

THE BIRTH, OPERATIONS AND DEMISE OF ZIMBABWE INTER-AFRICA NEWSAGENCY [ZIANA]

By

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Abstract

In the first place, the paper locates the creation of alternative news agencies in the realm of Third World nations' struggles for self-determination in all aspects of their lives. The arguments of the paper are that ZIANA was founded on noble ideas but was undermined by a number of factors that included: weak capital base from point of inception and along the way, ownership structure not preferred by larger part of media industry, lack of corporate identity, lack of a profit-motive drive in the core-business of gathering and selling news and generally poor managerial and administrative skills. The paper concludes that these problems if not addressed, most preferably in a holistic manner, will constitute an insidious worm that render the second experiment another still birth.

Introduction

"The establishment of ZIANA as a national news agency marks an historic event in the process of the consolidation of our independence" [Robert G. Mugabe, 1981]

Inasmuch as communication is as old as humanity, the struggle by humanity for self-determination has the same age. These opening remarks go a long way in assisting an understanding of forces that spurred the creation of national news agencies in most Third World countries. Although national news agencies, also known as alternative news agencies are a fairly recent development their history dates back to developing countries' struggles against the multi-faceted forms of colonial subjugation. The radical nationalist spirit that gave seed and impetus to national news agencies' development is rooted in numerous cultural performances that were expressions of undying resistance and struggle to proclaim own definitions.

After 90 years of colonial rule and about fifteen of which involved a protracted armed struggle, Zimbabwe became a politically independent and sovereign nation state in April 1980. Since colonialism is essentially institutionalised violence on the colonised, with the attainment of independence, it was logical to implement some wide-ranging structural re-arrangements in different strategic institutions to go in line with the agenda of the new democratic government. The nationalist agenda sought to make the Zimbabwean majority attain and practice full citizenship thus having a voice in their own governance. This saw a number of changes in the socio-economic, political and other public institutions. Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency

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[ZIANA] and the some media organizations were among the first establishments to be radically overhauled in terms of ownership, control and philosophy of operation as part of the larger process of consolidating the country's newly attained independence and sovereignty.

Along these lines, it has been argued that the process of de-colonising the information and communication sphere in many Third World countries is part of wider struggles for self-determination [Musa, 1997: 117]. The trend whereby the news media in the new nations gradually became dependent on foreign agencies for their material was seen as inimical to the former's commitment to self-determination. The activities of the foreign news agencies that produced news with a western perception and aimed primarily at a Western audience came under increasing attack from the Third World countries [Musa, 1997: 117].

In short, Third World countries wanted to project their experiences from a Third World perspective and consolidate their independence in the process. It is in this context that the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe proclaimed that, "the establishment of ZIANA as a national news agency marks an historic event in the process of the consolidation of our independence" as his opening statement in a speech made when he officially opened ZIANA.

Before the Birth of ZIANA ...

The colonial period was fraught with all sorts of undemocratic practices that permeated all mass media practices or processes of communication. This was neither coincidental nor restricted to colonial Zimbabwe alone. It was part of the larger colonial injustices that saw and persistently treated the colonised Blacks as worse than animals. This unfortunate but well orchestrated onslaught on Blacks was apparent from the basic organisational structure and staffing of colonial media to the range of racial insults that were chinned out in the name of news and current affairs programmes.

What became ZIANA in 1981 was formally Inter African News Agency [IANA] established in 1961 as a subsidiary of the South African Press Association [SAPA]. It was wholly owned and controlled by SAPA which for many years funded it through subsidies. Its managers and editors were appointed from Johannesburg. Furthermore, all news from international news agencies was first transmitted to the SAPA office in Johannesburg for editorial processing before publication in Zimbabwe.

In the business of news production and publishing, it must be remembered that editorial "angling" and "framing" are practices of cardinal importance. This explains the thrust of a wide range of discourses on the media and ideology. The mass media operate in specific ideological frameworks and consciously create certain realities and not others. This is what Stuart Hall refers to as "the politics of signification" or "the re-presentation and not representation of reality" by the media. The operations of news agencies in their routines of gathering, processing, and distributing news can be explained in these political terms. They are informed and guided by certain ideologies.

