



7. Newspapers

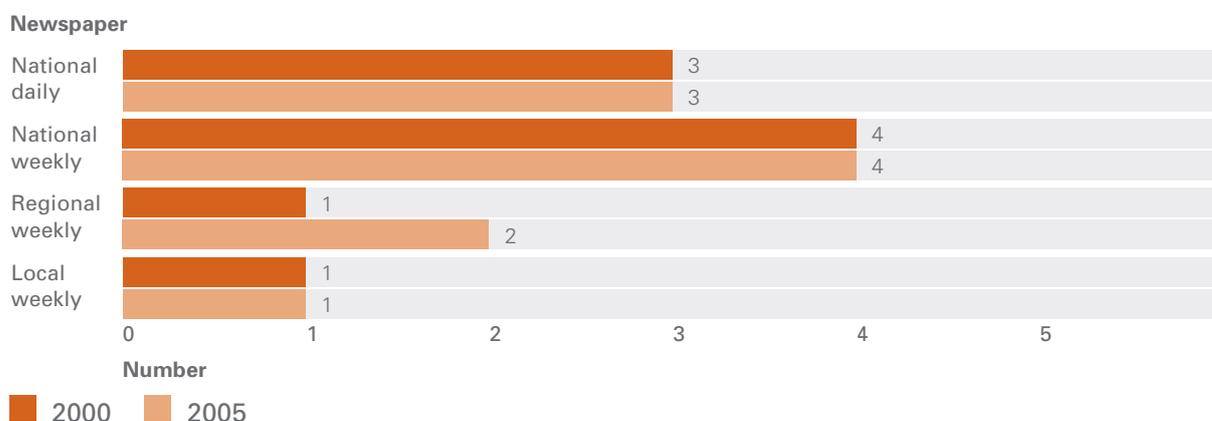
7.1 Key changes and development in the newspaper marketplace in the past five years

The newspaper industry, on the face of it, might appear not to have registered any growth between 2000 and 2005. There are still three operational national daily newspapers and four national weekly newspapers. There are still no regional daily newspapers, but there were two regional weekly newspapers in 2005, up from one in 2000. There is still one local weekly newspaper (Banda, 2004; MISA, 2005a). However, the study by Banda (2004) entitled *Newspapers and magazines in Zambia; a question of sustainability*, lists more than 200 newspaper titles registered with the Director of the National Archives between 1993 and 2003.

With the advent of economic and political liberalisation in the 1990s, there was a flurry of activity to register newspaper titles. Indeed, some took off, only to fold later. This shows that, in theory at least, the newspaper industry is the most progressive of all media of mass communication in the country. Having said this, newspapers, while easy to set up, are the most difficult to sustain. This is attributable to the low level of market buoyancy to absorb any more print media.

In general, the widest read papers are: *The Post* (0.39% readership); *The Times of Zambia* (0.26% readership); *The Zambia Daily Mail* (0.20% readership); *The Monitor and Digest* (0.07% readership); and, *The National Mirror* (0.07% readership) (CSO, 2002; Banda, 2004)³.

Figure 9: Total Number of Newspapers



Source: Banda, 2003 and 2004; MISA, 2000 and 2005a

³ The calculation is based on circulation as a percentage of national literacy. It is to be noted that circulation figures are often inflated and circulation does not reflect readership as such.

State-owned daily newspapers account for more than 50% of the existing titles (MISA 2005b). There is only one daily private newspaper, which has been in existence since the 1990s.

The only strong community newspaper is the Kanyama Community Voice, the existence of which is buoyed up by the Media Trust Fund, a conglomeration of media support organisations set up by NORAD and other donors in the country to provide financial support to emerging media, in addition to the existing state and private media outlets (Media Trust Fund, 2000).

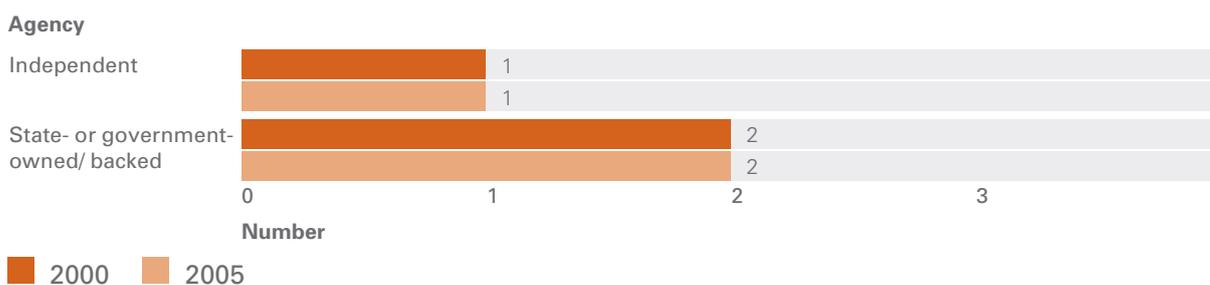
7.2 Investment and growth in newspapers in the past five years

There has been little or no growth in the newspaper sector. The situation has remained static, not for lack of attempts but because such attempts have proved unsuccessful. There is still only one commercial news agency in Zambia. The number of state-backed news agencies has dropped from two in 2000 to one in 2005, although in fact what happened in 2005 was simply a merger between the Zambia News Agency (ZANA) and the Zambia Information Services (ZIS) into the new Zambia News and Information Services (ZANIS).

Newspaper circulation figures, computed from information supplied by the newspapers themselves and not subjected to any independent verification, demonstrate the low level of newspaper penetration in the country, with the highest circulation figure being 0.39%⁴ for *The Post* newspaper (CSO, 2002; Banda, 2004).

