

**AFRICAN CHARTER ON DEMOCRACY, ELECTIONS AND GOVERNANCE
MEDIA WORKSHOP REPORT.**

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Venue: Kadoma Rainbow Hotel

Compiled by: Malvern Mkudu



Facilitators

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ACRONYMS

ACDEG- African Charter on Democracy Elections and Governance

MISA- Media Institute of Southern Africa

VMCZ- Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe

AIPPA- Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act

POSA- Public Order and Security Act

BSA- Broadcasting Services Act

Introduction

ActionAid in collaboration with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe Chapter, convened a two-day *African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance Media Workshop* in Kadoma on 22 and 23 March 2019. A total of 20 journalists drawn from the public and private media attended the workshop. Two participants were drawn from civil society organisations.

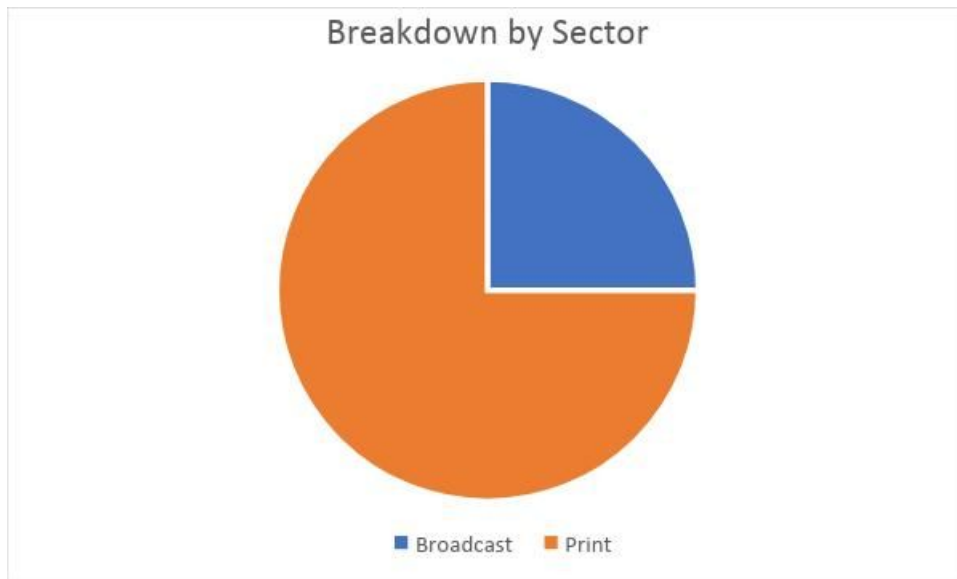
There was a healthy gender balance as there was almost 50-50 representation. Participants were drawn from Bulawayo, Gweru, Masvingo, Mutare and Harare. The participants had media experience ranging from one year to 18 years. Twenty-five percent were broadcast journalists while seventy-five percent were print journalists.

Objectives

To ensure journalists are familiar with the African Charter of Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) and to capacitate them to popularise the charter through their day to day story telling.



Some of the participants that attended the workshop



Background

ActionAid through its governance programme, convened the workshop in partnership with MISA Zimbabwe to familiarise media practitioners with ACDEG as part of a broader advocacy plan to popularise the charter. ACDEG which was crafted in 2007 and only signed by Zimbabwe on 21 March 2018 was approved for ratification by parliament on 19 March 2019. It is now waiting for approval by Senate and signing by President Emmerson Mnangagwa before it is domesticated.

This requires the media to be familiar with the processes to assist in the advocacy efforts for its domestication as well as providing vital information to citizens. ActionAid is using a two-pronged strategy working with citizens and forming coalitions with journalists to popularise ACDEG. This is in accordance with the broader goal of opening the democratic space.

