. On Ethics

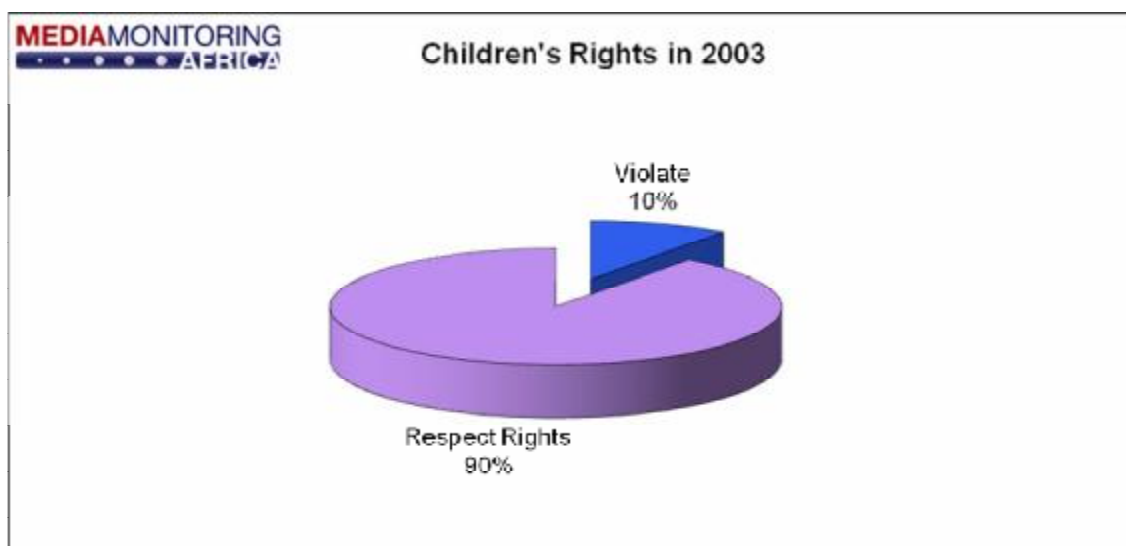
A hot issue and another argument for the Media Appeals Tribunal seem to be: the ethical reporting of politicians and senior public figures. MMA intends to carry out detailed media monitoring in the immediate future to assess coverage of senior public figures. But surely the people who need to be protected and who need recourse are those who do not have the resources and capacity to take on the media, not politicians who have the means to challenge the media, either through the courts, self regulatory bodies or public forums. Clearly this does not give media the right to simply violate the rights of senior public figures, but they are the ones who in the existing structures have the best means available to challenge the media if and when they feel their rights have been violated.

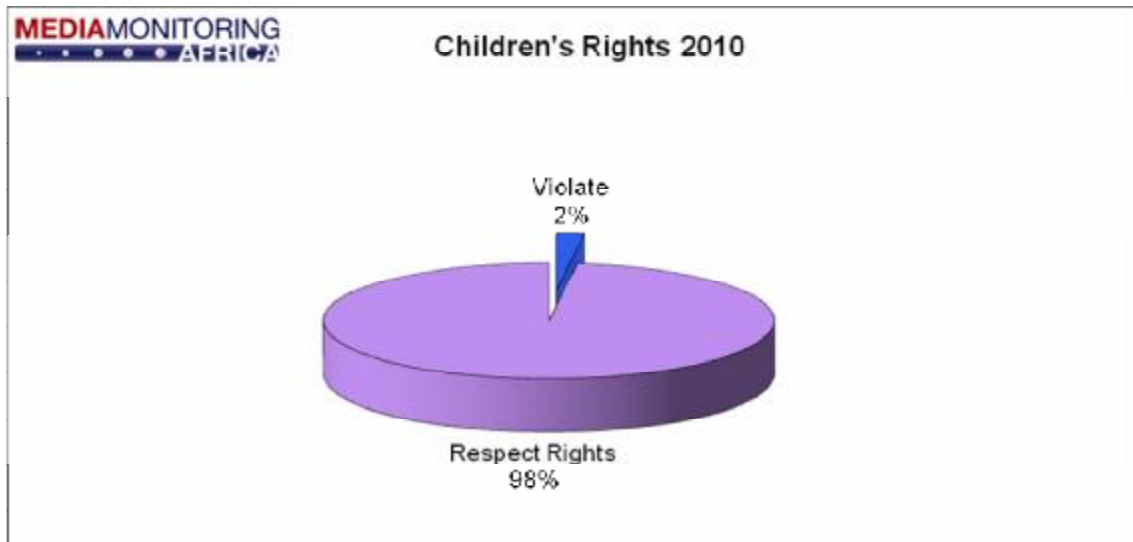
5.1 Gender

In terms of ethical issues it was fairly common in the mid 1990's, as highlighted in MMA's research on gender based violence, for a woman who was a survivor of abuse to be named and identified in the media. It was also common practice for media to report rape stories in such a manner that made the woman appear to have been "asking for it". This was often achieved by highlighting the clothes the woman was wearing, or that she was walking somewhere unsafe to begin with. While there are some exceptions to this, it is now extremely rare in MMA's monitoring experience for a story on gender based violence to be reported in such an unethical manner.

5.2 Children

Shifting our attention to another area of ethics and an altogether marginalised sector of our population, children. They account for roughly 39% of our population (See SA Children's Gauge Report 2010) In terms of how our media covers children there are some significant ethical problems. Currently the only mention of children in the Press Council Code of Conduct is under the definition of child pornography. This is an oversight that needs to be rectified to bring the code in line with our constitution. For the last eight years MMA has been implementing a comprehensive strategy to improve coverage of children in the South African media and there is strong evidence that it is working. In 2003, one in ten stories violated the rights of the child, see graph below. In doing so not only did the media act unethically and in many cases illegally but these acts were also clearly not in the best interests of the child. In the last five years we have seen a positive shift in our media. Not only has SANEF recommended a set of guidelines for reporting on children to all its members, but the Independent Group of newspapers has adopted them, and the AVUSA group and SABC has included key clauses focused on children in their own editorial policies. In our most recent research of over 7000 children's stories in print media we have found that 2% of items further violate the rights of the child. See graph below. While this is still 2% too many, it does indicate a significant improvement in South African reporting.