Within this context, IANA, processed news from international news agencies in ways that were congruent with the false racial supremacy that the colonial state wanted to promote and naturalise. The news agency endeavoured to do political public relations campaigns for the apartheid system that was institutionalised and reined in the then Union of South Africa and Rhodesia. This role was even more involving given that during the larger part of IANA's existence, the two countries were under international persecution coupled by sanctions while liberation struggles in the respective countries were gathering momentum leading to the colonial states' commission of extensive brutalities against the colonised Blacks.

This emphasises the point that, although the media generally constitute an important ideological and political arena, that role is even more crucial in times of massive political differences when such heated contestations spill into the marketplace of ideas where the media operate. This was the case in colonial set ups that gave logic and impetus to the need to de-colonise media following the attainment of political independence.

The situation that obtained before the establishment of ZIANA was generally seen as unacceptable by the new political establishment. Commenting on the issue, the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe Robert G. Mugabe said:

This situation was totally unacceptable to my government. If allowed to continue, it would make a mockery of our status and national pride as an independent nation. The birth of ZIANA brings to an end, a situation which was politically intolerable [Ibid.].

Severing Media Ties With South Africa

Although all former colonial masters of Africa are geographically to the North of the continent, Britain's colonial intrusion of Southern Africa was executed from the South. As a result, a number, if not all, colonial institutions including the media and their legal provisions, were "shipped" from Britain to Cape of Good Hope [now Cape Town] before being carted and later railed in-land after being accorded a South African colouring and links. Consequently, the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe meant severing ties in general and media ties in particular with the then apartheid ruled South Africa, a country that had close relationships with Rhodesia and was fiercely hostile to Zimbabwe from independence. It's worth recalling at this point that from the early eighties, South Africa militarily attacked Zimbabwe and, among other acts of sabotage, ran a pirate radio station ironically called *Radio Chokwadi* [Radio Truth] whose total out-put was deadly propaganda venom meant to destabilise the infant Zimbabwean nation.

As a co-operative and non-profit making agency, SAPA was built around its membership of Afrikaans and the English press. The agency has a history of serving the interests of its newspaper members - owned by both Afrikaners and English Whites but predominantly the latter. According to the Agency's editor, Mark van der Velden, in the 1930's, guidelines for stringers - mostly school teachers and postmasters - included an instruction to ignore news involving 'natives' unless it was an attack by a Black on a White person [Forbes, D. 1998: 155]. This context explains why the process of media disengagement from South Africa started as early as December 1980 with the establishment of Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust [ZMMT].

The ZMMT, was seen as a “unique experiment” in Africa’s search for alternative frameworks of media ownership and control. The Trust was meant to be the guardian of the independence of newspapers and to institute internal media policies that are in harmony with policy positions of the new nation state.

The ZMMT was set up to act as a buffer between the government and media organisations and ensure adherence to certain professional ethics in the media in which it had stakes on behalf of the citizens of Zimbabwe. The Trust, private companies and some individuals acquired shares formerly owned by Argus Company and other South African individuals in the Zimbabwe Newspapers. This was meant to make independence in the mass media field both meaningful and tangible.

This point was clearly articulated by the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe in the same speech when he said:

While our country was ruled and dominated by a white settler minority that relied heavily on South Africa and Britain, it followed that our mass media was equally dominated from those quarters. The wishes and interests of the majority of our people could not be ventilated fully in that media, because they conflicted with the interests of the ruling class. The views of the colonised majority were either ignored or totally misrepresented in order to support the interests of the ruling class. It is the intention of the ZMMT to reverse this colonialists trend and make our media an instrument of the masses of our people.

In Zimbabwe, the formerly oppressed masses have now become the dominant social force. The media should reflect their wishes, and help them consolidate their political gains as a result of achieving national independence [Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe’s speech at the official launch of ZIANA 1-07-81].

Among other things, these remarks fall in the larger terrain of discourses by most Third World leaders in their new domestic and international information and communication order advocacy.