Before parliament agreed to ratify the Charter on 19 March 2019 most advocacy efforts were channelled towards pushing government to ratify ACDEG. Now that ratification appears certain, advocacy efforts are expected to focus on domestication. The focus is now on ensuring that provisions of ACDEG are incorporated in local laws such as the Electoral Act. The media must find points of convergence and divergence between the country's constitution and ACDEG and ensure these are addressed. The media must focus on areas such as free and fair elections, democratic governance, respect for human rights, respect for rule of law and constitutionalism and observance of principles of good governance in ensuring the implementation of ACDEG. Media must be aware of necessary benchmarks to

facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation of the domestication process and implementation of ACDEG.

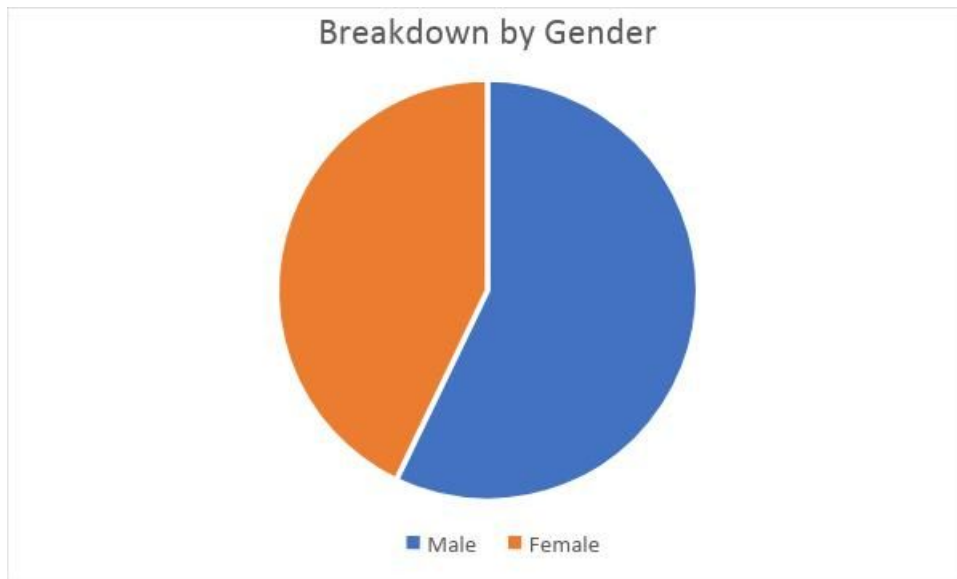
After the 2018 elections most of the reports tabled by various observer missions such as the African Union and SADC, noted that in some aspects the conduct of elections had failed to meet the expectations of ACDEG. For example, on civil society the AU observer report noted:

While the imposition of fees and/or charges on domestic observer groups is lawful, it contravenes Zimbabwe's international obligations, particularly Article 12(3) of the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, which requests State Parties to create conducive conditions for civil society organisations to exist and operate within the law."

The media should therefore be aware of these issues to highlight them through stories.



Participants having group discussions



Methodology

The learning processes involved group work as well as lectures on technical elements of ACDEG as well as practical sessions on delivering the message of ACDEG to different audience through video for example. Journalists were asked to identify what struck them, what is missing and what needs to be added after being handed a booklet of the Charter before convening into groups to acquaint and discuss its different chapters namely: *Democracy, rule of law and human rights, the culture of democracy and peace, democratic institutions, democratic elections.*

They also had opportunity to discuss other additional chapters such as sanctions that can be applied in cases of unconstitutional changes of government and political, economic and social governance.

Digital security was also a component in the training workshop.

Feedback from group discussions

Finally, journalists identified thematic areas that they would pursue as groups that would help them report and popularise ACDEG. In coming up with this report the writer relied on notes taken during the training processes as well as one-on-one interviews with participants after the training workshop.