The two examples below from the Daily Sun highlight this significant shift (of ethics in children's coverage) graphically.

Daily Sun (2004, front page)



This front page story in 2004 shows an abused child for all to see on the front page of the country's biggest daily newspaper. Not only was it unethical, it also clearly violated the rights of the child to dignity and privacy, and was also illegal according to South African Criminal Law.



Just three years later, the paper led with a similarly tragic story only this time the story notes, “the child ... who cannot be identified in any way.” The change in approach was a direct result of MMA’s interventions with the paper, including communication over the previous example and subsequent ongoing analysis of reports on children.

6. On Accuracy

Another allegation frequently levelled against the media is that of accuracy. There is clearly room for improvement in this regard.

6.1 HIV/AIDS Reporting

Taking a key health challenge, HIV/AIDS gives us some indication of media’s attention to accuracy. In 2003 MMA carried out a monitoring project together with the Peri Natal HIV Research Unit (PHRU), the Wits School of Journalism HIV and the Media project and an HIV and media fellow. At the time there was some concern about the media’s ability to report such a complicated health challenge accurately. There was a sense expressed by some of the partners that media was not accurate in its coverage of HIV. One of the methods devised to test the accuracy of the stories included having a doctor, who was an expert on HIV, analyse a random sample of stories to assess their accuracy. In 2003 the accuracy level was found to be: 88% of stories being accurate to very accurate. A similar test was carried out in 2005 on a study on prevention of mother to child transmission and the results were very similar.

While positive, this finding cannot be extrapolated to all areas of media coverage. What it does suggest however is that significantly, the media are able to accurately report an extremely complicated health challenge.

It is important to stress that accurate reporting of HIV should not be taken to assume that coverage of HIV is equally good. Again there are challenges in how HIV is reported, with very few voices of people living with HIV being heard in the media – print and broadcast. In addition media tend to cover the actions of leaders, allowing their agenda to be determined not by the issue but by the different leaders and the stories they generate. (See Finlay A. *Shaping the Conflict: Factors Influencing The Representation of Conflict Around HIV/AIDS Policy in the South African Press*, 2003).

7. The Role of the Media: Building Social Cohesion

Another aspect raised by the ANC Discussion document is the issue of the role of the media in building social cohesion.

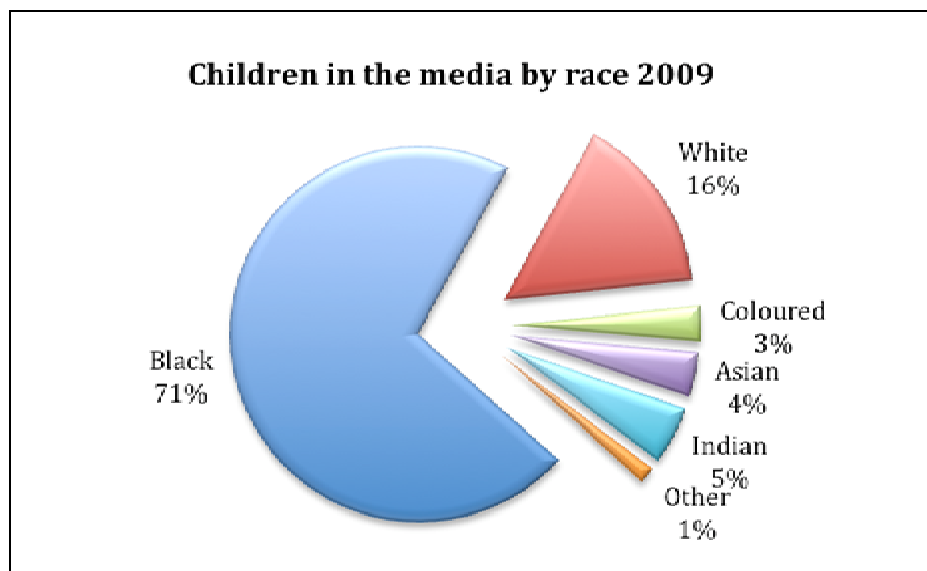
7.1 Race, Racism and Xenophobia

One of the most important areas that this can be achieved is in addressing issues of race, racism and xenophobia. This is another area that MMA has been monitoring for over ten years. During this period there have been some significant shifts – largely positive. It was common, for example, in the mid nineties for media to include the race of a person in a story, usually crime stories. A case in point was a story saying that three Black men hijacked a White woman in Sandton. Not only was the mentioning of the persons race irrelevant but it also served to perpetuate a range of stereotypes about Black people being criminals. This filtered through to reporting on crime, where in the late nineties it was common for media to portray Whites as the victims of crimes and Blacks as the perpetrators.

Following the South African Human Rights Commission’s Inquiry into racism in the media, a number of substantial changes occurred in the coverage of race. It is highly unlikely that a person’s race would be mentioned in an item unless it is clearly relevant to the story (for example, an item about a racially-motivated crime). The chances of a South African media breaking the law and being openly racist are even more unlikely. In spite of the positive changes to the media, however, racism and the perpetuation of racist stereotypes still occur. While race may not be so easily and overtly assigned in stories, negative stereotypes may be perpetuated through trends in representation. An example of this lies in some media tendencies in mid 2000’s to report on issues of race and especially racially motivated crimes as mere events that took place and therefore often lacked analysis and explanation. These reports often perpetuated stereotypes rather than challenged them. MMA’s most recent research on representation of race and racism highlighted that with one exception, *Die Afrikaanse Pers*, which is the newspaper aligned to the *Herstigte Nasionale Party*, all print media monitored adopted clear editorial positions opposing racism and the most common proposition identified in the monitoring was, “There is no place for racism in the new South Africa” (MMA, 2009, *Analysing Race*, 2009).