Colonial Media and Blacks

As intimated above, the struggle for a democratic domestic and international information and communication order was not ushered by the attainment of independence but was inextricably intertwined with the larger struggle for self-determination whose crux were the liberation struggles that brought independence. The oppressed wanted freedom to: draw their agenda, chose their leaders; compose and sing their songs; perform their dances; till their land and produce what they wanted; have the number of beasts they wanted to own; teach their children what they believed worthwhile; tell their own stories; and share their wishes and fears. In short, Blacks wanted spaces to say and do their own things by themselves and for themselves. The colonial system could not allow this freedom without negating itself.

The larger colonial media variously collaborated and negatively covered the colonized that is if they covered them at all. This was the case because the press is an exotic institution in

Africa [see Ainslie, 1968; Hachten, 1971; Head, 1974; Mayton, 1983]. The first to be introduced was print media, which was essentially 'settler press,' published in the language of colonial masters primarily to cater for their needs and interests and maintain the status quo of colonialism [Boafo, K. 1991: 104]. Some unofficial newspapers followed in the middle of the nineteenth century owned by missionaries and some indigenous Africans.

The introduction of broadcasting media technology started with radio had the initial role of providing information and entertainment to the colonial white settler community. As Ansah [1985] puts it, radio services were "primarily aimed at enabling Europeans in Africa to maintain political and cultural links with the metropolitan countries. In the case of the French colonies, an additional reason was to spread metropolitan culture among the educated African" [p. 6]. As stated in Item 1 of the "Younde Declaration," adopted at the Intergovernmental Conference on Communication Policies in Africa, held in Younde, Cameroon, July 1980:

In Africa, in the communication field, more perhaps than in any other, the prevailing situation is the direct result of the heritage of colonization. Political independence has not always been followed by a decolonization of the cultural life or the elimination of many alienating factors, imposed by the colonial system. Communication structures often still conform to the old colonial patterns and to the needs and aspirations of African peoples [UNESCO, 1981: 23].

The Domestic and New International Information Order Debate

Besides the above sad reality of media operation in colonial Africa there were other issues related to cultural imperialism that were raised by the Third World countries. These were aptly captured below:

The on-going search and struggle for the establishment of a new World Information Order cannot be correctly evaluated and understood unless it is taken as the continuation of the oppressed nations' struggles and quests for complete emancipation in the fields of economics, politics, ideology and culture. One of the colonial legacies of the nations of Africa ... has been the biased, unbalanced and often distorted pattern of reporting and assessing of events designed to reinforce the news ascendancy and value judgements of the Western countries. That kind of journalism and manipulation of the press made possible the white-washing and camouflage of the brutalities, inhumanities and selfish motives behind slavery and colonialism and presenting them as missions of civilisation and Christianity [Chikerema, 1986: 17].

This sums up the diverse range of issues that made up the New World Information Order debate. Among a number of options and ways forward, the creation of alternative news agencies was argued for and pursued as one of solutions to the problem. This is the global political and cultural context in which organisations like ZIANA were established in developing countries. These countries were demanding a chance to "develop their own collective self-reliance in news, information and entertainment, progressing at a rate and in a manner appropriate to their needs rather than in conformity to the marketplace needs of the industrialised nations [Fore, W. F.].

Dimensions of ZIANA

According to the organisation's policy document of 1981, Ziana was set up under the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust chaired by Dr Sadza to:

Seek, obtain and otherwise receive their subscription, payment, exchange national regional, local and other news and features; distribute such news, news material and news features to subscribers against payment either in the form of features or news exchanges or such other terms as may be agreed upon; present complete objective and impartial information, news or news material or features on any matter of public or national interest within and outside Zimbabwe; report truthfully and fairly without prejudice to public and national interest the views of all sections of the population of Zimbabwe, [ZMMT Policy document: 1981].

In the organisation's documents it is reflected that when it was founded, ZIANA had 80 staff members of which 20 were journalists working at the head office in Harare and bureaus in Mutare, Gweru, Bulawayo, Masvingo and Gwanda. The head office was linked to Gweru and Bulawayo bureaus by point to point telex system allowing a two-way transmission of news at any time and by telephone link with other offices.