Participants were divided into groups and thereafter reported back to plenary. They expressed their surprise and consternation that African leaders had come up with such a democratic

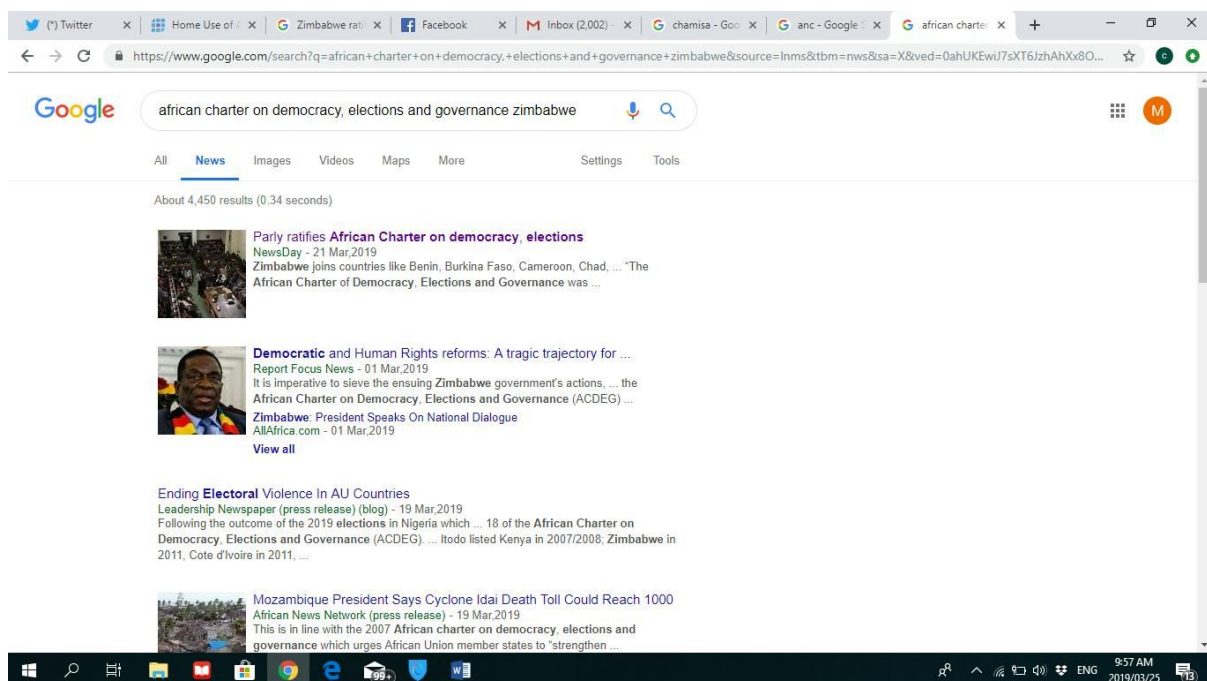
Charter as way back as in 2007 despite the continued existence of undemocratic environments prevailing in different African countries.

Most groups noted that there was no enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with the Charter notwithstanding the absence of clear timeframes for implementation.

On digital security, most of the participants demonstrated lack of knowledge with digital security best practices. While journalists are using ICT tools to produce content and publish news, many demonstrated a lack of appreciation of safety issues.

The last session involved participants choosing thematic areas they wish to pursue, and the four areas chosen were: *the media under siege*, *civil society under siege*, *transparent and accountable leadership and right to know*. Participants made presentation on specific areas and activities they will pursue under these topics. These will further be considered by ActionAid in consultation with the journalists who proposed. **Underreporting of ACDEG**

Most participants demonstrated little or no knowledge of ACDEG. For instance on Tuesday, 19 March the Parliament of Zimbabwe agreed to ratify the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Only the Newsday through Vernaranda Langa, published a story on the issue. The output in media stories does not match the advocacy that has been invested by Civil Society Organisations and other stakeholders such as ActionAid in popularising ACDEG.