It should be noted however that whilst there has been a significant shift, journalists interviewed for the research in 2009 also indicated that there had not been sufficient transformation in the media industry. It is clear there is still some distance to go in addressing the coverage of race and racism, but it is also clear that there have been significant positive shifts in the coverage. A quick glance at coverage of children in terms of racial breakdown highlights this shift.

In 2003, our research on Empowering Children and the Media revealed that only 39% of children represented in the media were Black compared to 30% White. This figure almost doubled in our 2009 research results, with Black children accounting for 71% of those accessed or mentioned in reports and Whites dropping to 16%. See graph below.



7.2 Xenophobia

In May and June in 2008 there was an outbreak of violence around Johannesburg, which was soon identified, by media, government officials and NGO's as being xenophobic based violence. The violence was located largely in townships around central Johannesburg and in most instances took the form of violence expressed against African non-South African's by African South African's. In a three week period over 60 people were killed and 50 000 were displaced from their homes. The authorities were seemingly caught off guard and media reported their delayed response to the violence. In many instances it was reported that NGO's were operating more efficiently and effectively than formal government response services.

Typically MMA monitors a selected number of media on a daily basis and it would be fair to suggest that the media coverage during this period was extraordinary. The majority of media were able to emphasise the brutality of the violence often through the use of graphic visuals.

All of the media monitored, with one glaring exception, the Daily Sun⁴, clearly condemned the violence, even the majority of tabloids- "We are all to blame" Sunday Sun, (18/05/08, p.18), and "Act now, or it won't end" Sunday Sun (01/06/08, p.18). The condemnation of the xenophobic based violence was given extraordinary prominence in some cases through the use of front page editorials, Sowetan said: "Do unto refugees as you would them to you"(14/05/08, p.1).

⁴ It should be noted that the MMA together with its partner CRMSA lodged a complaint with the Press Ombudsman. On appeal the parties reached mutual agreement and the case was settled and included a front page explanation from the Daily Sun which included the commitment to never refer to non South Africans as aliens. .

The media coverage of the violence was typified by a diversity of issues being covered, from dealing with the violence, to response from authorities, to shelters and emergency service stories. Media monitored carried special sections in their newspapers, they had special debates and discussions on radio, and even public debates with experts that aimed to understand some of the causes of the violence.

Media in general terms made efforts to ensure that coverage was not just focused on the hatred and xenophobic violence. Some media carried stories focused on communities where all people were getting along. "Hatred and mayhem shatter SA, but...in Bokfontein love transcends borders" (City Press, 18/05/08, p.4-5). This included an article, accompanied by photographs, which focused on positive relationships between foreign nationals and South Africans in an area with high unemployment and poverty. Another article "Khutsong vows to support its comrades in "demarcation struggle" (City Press, 01/06/08, p.7) drew attention to a community whereby the local residents' forum and Merafong Demarcation Forum had pledged that they would live in peace and not involve themselves in attacks against foreign nationals. It highlighted the history of South Africans and foreign nationals living together in that area, and sharing the same cause. One forum member is quoted as saying: "These comrades from other countries have been on our side in the demarcation struggle. They have been living with us for more than 20 years and have not done anything wrong to us".

The media's general response to the violence even went beyond the traditional news media, and included local soap opera stars and musicians and other celebrities coming out and calling for an end to the violence. There were even a few stories about rape as a form of xenophobic violence, however generally there was an absence of a gender perspective, which was a significant area of weakness in the coverage, as will be discussed further.

Other stories served to humanise the victims of the violence, largely by giving the victims a voice and telling their stories. In doing so the media helped to challenge stereotypes about non South Africans and also served to highlight the consequences of the violence. For example, "Foreign nationals are marooned between a rock and a hard place as former neighbours go berserk" (City Press, 18/05/08, p.4) tells the story of a "naturalised South African citizen" a "municipal employee", who had lived in Alex since 1994, who could not go back to Zimbabwe due to lack of jobs, and a Zimbabwean with a South African wife who had lived in South Africa for 11 years. Numerous articles, with a similar focus, can be cited in City Press, including "Dreams of prosperous life in SA shattered" (25/05/08, p.14), "I'd rather die here than go back to Zim" (25/05/08, Gauteng Section, p.5), "Refugee life is not a bed of roses" (01/06/08, p.6), "Shop owners forced to abandon their business" (01/06/08, p.7), and "A Blessing taken away, at only 4 months" (01/06/08, p.7).

Other media stories focused on the perspectives of children which made for particularly powerful stories and also served to demonstrate the impact of the violence. A story in City Press, "I am 12 and I am always scared" (25/05/08, p.2) was written from the child's perspective and talks about the impact of the violence on the child. Another story in the Sowetan, "Hope beats fear" (25/05/08, p.1) also examined the violence from a child's perspective and also demonstrated how despite the circumstances the children found themselves in, they were hopeful that things would be resolved. For the first time since MMA has been monitoring the Mail & Guardian, it used the drawings of children of the violence on its front page, and was accompanied by powerful accounts of the experience of children during the violence. "Tell them we are from here." (Mail & Guardian, 24/05/08, p.1)

In many instances media went beyond traditional lines of ethics and responsibility by setting up their own initiatives and actively encouraging help and assistance from their readers, viewers and listeners. Some media, like The Star, set up their own fund and encouraged companies to donate. Other media provided information of where people could make donations while other media professionals, journalists and camera people continued to work in the communities after filing their stories.