ZIANA had contractual relations for commercial or exchange agreements with 22 foreign news agencies, eight of which were in Africa and Asia. Reception of news by ZIANA head office from six foreign agencies via cable and five radio Teletype casts and printed bulletins. Within Zimbabwe, ZIANA offered news service transmissions via leased cable lines, postal and messenger services. The news agency gave itself a target of 10 000 words per day of news from Zimbabwe and SADC. Among other organisations, the news service was served to Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, Zimbabwe Newspapers, News File, News Services, Reserve Bank, Orbis International, Modus Publishers, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, some embassies, Associated Press, AFP, Reuters, Tass, Xinhua News Agencies, Inter-Press Service, Aim, PANA, ZANA and Shihata.

In short, the ZIANA project was quite ambitious and founded on noble principles and objectives of democratising the flow of information at domestic and international levels. However, in spite of its grandiose pronouncements, and promising beginning, ZIANA, just like a number of similar projects in developing countries, suffered retarded growth and could not adequately fulfill the purpose for which it was created en route to its demise.

What Went Wrong?

With reference to the functioning of the dilapidated state of ZIANA just before its demise, the then Minister of State for Information and Publicity in the Office of the President and Cabinet, Professor Jonathan Moyo rightly commented that:

“It would be dishonest for any informed person to pretend that Ziana's difficulties are new because things there fell apart a long time ago,” [*The Sunday Mail* 4 August 2002].

There was something rotten in the running of not only ZIANA, but also the organisation's mother body: ZMMT. However, diagnosing the chronic illness of the later is beyond the scope of this paper. Below is a discussion of what went wrong with ZIANA.

At a seminar in 1991, ZIANA's editor-in-chief and chief executive officer, Henry Muradzikwa threw some light on his organisation's ailments. He said:

The history of Ziana is one of confusion, chaos and lack of a clearly defined direction. Not a single document exists stating in unambiguous terms, the rationale and philosophy of the organisation. Consequently, for 10 years the organisation has drifted in circles and turns almost without aim.

The captain and his crew have only managed to keep the ship afloat in a struggle for survival. That in itself must be considered a success given the enormity of the problems the organisation faced and still faces, [Muradzikwa, "Ziana Maps out Future Strategy", ZIANA Copy 8 September 1991.

He said that one thing which was clear was that Ziana was in the business of gathering news, producing features and selling all of these to its various clients. The seminar's purpose was to critically examine the operations of Ziana, past, present and synthesize their ideas into a new vision for the future.

The major problem with ZIANA was succinctly captured in a 1997 consultancy report carried that stated that:

Ziana suffers from debilitating structural and financial incapacities. They begin with the absence of any clear legal status on which to operate commercially, compounded by limited financial management skills, lack of marketing and pricing policies, and an endemic culture of non-profit making shored up by subsidy.

There is no evidence of any purposive and methodical attempt to match costs by revenue, or to set goals and targets in either of these areas. Nor does there appear to be any effective mechanism to separate out and monitor the organisation's various business functions and activities, [Consultancy Report on the Commercialisation of Ziana Prepared for the Minister of Information, Posts and Telecommunications by the British High Commission in Zimbabwe, 1997: 20].

In the larger part of its existence, ZIANA was technically insolvent. According to the agency's documents shareholders, funds turned to a debt balance of over \$13m at the end of December 2000. Current liabilities exceeded current assets by over \$16 million making it impossible for the agency to honour the payment of its obligations as they became due. For example, on many occasions, ZIANA ran up astronomical telephone and telex bills to a point where the responsible organisations switched the agency off-line. This action disrupted the work of ZIANA's clients, depriving them of a vital source of foreign news. To make matters worse, workers were occasionally not paid on time leading to low staff morale, something that seriously undermines productivity. In any case, disruption of core business in the media industry is seriously damaging since timeliness and consistence are highly valued.