Screenshot showing only one online story on ACDEG

Opportunities for media

ACDEG has been under-reported in the media. However, parliament's approval to ratify the Charter means it is mostly likely to sail through Senate and will soon be signed by the President.

Senate through its notices has already announced that they will debate ACDEG on 27 or 28 March 2019. Legal experts expect that provisions of the Charter will be sprinkled or adapted to local laws such as the Electoral Act as opposed to adopting the Charter as an Act on its own.

In that case, the media must advocate for such respective laws to be aligned with the Charter. Currently there is a process to repeal the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA).

AIPPA will be unbundled and superseded by three laws namely, Zimbabwe Media Commission Bill, Access to Information Bill and Data Protection Bill. There are plans to also reform the Broadcasting Services Act.

The media thus has opportunity to advocate for the proposed bills to comply with the provisions of ACDEG. CSOs such as MISA are involved in advocacy efforts to democratise the proposed laws and ensure their compliance with ACDEG and the Constitution. The media can also take advantage of these ongoing advocacy efforts to popularise ACDEG.

Media practitioners have an opportunity to work closely with CSOs such as MISA, Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ), ZACRAS, Zimbabwe Election Support Network, and Zimbabwe Peace Project that are conducting lobby and advocacy campaigns for democratic law reforms.

The media must track and monitor the domestication process against the reports and findings by election observer missions that noted the deficiencies in the relevant local laws. The media through its reportage, should push for appropriate remedies on the irregularities noted by observer missions particularly those made reference to ACDEG.

Findings

General unawareness and lack of knowledge on ACDEG by journalists- most journalists demonstrated their lack of knowledge about ACDEG. There was no technical understanding of the contents prior to the facilitator's having to take them through its basic mechanisms.

Most journalists were unaware that the Parliament of Zimbabwe had approved to ratify the Charter, two days before the training workshop.

“If President Mnangagwa has signed the Charter why is [parliament still approving it?”

This demonstrated the general lack of knowledge on the parliamentary processes and stages towards ratification and domestication of the Charter by the journalists. For example, some journalists did not know the difference between signing, ratification and domestication.

This poses a serious indictment on the nature of interventions that the journalists will employ in aiding the advocacy efforts to ratify and domesticate ACDEG.

Simulated video footages/skits produced by journalists to popularise ACDEG during the workshop, revealed gaps between the stage at which the process is at and the message being delivered to the public and other stakeholders. While most of the skits were creative and informative, they failed to capture the correct advocacy message. There was a poor grasp of which local laws require to be aligned with the Charter. Journalists also revealed that they were not familiar with the Charter's basic terms.

“We propose to participate in the media reform agenda,” said one participant

This revealed the unawareness in the media law reform agenda and the stages that it has reached thus far. Opportunities to align proposed laws with ACDEG may be missed.

Absence of online community- participants were mainly drawn from the mainstream media. However, freelance journalists and bloggers (responsible for more than 60% of news generation). Their absence from such commendable media initiatives and interventions, and leaves out an important information base.

Digital security- journalists are not familiar with digital security and are vulnerable to external attacks which may compromise their information and sources as well as the journalists themselves.

Skills gap-journalists lack skills such as data journalism which makes it difficult to value add to their stories through diagrams or heat maps. ActionAid in partnership with MISA, should look into the possibility of conducting summer schools to equip journalists with these skills.

Group Resolutions

Following deliberations from the thematic group discussion, participants came up with the following resolutions as part of efforts at escalating advocacy work around ACDEG.