The media went beyond traditional boundaries of media roles and responsibilities by not merely reporting and providing information. Media also in some instances pushed ethical boundaries to the limit. There was extensive public debate generated over the use of a particular series of photographs of a man who had been set on fire. The man can be seen in the foreground bent over double while his flesh burns. Subsequent images show police officers extinguishing his burning body, while the man was alive.⁵ Some media argued that the use of such images were essential to bring home the brutality of the violence, while others argued the pictures were offensive and undignified. The media's response to these images and the violence in general terms demonstrated how difficult covering such violence can be and also highlighted how media can and sometimes do clearly adopt positions opposing violence and clearly engaging with the issues, and not merely reporting on them from a distance. It also highlights how difficult daily ethical decision making processes are.

Of course while there were many truly remarkable instances of in depth reporting as well as clear rights based position adopted, there were also significant gaps and weaknesses in the media's coverage.

Sadly in most instances the gender dimensions were not considered around the violence. While the media can shoulder some part of the blame for failing to consider the gender dimensions of the violence, civil society including institutions like the Commission on Gender Equality failed to raise or highlight the gender dimensions. There was also insufficient analysis of the causes of the violence.

Overall however it is clear that the majority of media adopted very clear anti- xenophobic positions and went to great lengths to help build social cohesion. The recent attacks just after the soccer world cup 2010 again saw the media coming out with clear positions asking their audiences to challenge xenophobia. Many print media produced inserts about xenophobia and the Independent Group have even started an insert call the Migrant to ensure a greater diversity of voices.

More recently however there have been clear positive initiatives adopted by broadcast and print media to help build and unite South Africa, the Lead-SA is an example of this.

7.3 Soccer World Cup 2010

Our President was quoted as saying, "South Africans rebelled against the media in June-July this year, united in their diversity. When the gloom and doom dominated news reportage over many months, they decided to defy the chorus of division and negativity and projected the type of society they want to be, and how they want to be viewed by the world. That is one 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament lesson that the media has not yet

⁵ As it turned out the man was identified and the media paid for him to be returned to his home in Mozambique and also covered the costs to give him a dignified burial.

realised or that they are choosing to pretend it did not happen.” (Politics web, “This is not personal”, 13/08/2010).

MMA was not in a position to monitor the media’s coverage of the run up to the World Cup so we are not in a position to offer any clear analysis on this. We have however been carrying out a major media monitoring project on the coverage of the world cup, of a range of print and broadcast media from the start of the world cup to the immediate one month after. The results are still being produced but already the following aspects are clear:

Local media during the period were more engaged with boosterism for the event and its success and benefits, than with hardcore analysis. Various newspapers dedicated full pages of pictures portraying fans from all walks of life in a celebratory mood, emphasising unity and support for different nations. For example, newspapers such as The Star (“A 16-year journey to success”, July 27, 2010, p.15) carried a piece that traced a 16-year long journey that culminated in the successful hosting of the football spectacle. The article went on to highlight the country and Africa’s capabilities as possible hosts of other world spectacles to come.

The “can-do attitude” of our country and positive image, also grabbed headlines across national media. A case in point was a Star article “We show the world: Yes, we can” (June 28, 2010, p. 14), which sought to shout to the world that as South Africa, we are “pulling off” what others thought we were not capable of. Another example of a positive image of South Africa appeared in the Citizen, about the Department of International Affairs and Cooperation giving SA thumbs up for warmth and hospitable image portrayed, (June 25, 2010, p. 4). Also, City Press carried an article “Overcoming the victim mentality” (July 28, 2010, p.27) that emphasised a positive image of South Africa, showing that South Africa has overcome the victim mentality that is associated with being an “African country”, and has shunned international critics that thought it could not host a successful world cup.

Another trend of the media’s coverage was critical reporting, which does not mean that the media did “defy the chorus of division and negativity”. The media bears a significant responsibility during a major sporting event like the world cup, to navigate between reporting on the excitement of a major sporting event, informing people/tourists on important information regarding the match logistics, as well as adopting a critical perspective and debating key issues and asking important questions surrounding the World Cup. This includes being a watchdog and to critically interrogate the powers that be and chew through the spin. There were many examples of this type of coverage who sought to assume the critical perspective of the showpiece whilst still highlighting the positive contribution the event has brought to our shores, and how more could still be achieved using the wave and euphoria brought about by it. For example, Justice Malala’s article in The Times (June 14, 2010, p. 8) titled “Harness Cup energy for good”, states how the country can use the Cup energy, and the national unity, far beyond the final whistle towards nation building. The Sunday Times ran in its Business Times section (August 22, 2010, p. 5) an article that justifies government’s World Cup spending, titled “Weighing the World Cup’s worth”. The article stressed that despite the R6bn-costing stadia, labelled by critics as “white elephants”, the benefits thereof are tangible even though the money spent on building of these stadia is twice what visiting fans spent. This is an example of media fulfilling its watchdog role of holding those in power to account, on behalf of the taxpayers. Also, the media did provide items that commended the governments efficient delivery, a Citizen article (June 28, 2010, p. 4) about a total of 613 foreigners denied entry into SA as their names appeared on FIFA, Interpol & SA’s Visa

entry stop list highlighted commendable SA's security efforts and efficiency. Similarly, a Sowetan article "World Cup boosts visits to country" (July 5, 2010, p. 10) also highlighted South Africa's success in preventing "undesirables" from gaining entry into the country during the world cup.

In addition, a significant amount of coverage highlighted government positive delivery with regards to the world cup. These include coverage about: a soaring influx of tourists for the World Cup, successful policing and the arrest and conviction rate by the world cup courts, massive game attendance both at stadia and fan parks, record-breaking TV viewership, garnering of support for Bafana Bafana and urging the nation to be behind the team, and testimony by both local and international celebrities about the success of the Cup, and how hospitable South Africans are. Therefore, it can be said that in general, the media were overly positive and uncritical in their coverage of the World Cup.