In fact, the agency's expenditure massively outstripped revenue. Monthly fixed costs exceeded \$2m, whilst revenue potential based on current subscribers was less than half a million dollars. The deficit was always funded by the ZMMT and through annual government grants which were always dwindling thereby further crippling the agency.

Perception is another problem that haunted ZIANA. In spite of the steady growth of the country's media industry especially in the 1990s, the news agency's subscriber base did not increase. In stead, the number of its clients drastically dropped at international and domestic levels. At the latter level, the problem has largely been that of perception. The Zimbabwean media industry is seriously polarised with the public media wrestling with the accusation of being Zanu [PF], government and state sycophants while private media see themselves as champions of freedom of expression hence democracy.

This was revealed in stories written on ZIANA by most private media houses. For example, ZIANA was referred to as an agency that writes "near-useless stories" and on top of that the copies will be late. *The Daily News* argued that in spite of the troubled nature of the agency, money continued being poured into ZIANA, with no returns while it sank deeper into debt. The report says the agency could not pay its staff and creditors. ZIANA was said to be "a complete waste of public funds and must go." The story whose strongly worded headline screamed, "Shut Down Ziana Now, There is no Future for it," ended by asserting: "controlled information through government news agencies will never sell" [*The Daily News*, 30 August 2002].

As a result, from the above 50 subscribers it had in the 1990s, ZIANA had about ten at the point of its demise. From a media economics perspective, such a small clientele base cannot fully support the operations of any national news agency. This contrasts sharply with other news agencies whose business is propped up by a larger subscriber base. For example, SAPA has more than 100 subscribers, Associated Press [AP] serves well over 14 000 newspapers, radio and television subscribers in over 100 countries. Maybe this is not the best of comparisons. However the fact remains. This show that ZIANA failed to grow and fully execute and accomplish its national obligations.

Operational Handicaps of Ailing ZIANA

Taking note that, among other things, ZIANA was set up to democratise the domestic information flow, it becomes clear that the agency failed in that regard. The formerly information poor masses in rural areas have remained marginalised as ZIANA was forced to re-define itself and shrink its news catchment areas in favour of the vicinity of its head office in Harare and a few of its remaining provincial offices. In this case, operational policy was defined by financial realities and contrasted sharply with the one on paper and declared at inception.

The national news agency had no financial resources to pay its reporters well enough to retain them, let alone employ enough reporters. Also, there was no money to provide enough transport and technological gadgets for communication in the fast relaying of news before they become stale. These problems forced ZIANA to cover the same urban events that were also covered by their subscribers thereby rendering their copies a duplicate of what they already had hence useless. This explains why, in spite of having a common ZMMT

parentage, Zimpapers rarely used ZIANA's copy. For example, it was common practice for *The Herald* to go for six days of the week without using a Ziana story. Normally, there were two or so ZIANA stories in Monday's edition of *The Herald*. It was so because *The Herald* has a skeletal staff on Sundays that write stories for the Monday paper that is traditionally quite thin. Moreover, there is little that takes place in public and corporate sectors on Sunday to be reported in the Monday paper.

Related to this scenario is the fact that, because of failure to pay its reporters competitively, ZIANA has become training ground for journalists who are quickly snatched by better paying organisations as soon as they become seasoned. In an interview the president of ZUJ, Mathew Takaona, bemoaned the agency's problems. He said:

ZIANA has fallen from the prestigious position that it enjoyed in the 1980's. It used to pay so well that it attracted the most senior journalists in the country and the agency's copy was always better written than that of its subscribers. Today the agency is almost dead. Besides having journalists that are fresh from college or on attachment, there is no transport and other resources for the coverage of events we [Zimpapers] fail to cover [6 September 2002].

ZIANA, just like the rest of mainstream and community media in Zimbabwe, did not go deep into rural areas if it was not following a high-ranking government official going to preside over a certain public ritual. As a result its stories were always more than 90% urban and the rest based on peri-urban happenings.