Group1 : Transparent and Accountable Leadership

Members (Chido Lucias, Walter Tapfumaneyi, Chamunorwa Murara, Ruth Butaumocho, Samuel Kadungure)

- Capacity building workshop partnering with CSOs- There is need to enlist legal practitioners and other resources to ensure that journalists have a firm grasp of ACDEG and the inherent legal processes involved towards its ratification and domestication.
- Roundtable discussions on ACDEG. These can also include student journalists.
- Production of Factsheets on ACDEG
- Capacity building of journalists through training workshops. This programme will also train members of Parliament for them to have an appreciation of local laws and how ACDEG can be applied to these laws.
- Progress tracking through tracking the processes in law making and drafting to ensure provisions of the Charter are adhered to in the current law reform exercise. There is need to ensure there is constant updates on the status of the Charter and efforts being made to domesticate it to maintain public interest as well as enable monitoring of the process.
- Annual awards to recognises stories on ACDEG- journalists require motivation to write on certain matters. An award will arouse interest among journalists to research and write about ACDEG.
- Establishment of a portal that will publish content produced by journalists, factsheets and articles from the mainstream media. This means partnering with existing portals such as Kubatana or other blogs that can move the content.

Group 2: Civil Society under siege

Members (Rutendo Mawere, Brighton Chiseva, Gloria Machakaire, Prisca Manyiwa)

- April-December - Provincial meetings in various provinces to raise media awareness on ACDEG. This can be done through press club discussions in the town's major cities.

- World Press Freedom Day May 3 -Invite an expert to give a lecture on ACDEG. The overall theme of the May 3 Media Freedom commemorations in 2019 event will be: *Role of media in elections and democracy.*
- Monthly road shows to popularise ACDEG
- Capacitate resource information kiosks by putting literature and materials on ACDEG
- Evaluation and monitoring to assess progress
- Request CSOs and other organisations to place adverts on ACDEG through various media houses.

Group 3: Journalists under siege

Members (Kelvin H Jakachira, Fungi Kwaramba, Nkulumane Mlambo, Freedom Mashava)

- Lobby government to immediately repeal AIPPA and POSA
- Work with media advocacy groups to come up with new media laws
- Training of journalists on safety and ethics
- Improve the welfare of journalists
- Improve political environment through engagement of political parties
- Raise awareness in hostile environment
- Adherence to journalistic ethics
- Host an event for Press Freedom Day

The meeting had reservations on the proposed from this group.

Group 4: Right to Know

Members (Vernaranda Langa, Vimbai Chingwaramuse, Partonella Nqodzo, Tafadzwa Mukome)

- Form synergies between CSOs and the media- Engage information officers of relevant organisations and train them media strategy to augment their advocacy efforts on ACDEG.
- Public talk shows on ACDEG.
- Social media blitz social on ACDEG
- Workshops for editors and civil society organisations to improve their understanding of ACDEG- Editors ultimately are the gatekeepers, so there is need to engage them to get their buy-in towards pushing stories on ACDEG.

Recommendations

- Invite online journalists, freelance journalists and bloggers to workshops of this nature as they have a huge audience and research shows they are responsible for creation of 60% of news content. Some of them are online influencers.
- Involvement of editors who are the gate-keepers to ensure that ACDEG stories are more appreciated in the newsrooms. The Zimbabwe National Editors Forum is a suitable entry point.
- Develop sound media strategies to augment the advocacy efforts of CSOs. Engagement meetings with media houses and influencing their editorial policies to increase coverage on ACDEG.
- Engagement meetings of media practitioners and CSOs to ensure media practitioners to strengthen advocacy strategies in thematic areas such as media law reform and access to information.
- Partner with ZUJ and VMCZ for an annual ACDEG Media Awards as an incentive to encourage reportage and stories on ACDEG.
- Partner with existing popular online portals to post stories on ACDEG
- Capacity building of journalists through digital security training as well as other skills such as data journalism.

Conclusions

Media practitioners lack knowledge about ACDEG. There is need to capacitate them to understand the issues better as well as arouse their interests in reporting on ACDEG by providing incentives. There is need for further engagement with CSOs, legislators and other stakeholders to ensure the domestication of ACDEG.

Journalists need to acquaint themselves with relevant regional, continental and international best practices for them to effectively monitor ACDEG's domestication and implementation process in Zimbabwe.

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