The examples of challenging xenophobia as well as cover of the world cup serve to highlight that media can and clearly do adopt biased positions in favour of building democracy and social cohesions and that they also clearly revelled in the momentum created by the World cup of showing what South Africa is capable of.

8. Conclusion

Our media is far from perfect and some of the criticisms of the self regulatory system have merit. Many of these, including efficiency, publicity, access and fines have been debated within SANEF for years. It would appear that current thinking for some in the ANC is that to fix the challenges government needs to step in. This is certainly the logic that underlies the Public Service Broadcasting Bill and the ICASA Amendment Bill, both of which would see huge powers granted to the Minister. The problem is, sticking in a higher authority is not going to make the media any better it simply shifts power and undermines media freedom. To make our media better we need to address the challenges that exist within it. You only need to look at the SABC's most recent crises to see that you can shift the power about, but unless you address the causes of the challenges you are simply wasting time and destroying an institution. We have some of the best media professionals in the world working in South Africa, let us focus on helping them do a better job instead of attacking the media when it gets things wrong. After all isn't this precisely what the government is asking of the media?

William Bird

William is the Director of Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) and an Ashoka fellow. William has been monitoring the media for 15 years, and has been working with media to entrench human rights values. William has two boys, both of whom have been introduced to the joy of media monitoring.

Appendix A

2009 Election Coverage: Did media assist citizens in making an informed decision?

8 May 2009

In Media Monitoring Africa's final weekly report on the 2009 Elections, we focus on the overall performance of media in terms of their role in enabling South African citizens to fully and effectively participate in their democracy through the provision of relevant and timely information in the lead up to the elections on April 22.

This report covers the period March 13 until April 26

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) has conducted widespread monitoring of media across South Africa. This has resulted in the collection of a large amount of data enabling both media's performance as a whole to be analysed, and individual media to be compared in relation to each other.

While it is hoped that all interested in media find these reports informative and useful, in the first instance, MMA's election reports are created for the purpose of assisting media to reflect on their practice and inform future improvement. Because of this, this weekly report will highlight what in particular could be expected of media in their reporting on the elections in terms of best practice. This standard provides core principles against which media's performance can be analysed, questioned, praised and constructively criticized.

Analysis framework

In our first weekly report, we wrote: "During elections, our methodology is particularly concerned with the broader role for media to hold government to account on behalf of citizens. While media, in particular commercial media, do not sign a formal contract stating that they endorse and will fulfill this role, this expectation must be recognised and honoured in support of the argument for a free and plural media.

Where a democratic government does not provide easily accessible and complete information on government performance to the public so that they are enabled to hold their elected representatives to account, citizens must get this information from other sources, and the most logical source and expertise for this is the media.

As such, the monitoring process captures pertinent information relating to political participation, including information around representation of gender, race and other core human rights issues. Key to media coverage during an election period, the monitoring also addresses the fair and equitable treatment of political parties, and the quality of information provided."

Using this initial framework, we now turn to what is ideally expected of media's approach to their election coverage and the contents of their reports. There are eight key components that MMA hopes to see in quality news coverage during an election period:

1. Adoption of a citizen's agenda: Focus on key issues of importance to lives of South Africans.

These issues relate to Poverty, Service Delivery (Health, Education, Welfare, Housing, Public Utilities such as water and electricity, etc.), Youth Unemployment, Safety/Crime, Gender Equality, and Children.

The choice of a political party for government will affect the lives of citizens through the policies they adopt and implement, or not adopt and implement. If media does not focus on the key issues of importance in the lives of citizens in their reports, analysis and engagement with parties, then media are severely limiting (potential) voter capacity to make informed decisions in democratic processes whose outcome will affect their lives.

2. Fairness towards all political parties in coverage needs to be exhibited in coverage – taking into account size of party, presence in parliament, etc.

If all coverage is given to only a few parties, then voter's choices are falsely limited, and if coverage deliberately favours or disfavors political parties, then voters are not given balanced and accurate information to inform their choice.

3. Unpacking of manifestos and engaging with party representatives with regards to important issues, and exploring validity of responses and solutions proposed.

As it is primarily through their manifestos that parties indicate their ideology and intent, deep engagement on manifestos with regards to the key issues should be one of the highest priorities for media's election coverage. Analysis of manifestos, and engaging further with parties on the detail, enables voters to really know if, and understand how, parties intend to address their concerns, and whether what is being proposed is valid and can be realistically delivered. For the ruling party, it should also explore how the party has delivered on previous manifestos and promises made, to feed into the cycle of accountable government.

4. Representation of the concerns of the marginalised, in particular women and children, and specifically rural women and children.

As has been discussed in the previous two weekly reports, women and children form two of the most marginalised groups in South Africa. Women and children, in particular rural women and children, remain largely voiceless in media and government policy. However, women and children suffer the most from poverty and poor public service delivery, and a variety of health and social ills, including abuse. As South African citizens, who also have a significant demographic presence across the population, their voices and concerns must be heard, over and above any others.

5. Role and responsibilities of the SA Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

The IEC has a very large and important role to fulfill, particularly as a non-partisan institution that must remain impartial and competent in the eyes of citizens. The role and responsibilities of the IEC must be understood and its performance reported on in order for the institution to be held accountable to its mandate, and so that the final results are credible.

6. Explanation of voting system on a timely basis, including: voter registration, provincial and national election systems, how voting should proceed on the day, etc.

Clearly, citizens must understand their role as voters and the consequences of decisions made at the ballot box, in order to effectively and meaningfully participate in the process.

7. Encouragement of voter registration and voting (importance of voting).

For truly meaningful results that produce a government that is representative of the country, all eligible citizens should be registered to vote and actually make their vote. All media coverage should be inspiring, motivating citizens to fulfill one of their vital roles in democracy and vote for the party of their choice for government, unless without due reason (such as illegitimacy of process).