Other Ailing National News Agencies

ZIANA was not the only national news agency in that predicament. Generally, most news agencies in developing countries are besieged by many problems that have grossly compromised their discharge of core business. This has been the case whether it is Zambia News Agency [ZANA], Namibia Press Agency [NAMPA], Botswana Press Agency [BOPA] or Shirika la Habari la Tanzania [SHIHATA] just to name a few. Even the Non-Aligned News Agency Pool [NANAP] and Pan-African News Agency [PANA] are equally crippled. If it is agreed that the realities, philosophy and objectives that led to the establishment of Ziana were shared among Third World countries when they set up their national news agencies including PANA and NANAP, then it is also agreed that that the current scenario implies the disruption of a noble and well intentioned dream of developing countries. PANA has since been privatised due to financial problems. As a result, it is grappling with the characteristic challenges associated with the need to balance the profit motive drive and the execution of a public service obligation.

How others are flourishing when some are perishing

As discussed above, ZIANA, like other similarly constructed news agencies, is a victim of negative perception emanating from its link with the government. In practice, media houses that are financially and politically independent have a stronger claim to credibility, impartiality and objectivity in their news reporting. The limits to autonomy are generally seen to relate

variously to issues of ownership, control and sources of finance. Within the context of this argument, it is interesting to look at profiles of successful international news agencies.

The 19th century Reuters, Havas [France] and Wolff/Continental [German] had government links. These agencies, the leading ones in the 19th century, were independent companies whose success in their early years was generated by the strengths and personalities of their founders. They were all indirectly linked to their respective governments, which were important as sources of revenue and as sources of intelligence, and it is generally considered that their news services reflected their respective national interests. For example, Read argues that Reuters in the period 1860 - 1900 functioned “increasingly as an institution of the British Empire” [Quoted in Boyd-Barrett, O 1998: 23]. Wolff was subsidised by Bismarck’s government that wanted to prevent Reuters from taking over the German agency [Ibid.]. In fact, political funding of news agencies has been practised in many disguised forms including ‘excessive’ payments for services rendered in the case of Reuters. But what is important to note here is that the media in their countries and even abroad did not disfavour these news agencies on the basis of government links.

A new model of agency ownership and control in the form of a co-operative emerged in the 20th century US. For example, when AFP succeeded Havas, it took a co-operative ownership structure, representing newspapers, journalists and the state. AFP is subject to government interference through state representatives on the agency’s governing council. Such influence was exerted in 1975 to block the re-appointment of Jean Marin as director general and again to prevent the re-election of Lionel Fleury as director in 1996, following the agency’s 1995 coverage of a housing scandal which involved the Prime Minister [Ibid. 25].

This implies that what really matters is not mere government involvement in a news agency’s affairs that should devastate its credibility but power relations in the operations of the agency and how the media in a country view the government and state and subsequently understand the issue of national interests. In fact Reuters has provisions to prevent the control of the agency by a single interest group. Unfortunately, it is largely in developing countries and specifically in Africa where the populace and culture industries have been mis-schooled to hate their governments together with government-related institutions.

Related to the success of global news agencies, as noted above, is their broad-based or democratised ownership structure. This development is at the centre of their prosperity in the sense that even if the big news agencies have global markets, their most important markets have tended to be their home or domestic markets, followed by North America and Western Europe. “For Reuters”, Boy-Barett argues, “the UK is the single most important country, in terms of revenue” that amounted to 16% of the total in 1995 [Ibid.30]. He adds that the same is true for AP and AFP in their domestic US and French markets respectively. What this means for someone tasked to revive a news agency like Ziana is discussed below.

Zimbabwe's Domestic Information Order

*“Every country needs a national news agency that not only links and unifies various parts of that country together but also links the soul of that country itself with the rest of the world from the point of view of up-to-date news and information” [Moyo, J. **The Sunday Mail**, 04 August 2002].*

If the objective of African governments' [including Zimbabwe] communication policies was to democratise the flow of information at domestic and international levels the result has been a flop. A number of factors, inter alia, weak initial capital base; poor management and lack of equipment and commitment militated against the realisation of this noble objective. Communication technologies have remained centralised much to the exclusion of the citizens who live in rural areas. Consequently, the much-lauded policies of nation building and socio-economic and political development have remained at the level of rhetoric. Tehranian, [1980] refers to this as, “cognitive tyranny by the ruling groups.” His argument is that, in African societies the use and management of communication technologies, especially the dominant mass communication systems, has been to propagate the views and values, and to perpetuate the interests and positions of the political leadership and elite.