The newspaper industry is heavily dependent on advertising – not many NGOs, for instance, sponsor content in the newspapers. The small ads section attracts much revenue from small-scale businesses, but the market is proving too small to accommodate new entrants. It is largely because of this that there has been little or no visible investment and growth. The study by Banda (2004) gives a variety of reasons for this, among which are issues to do with depressed economic activity, the lack of entrepreneurial skills among media owners, low literacy levels, cross-media competition and the lack of proactive and effective financing mechanisms with bank and other financial institutions.

Figure 10: Ownership of Newspaper Agencies



Source: MISA, 2005b

7.3 Plurality, ownership and control

Ownership of newspapers has always been diversified. As early as 1972, church groups owned the *National Mirror*. However, with political liberalisation, the tendency towards private newspaper ownership had a new impetus. There is thus a multiplicity of newspaper titles the owners of which are private individuals and organisations.

⁴ Calculation based on newspaper circulation as a percentage of national literacy rates. Circulation figures are often inflated. Also note that circulation does not reflect readership as such.

The state has failed to exercise any fundamental control in the newspaper sector. The power to control is far removed from the state because of the legislative ease with which one can set up a newspaper. It is simply necessary to lodge the particulars of one's publication with the Director of the National Archives. This is not a cumbersome process. Government control is thus not an issue here, except in more subtle forms, such as the withdrawal of government advertising from what are seen as irresponsible or erring newspapers. This particular behaviour was witnessed during the reign of President FTJ Chiluba, whose MMD regime instructed government ministries, departments and parastatal companies not to advertise in the privately owned *Post*. That position has since been reversed by the new MMD president, Levy Mwanawasa.

7.4 Diversity

Newspapers are read by 37.10% of the population, compared to 50% who listen to the radio. Even so, the number of people who read newspapers once a week has increased by 8% between 2000 and 2005 (CSO, Central Board of Health & ORC Macro, 2003; CSO & ORC Macro, 2003)⁵. Several factors may account for this, including improved literacy among the population (there has been a 16% increase in the adult literacy rate between 2003 and 2006, from 66.9% to 80.6% in 2006)⁶ and wider distribution of newspapers across the country. *The Post*, for instance, has even launched a courier service, suggesting that its own capacity to distribute *The Post* newspaper has grown exponentially.

In a sense, an expanded readership entails an expanded sourcing of news stories and reports. While the state-owned media have remained largely undiversified in terms of their political reportage, the privately-owned newspapers, most notably *The Post* and the *Weekly Angel*, have sought to focus on alternative voices. But one must be cautious even here: most of the alternative voices are those of people in privileged positions – NGOs, political parties, businesses, etc. As a business strategy, *The Post* now publishes an educational supplement targeting teachers and pupils. It also publishes the *Business Post*, an initiative born out of the Business Development Services (BDS) project of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The BDS project injected some funding into *The Post* for it to conduct an assessment of the potential “market” for a new product that would target “small scale to medium businesses” (Banda et al. 2005). It could be concluded, on the basis of this, that *The Post* is more inclusive of hitherto unheard voices. The Panos media monitoring project, however, indicts *The Post's* statistically insignificant reporting of gender issues, as it does that of other newspapers (PISA, 2004).

⁵ The first study by the Central Statistical Office, the Central Board of Health and the ORC Macro was published in February 2003 and covered the period 2001/2002, while the second study was published in April 2003 by the Central Statistical Office, the Ministry of Education and ORC Macro and covers the period 2002. The first set of statistics would seem to be more representative of the base year of 2000 for this study.

⁶ The 2003 literacy rate is based on UNDP figures (UNDP, 2003 <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/countries.cfm>), while the 2006 literacy rate is taken from CIA, 2006.

7.5 Quality of newspaper reporting

The quality of newspaper coverage of political news is not balanced in the case of state-owned newspapers. However, the state-owned newspapers do make an attempt to balance stories other than those of a political nature in which the ruling party has overriding interest. Thus, it is not unusual to find well-written features on environmental issues. There is no scientifically established data to substantiate this point, but anecdotal evidence abounds.

Privately-owned newspapers, on the contrary, tend to lean towards opposition political parties in their coverage of political news. But even here, some opposition parties are not covered in the best light, nor do they get large quantities of coverage.

The Post newspaper has not signed up to join the newly established Media Council of Zambia (MECOZ), which is designed to be an ethical watchdog for the press in the country. Although this is an indictment against the newspaper, those newspapers that are members do not seem to treat the Council with any seriousness. This poses an ethical challenge, even as it poses an issue of quality control.

7.6 Specific challenges

Newspaper publishing, despite registering the largest number of would-be investors, has not registered any real growth. The economic environment is not conducive to media business. At the same time, there is a lack of bullish business skills among media owners. Where owners have demonstrated these, as in the case of *The Post*, some success has resulted. Added to the poor economy is the state's subtle undermining of newspapers that publish content that goes against its political interests.

There is also a lack of newspaper infrastructure in the country. There are few or no *reliable* printing presses and those that are available tend to be expensive and over-subscribed. The case can be made that state newspaper companies have tended to monopolise printing presses, although this is no longer the case. *The Post*, for instance, has invested in its own printing press. The *Monitor and Digest* has also invested in its own printing press, although it has generally not been doing well.

Key findings

- In theory, newspapers have been the most progressive sector in the media industry since 2000.
- Legislation surrounding publication of newspapers is not as restrictive as that relating to radio and television broadcasting.
- Despite many registrations of titles, there are increasingly fewer newspapers being published.
- The problems attending this sector range from depressed economic activity to competition with other media forms.
- Newspapers continue to be politically inclined either towards the ruling or opposition political parties, depending on whether or not they are state-owned.