8. Election Day follow-up: safety, behaviour (voters, parties and IEC), results etc.

To booster confidence in the system and credibility of the results, citizens need to know of the results and performance of all authorities and institutions involved in managing the election process on a timely basis. Citizens must see whether it was a free and fair election until the new government is called and in power. This knowledge justifies citizen participation in the election process and enables belief in the credibility of the results, or alternatively, citizens can understand why the results called are open to question and should be subject to review.

Ideally, follow-up should also move further than the process of elections and explore the consequences and implications of how citizens cast their vote. Good reporting could analyse such elements as voter turnout, the general pattern of voting across districts and provinces (information that should be available from the IEC or media's own resources) according to demographics and local issues, and the implications of new party representation at national and provincial level governments. This information gives an indication as to the level and interest of citizen participation, on what basis people voted (such as perceived racial or party alliance, ideology, or specific local issues), and the potential impact on government policy and the state of South Africa's democracy itself.

Review of monitoring results

Table 1: MMA Elections 2009 Topic Coverage Breakdown (Listed in order down to 1%)

Topic	Average
IEC/Election Logistics	18%
Party politics	14%
Political Party Campaigning (last resort only)	13%
Justice System	10%
Party Manifesto	6%
Political Violence & Intimidation	5%
Rates & Services	3%
Personalities and Profiles	3%
Corruption	2%
Opinion Polls	2%
Provincial and Local Government	2%
South Africa - National (Including SA Government & Parliament)	2%
Voter Education & Registration	2%
Corruption: Government & Party	2%
Coalitions and Party Co-operation	1%
Crime	1%
Human Rights	1%
General	1%
Media	1%
Education	1%
Development	1%
Labour, Strikes, Unemployment	1%
Demonstrations	1%
Election funding	1%
Economics	1%
Arts/Culture/Entertainment/Religion	1%
2/3 majority	1%
Gender	1%

Table 2: MMA Elections 2009 Political Party Coverage Breakdown

Political Party	Average
African National Congress – ANC	45%
Congress Of The People – Cope 17%	17%
Democratic Alliance/Demokratiese Alliansie - DA	11%
Inkatha Freedom Party – IFP	5%

Other Parties	3%
Vryheidsfront Plus/Freedom Front Plus - VF+ /FF Plus	3%
Independent Democrats – ID	3%
United Democratic Movement - UDM	3%
African Christian Democratic Party - ACDP	2%
South African Communist Party - SACP	2%
Azanian People’s Organisation - Azapo	1%
Pan Africanist Congress Of Azania - PAC	1%
United Christian Democratic Party - UCDP	1%
Africa Muslim Party – AMP	1%
National Democratic Convention	0%
Minority Front – MF	0%
Sindawonye Progressive Party - SPP	0%
Ximoko Party – XP	0%
Dikwankwetla Party Of South Africa - DPSA	0%
Keep It Straight And Simple – Kiss	0%
Alliance For Democracy And Prosperity - ADP	0%
Christian Democratic Party – CDP	0%
Labour Party Of South Africa - LP	0%
National Alliance - NA	0%
Izwi Lethu	0%
Peace And Development Party - PDP	0%
Peace And Justice Congress - PJC	0%

- Reports that included a gender perspective added up to less than 2.4% of items.
- Female sources accounted for 25% of the total sought in news items.

Media Performance

Using the results of MMA’s monitoring, following is a discussion on how media’s performance in general compares against the eight key components defined above:

1. Adoption of a Citizen’s Agenda

Previous weekly reports have gone into detail over the progress lack of focus, or indeed of any significant coverage, on key issues of importance to the lives of South Africans. The results above, revealing the accrual of data for this longer monitoring period, demonstrate again how media for the most part have failed citizens considerably in this regard. Poverty, service delivery, health, education, children/child abuse, HIV/Aids, and women all fared poorly in election coverage, with the lion’s share going to issues that should have been much further down the list of topics in order of attention received.

A particularly sad indication of poor reporting skills is in not seeing the strong link between many issues that are ordinarily reported on, and continued to be over the election period, and election coverage. As such, stories around service delivery failure in health and child abuse, for example, did not become a key part of election coverage and a platform from which to engage with political parties and form the focus of political analysis.

While there were some excellent pieces produced by media that focused on health, education and children, these tended to be the exception rather than the rule in overall content of their reports.

2. Fairness to all political parties contesting the election.

The results reveal that on the surface, media proved to be largely fair towards all political parties in their coverage, including the SABC, with 97% of all items monitored being monitored as fair (I.e. the item neither clearly favours or disfavors any political party). As has been expressed by the SABC, it is to be expected that the ruling party receive a significant share of the attention. Coverage is required to be equitable, which means that party membership, representation in parliament, and newsworthiness need to be considered in the coverage they receive, and this balanced with 'in the public interest' considerations.

Reflecting the same argument made in the first weekly report, the attention paid to the new party Cope was inappropriate in this light, with its 'news worthiness' overshadowing the attention that potentially should have been paid 'in the public interest' to other parties with seats in parliament. Furthermore, the content of reports on parties demonstrated a focus on pure campaigning activities, personalities, and party conflict, to the detriment of engagement over key issues as previously defined. In doing so, to some extent, party electioneering activities such as political advertising was extended by media.

Given Cope's success in the elections, and their presence in parliament corresponding with a fall in support for other small but older parties, it must be questioned to what extent media assisted in Cope's campaigning. A very recent newcomer, the party would have had very limited resources that could not be realistically deployed to campaign extensively across all provinces. The attention paid by media to this party would have enabled far reaching awareness of the party and its message beyond its own capacity and perhaps at the expense of awareness around other competing parties, who also struggle to have their message heard.

There is a stronger argument to be made for media to report significantly more 'in the public interest' rather than on 'newsworthy' stories during an election period. This is not only about ensuring that citizens receive information that assists them in making an informed decisions, but also about the fairness and consequences of reporting on

traditionally ‘newsworthy’ stories. While Cope’s appearance on the scene and the political conflict between the ANC and Cope may be newsworthy, the consequences of focusing on these events over key issues and other parties could be interpreted as unfair to competing political parties and South Africans in general.