As a result of centralised structures, communication technology is monopolised by the urban population, particularly the socio-economic, political, military, and administrative elite, who use it for “collective monologue, ignoring the villages and farmers and, by implication, an overwhelming majority of the population” [Ekwelie, S. 1985: 28]. The structure of communication technology systems in Black Africa ensures vertical communications, in which the predominant mode of information flow is from the top to the bottom, and the few talk to the many about the needs and problems of the many from the perspectives of the few, [MacBride, S. 1980: 168]. A form of information apartheid is the result.

Ziana's successor

A successor to ZIANA is already in place. It operates as a news agency falling under an ambitious multimedia organization called New Ziana. Well before its birth, the core business of the news agency was stated as that of performing the dual job of bringing Zimbabwe to world and taking the world to Zimbabwe.

“ZIANA is a key and strategic national institution that should never be allowed to die. We have a vision of new, well funded multi-media ZIANA that would have new and nationally dedicated staff who are highly qualified and are committed to using the best business and media industry practices to gather and disseminate credible news about and from Zimbabwe from a Pan African perspective,” [Moyo, J, **The Sunday Mail** - 8 August 2002].

So what is clear is that, government acknowledges the importance of a national news agency as a strategic institution. Such an institution become even more important and strategic in this epoch of rapid cultural fussions as waves of globalisations continue to intensify.

However, unclear funding mechanism and funding levels have already appeared. This can be deciphered from the text below in which the responsible government minister was responding to the following question by a reporter in a question and answer session:

Reporter: If ZIANA is that necessary, why is there a reluctance to spend money on it, or is it a question of prioritising?

Minister: *“It is not true that there is a reluctance to spent money on New Ziana nor is it true that any money has been requested from anybody or authority. The New Ziana is not yet there, nor do we know how much it will require once it is there. We still have the old ZIANA and we are in the process of restructuring it because it is not relevant and not viable. In the restructuring process, we must be careful not to take the approach that money is the solution because it never is. Money is not the issue. Anyone who tells you that they will do good things only if you pay them huge amount of money is either a charlatan or a mercenary and needs to get real. Yes, money is an important thing but real solutions to real problems require much more than money. Good solutions are driven by good ideas and often those who want money do not have good ideas. That is why it is always better to reward good ideas that you have than to use money in the hope of getting good ideas.” [Moyo, J, **The Sunday Mail** - 8 August 2002].*

In the same speech he noted that the future of the new project was anchored on the formulation of Strategies and structures that are competitive and driven by a professional, motivated and committed news staff capable of identifying new business opportunities that can attract investment [Ibid.] The kind of investment referred to here is not quite clear in the sense that the umbrella organization, New Ziana, to which the news agency belongs, is a private company. New Ziana is wholly owned and controlled by the government of Zimbabwe. However, the issue of corporatising the entity is necessary so that dependency on government grants while operating in ways that are inimical to business becomes a thing of the past.

Concluding remarks

The problems of ZIANA were quite crippling and restructuring the project was necessary was long over due. However, a challenge that has already emerged is that of coming up with a structure of ownership that endears the news agency to the local media market. That has not been done. As discussed above, the prosperity of news agencies lie in a co-operative structure that is in line with what prosperous global news agencies have adopted including the “Big Four.”

The new News Agency’s structure of ownership and control should include interested parties and main categories of clients for news agency services which include domestic media, corporate sector government and other stakeholders. This model ensures that a news agency, in the first place attains funding, gain local acceptance and prosper within and without Zimbabwe. This will make the agency capture the domestic market, which, as illustrated

above, is a requisite foundation upon which the big global news agencies constructed their success. This challenge is looming and may lead to another flop if drastic administrative steps are not taken to address it.

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