Similarly, the attention paid to whether or not the NPA would go ahead and lay charges against Jacob Zuma, and then the decision not to, could also be argued to have been too excessive for an election period. While it is important for citizens to know of activities outside the election process that could impact on the ability of a person to carry out duties if voted into government office and the potential impact on the credibility of the justice system, the amount of attention devoted to this situation – as exhibited by the topic of ‘Justice’ – without seeing a concomitant increase in other election coverage opens up the possible argument that the dominance of this coverage was not in the best interests of citizens, when issues such as poverty and service delivery remain of greater relevance to their lives.

Examples of good performance in demonstrating equitable reporting were present, and indicated that a nuanced understanding of fair treatment to political parties is possible in media coverage. Although media dedicated the largest proportion of political party coverage to the ruling party, there were instances where opposition/smaller parties were given positive coverage. For instance, the 11 April SABC 3, 7 pm news highlighted opposition/smaller parties’ positive contribution to democracy. It reported that whilst the ANC is expected to win a majority of votes, opposition parties believe that they have a bigger role to play, and interviewed Cope, ACDP, APC and ID.

3. Unpacking of manifestos and engaging with parties over key issues.

Media as a whole performed poorly on this, though certain individual media did perform better than others, with analyses of party manifestos and key issues. This result is concerning and reflects inadequate attention in newsrooms to these key issues. While reporters themselves may lack the specialist knowledge to analyse manifestos beyond the “how many women, how many men” question, South Africa has a number of expert individuals and organisations available to assist media and reporters in exploring pertinent issues. It is also a strong indication that media should be seeking further development of their news editors and reporters to improve their standard of practice in producing quality reports that uphold the argument for a free and plural media.

At an individual media level, there were exceptional examples of how media could produce quality reports and programmes. The SABC FM radio channels, Lesedi in seSotho and Motsweding in seTswana both proved the ability of SA media to meaningfully engage with communities and political parties over party manifestos. The stations took parties to communities on a weekly basis, and gave communities the opportunity to ask questions around how their manifestos would address their concerns,

particularly with regards to service delivery issues and public infrastructure. This included questions aimed at the ruling party, asking how they would deliver on promises on road infrastructure for example, when they previously had shown themselves unable to do so, with roads falling into severe disrepair.

This type of coverage contributes towards the community being able to cast an informed vote by facilitating and providing coverage of fundamental issues that voters require in an election period.

While newspapers are unable to offer the immediacy and detailed debate of radio and TV programmes, they are still able to provide space for direct engagement with party representatives. The Sunday World (19/04/09) provides such an example, featuring an article on an interview conducted with UDM leader Bantu Holomisa. Questions posed by the journalist to Holomisa included:

- Is the UDM going to do anything to help the destitute?
- How would UDM deal with border control?
- List four successes that demonstrate readiness to rule?
- Does the UDM simply exist to ensure Bantu Holomisa has an income?

This form of coverage should be commended and encouraged during an election period by media houses. The questions engaged the UDM on their manifesto and readiness/ability to rule, thus educating voters on the UDM and contributing towards a more informed vote. In addition, on the same day, Sunday World also featured another article posing similar questions to the ACDP leader.

A further example is the Mail and Guardian (17-23 April 2009), which provided a five page “Election Guide” offering valuable information to voters, such as:

- A tally of the ANC government’s big wins and losses since the last round of election promises;
- Plan and promises of the main political parties i.e. ANC, DA, Cope, ACDP, IFP, ID and UDM. The Mail and Guardian not only mentioned the plans and promises, but even assessed the validity and sustainability of these promises and plans;
- A profile of the main political parties as well as their leaders;
- A feature that explored what some of the smaller political parties are about, including Women Forward, New Vision Party, Kiss, Ximoko, APC and A Party. The information provided regarded their respective membership size, origin, branches and issues they focus on.

The Mail and Guardian’s election guide provided all the vital components that media should be providing to voters. It informed voters about political party manifestos, educated voters on the political parties (i.e. leaders, origin, history), and enabled voters to know the validity of these plans and promises. In addition, it explored the ruling party’s

delivery on previous manifestos and promises made. This type of coverage is to be highly commended, and is indeed highly commended by MMA.

4. Representation of the concerns of the marginalised

Again, media on the whole performed very poorly on this component as exhibited across the Topics list, percentage of female sources, and percentage of stories with a gender dimension. Considering the disproportional impact of poverty, social and health related problems on each group and their strong presence in South African demographics, children and women were severely under-represented in election coverage.

While gender and children did not need to form the primary focus of all election reports, a mainstreaming of gender and child-related issues across many reports with relevant topics should have been adopted. Certain media did provide space for organisations and individuals such as professional political analysts to contribute with commentary on gender-related issues on the rare occasion. However, on the whole, these were not driven or produced by the media themselves.

In its 16/04/09 edition, the Sowetan continued with a regular feature, Woman, though with a contribution by Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre and Women's Net commenting on political party approaches to dealing with gender-based violence, as outlined in their manifestos (or not). This is a good example of a media enabling organisations with expertise to make relevant contributions to the election discourse. However, media need to see that gender, and indeed children, are not isolated issues unrelated to other key concerns such as health, justice, public service delivery and poverty.

The very obvious lack of attention paid to women and children, and related issues, does not bode well for change in their marginalised positions in society and public policy that can improve the quality of their lives.

5. Role and responsibilities of the IEC

This is where media need to be congratulated. Most media paid regular attention to the IEC and its representatives, both in terms of their public announcements and role in the election process. Some analysis was also exhibited in terms of IEC responses to such issues as non-resident South Africans being able to vote. While some newspapers and radio stations did not engage around the IEC's role and responsibilities, on the whole, citizens should have garnered sufficient knowledge from media to understand what is required of the institution.

City Press (19/04/09) for example, featured an article holding the IEC to account. The weekend paper reported that Franksdale informal settlement had not been visited by the

IEC to register or talk to them about elections. Thus, this Cape Town community felt that they were “forgotten South Africans that had been overlooked by the political establishment”. In addition to holding the IEC accountable, the article also provided a voice to the concerns of a marginalised community.

However, also tied into the following component (6), some media also made unfortunate reports that undermined the rights of citizens or did not inform them of their rights in IEC-role related reports. One example is a Sowetan article (24/04/09) on an elderly voter who required assistance from an IEC officer to cast her vote because she had difficulty with seeing. Apparently the officer also allowed an ANC regional executive member to be present when her vote was cast for Cope, and this information then rapidly spread through the village. The article quoted the lady’s grandson as being concerned that this information being made public by the ANC representative could put her in danger when the area primarily supports the ANC. No mention of the article was made on the lady’s legal rights to privacy, nor of the IEC official’s responsibility to protect that privacy.

6. Explanation of the voting system on a timely basis

This is also where media assisted citizens, with many newspapers featuring reports and diagrams illustrating the process that would be expected to go through in order to cast their vote. Sunday World (19/04/09) for example, featured an article entitled “Elections are here - guidelines you need to know before voting”, and was presented in a question-answer style format. The article answered informative questions such as:

- Why should I vote?
- Who can vote?
- What do I do once I have registered?
- Where do I vote?
- What happens at the voting station?

While radio stations were obviously limited in their capacity to demonstrate the process, it was rare for radio to discuss what voters would be facing at their local voting station. However, some SABC radio stations covered the voting process and SABC television channels carried a diagram of how to cast your vote.

However, in terms of understanding how citizen’s votes work toward the election of government representatives at provincial and national level, media fell far short in facilitating understanding of this important facet of their democracy. This could indeed be a reflection of a lack of understanding around the process of government formation amongst journalists themselves.

Much was made of the opportunity for certain voters who might experience difficulties with voting on April 22, or require assistance in general, to cast their votes earlier.

However, little information was disseminated in coverage on special voting considerations and the rights of voters to privacy, for instance, when they require assistance. In some advertisements appearing on television, it was acknowledged that a person's vote is their secret, which they can choose to disclose or not. However, as was seen in media coverage, some people required assistance in actually marking their ballot paper, and some disclosed in reports who they voted for.

Furthermore, very little information was provided in coverage on what to do or where to go when encountering other difficulties in trying to cast a vote, such as intimidation, and difficulty in accessing a voting station or even ballot papers.

In addition to informing voters how to vote, and what their vote means, citizens must also be informed of their rights in the process.

7. Encouragement of voter registration and voting

A large swathe of media can be commended for adopting a strong 'go out and vote' approach in their reports in the days before the election, also reflecting political party messages in this regard. While MMA did not observe any newspaper clearly endorsing or supporting any particular political party, the message to go out and vote was carried prominently and strongly, with some newspapers using front page editorials to encourage people to go out and vote.

However, it must be noted that this would have had no impact on those who had not registered – almost 20 percent of the eligible population, or some 6 million people.

A legitimate democracy relies at the very least on widespread public participation in the election process, and the importance of voting, and thus the importance of registering to vote, should be stressed from a very early date, prior to when voter registration is no longer an option. While an almost 80 percent registration figure is laudable for a system that does not make voting a legal requirement, it also shows that an enormous number of people did not receive the message or were not sufficiently encouraged to vote.

While just over 77 percent voter turnout (as a proportion of registered voters) was higher than the previous election, it should also concern those who aim for a healthy and vital democracy that 23 percent of registered citizens did not or were not able to vote, and that this could very well be the result of feeling disenfranchised from democratic processes – believing that their vote, their voice, does not count and would not change anything. If their reason for being unable to vote was because of problems encountered at the voting station, then this is also a considerable concern for both the IEC and the election process in general, and could result in discouraging citizen participation further.

8. Election Day Follow-up

The release of the election results was timely, and demonstrated a well coordinated effort between media and the IEC to ensure that citizens with access to TV, radio or newspapers would be aware of these results when they became official.

While the elections were declared “free and fair” by the IEC on Friday April 24, a number of reports on incidents of election violence, farm workers unable to vote, and insufficient ballot papers seemingly still had to be followed up on. Events such as these have an impact on the working of the election process, and as such, on the determination of whether an election is truly free, fair and legitimate. Questions around what happened or what is to happen to those citizens unable to vote because of insufficient ballot papers remain unanswered, including what is legally required of the state or the IEC to enable these people to cast their vote, or what recourse citizens have when facing this situation. The instances of election violence, while reported as less than previously experienced or indeed prepared for in various security measures, should be explored in terms of previous experience and potential impact, in addition to the consequences for those involved.

Though the ANC retained its ruling party position, with only a small loss in its share of votes, a great deal more analysis could be directed towards how people voted in relation to the increased number of voters and issues specific to certain areas. Reports made note of increased voter turnout, indeed congratulating people for becoming more involved, in particular the higher youth turnout. However, if more reports focus on how voting and the voting results demonstrated changes in the electorate and South Africa’s democracy, it would inform citizens about changes to their society and democratic system, in addition to supporting government accountability. Such changes to be explored could be the implication for ruling party support with an increased voter turnout but fall in proportion of votes received. While ANC remains the ruling party, peoples’ willingness to change allegiance for whatever reason, could indicate that South Africa is now heading towards a true multi-party democracy.

Some media should be congratulated for moving quickly on analysing the consequences of the election results for South Africa. The City Press (26/4/09) for example, featured two articles exploring how the re-elected ANC will be able to deliver on its promises given the current economic constraints.

-Tanya Owen and Prinola Govenden-