

The Vernacular Press in Zambia: A Pilot Study of a Provincial Newspaper

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Abstract

It is a quarter of a century now since Zambia's vernacular provincial press was established by the government. In this pilot study, the researchers have looked at one of the newspapers and concluded that it is ineffective content-wise and circulation-wise. The authors recommend that the Zambian government should take a fresh look at the newspaper, and perhaps at the other five as well, to ensure that what is published is really **about** and **for** rural people and that copies of every issue are made available to them.

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La presse vernaculaire en Zambie: une étude pilote des journaux régionaux

Résumé

La presse régionale zambienne a été créée par le gouvernement il y a un quart de siècle. Dans cette étude pilote, les chercheurs ont fait des études sur un des journaux et ont abouti à la conclusion qu'il était inefficace au niveau du contenu et de la distribution. Les auteurs recommandent que le gouvernement zambien réévalue le journal, et peut-être aussi les cinq autres, pour que ce qui est publié soit réellement pour et à-propos des masses rurales et que les exemplaires de chaque numéros leurs soient disponibles.

Introduction

In 1986 when this pilot study was undertaken, Zambia had six provincial newspapers. These were vernacular newspapers edited and published in metropolitan Lusaka but circulated in the province. *Tsopano*, the subject of this study, was one of the six newspapers which the Zambian government published through its Information Service (ZIS). The purpose of this study was to establish the effectiveness of *Tsopano* in the Eastern Province circulation-wise and content-wise.

It was important to look into the circulation of *Tsopano* because it was not uncommon for districts in the Eastern Province to go without the newspaper for several months, either because it had not been printed or because it had not been shipped from its printing base in Lusaka or the provincial headquarters of ZIS in Chipata, some 700 kilometres east of the capital. It was equally necessary to look at the content of the newspaper to see whether it presented news, information and views that mattered in the lives of the people among whom it was circulating. It was hoped that through this assessment of the content and the factors influencing it, policy decisions could be made which would make the newspaper a more efficient tool of communication.

From our interviews with relevant authorities, it was clear that *Tsopano*, like the other provincial newspapers, was established to be an organ of a two-way communication between the people at the grassroots level, and the local as well as national government leadership. Through it the people were to make known what was happening in their areas as well as their hopes and aspirations so as to enable the government to assist them in their development efforts. The newspaper was also meant to inform the people about government pronouncements so that the grassroots could understand why certain decisions which affected their lives were made at the central as well as the local government levels.

The study therefore had the following specific objectives:

1. To provide quantitative data on the provincial content of *Tsopano*;
2. To provide quantitative data on factors affecting the content of *Tsopano*;
3. To provide qualitative data on factors affecting the content of the *Tsopano*;
4. To identify the circulation patterns of *Tsopano*;
5. To describe the readership of *Tsopano*;
6. To identify economic factors affecting the content of *Tsopano*;
7. To identify qualitative factors affecting the distribution and circulation of *Tsopano*;
8. To describe the qualitative and quantitative factors influencing the

flow of news from rural areas of the Eastern Province to the capital, that is, news selection; and

9. To assess the attitudes and opinions of the people in the Eastern Province about *Tsopano*.

The rationale for this study was based on the fact that the content of the press sometimes sets the agenda for the public discussion and implementation of development programmes. The Zambian government at the time of the study was advocating the decentralization of administrative, economic and political affairs of the nation. Its efforts were going to be effective partly to the degree that the press content reflected the decentralization goals. The main thrust of these goals was to take power and decision-making to the people. Power and decision-making entail that ideas flow from the people. The press plays a big role in the flow of these ideas.

The research was to provide the empirical basis for evaluating the provincial press as typified by *Tsopano*. It was going to determine whether the news and other information the provincial newspapers, such as *Tsopano*, carried were indeed really from the provinces and answered the needs and aspirations of the rural people.

Review of Literature

Related research has been conducted by Smith (1984), Weaver and Elliot (1985) and Fuller (1983) in the United States on the community press. Some of these studies used content analysis and interviews with journalists and editors. In their work they were able to show systematic biases in the content of the community press and in the selection of news by editors and journalists. Smith, in particular, established that the media, newspapers included, are likely both to affect and be affected by what goes on in a community.

In Zambia, Kasoma has made considerable inquiries in the rural press in Kabompo, Mongu, Petauke and Serenje which have partly resulted in the work *Publishing Rural/Community Newspapers in Africa* (forthcoming). The book stresses the need for rural folk to set up their own newspapers because the so-called provincial newspapers, like *Tsopano*, which are based and edited in towns, do not seem to answer their needs. Mytton (1974), in his survey of the mass media in Zambia, established that newspapers mainly circulated in the urban rather than in the rural areas. But this study did not deal with content analysis of newspapers to determine whether the newspapers contained rural news and information. Lately, Kasoma (1989, 1990) has carried out studies in how to make rural newspapers reflect views of villagers. All this research seems to demonstrate that there are definite factors affecting the content of

provincial newspapers. Policy-makers would find knowledge of these factors useful in achieving the decentralization goals of government.

Methodology

A one-year sample of issues of *Tsopano* was content analysed. The analysis classified and coded the content according to its origin (capital vs province), theme (capital, national or provincial), size and placement (front or inside pages). A similar analysis was made of photographs appearing in the sample of the issues chosen. The year that was randomly chosen for the study was 1985. Coded data was tabulated and compared to identify salient characteristics in quantitative terms.

Editors, journalists as well as Eastern provincial and district news gatekeepers were interviewed on the factors affecting their selection of news exclusion and inclusion in the provincial press to discover those most commonly reported. Another instrument used to collect data for the study was questionnaires which were addressed to the information sources and the general public. These were pre-tested in the field before being administered personally by the researchers. They consisted of mainly closed-ended questions. The questionnaires were translated in Chinyanja — the dominant language in the Eastern Province where respondents indicated that they did not speak or read English. The translations were done by Chinyanja speakers. Apart from the information solicited for in the questionnaires, the researchers also searched for and gathered any other relevant information sources that were willing to give information on the subject. Some of the information from the random interviews was useful.

Interviews were conducted at randomly chosen places throughout the Eastern Province from Kacholola, near Luangwa River, all the way to Lundazi. Altogether, four districts and one sub-*boma* were visited as well as those villages in between. The districts were Perauke, Katete, Chipata and Lundazi. The sub-*boma* was Nyimba. Only the two districts of Chadiza and Chama were not visited by the research team.

Data-gathering in the province took almost two weeks. But data-gathering in Lusaka, with special emphasis at the ZIS headquarters, took several months and was undertaken after the trip to the Eastern Province. The search at the ZIS headquarters, where *Tsopano* is published, mainly consisted of interviewing the editing staff as well as analysing the content of the issues of the newspaper from the sample. The researchers also requested for all the copy that was submitted for publication, including that which was not used. The same was the case with the photographs. The senior members of staff of ZIS were requested to make submissions on how they saw the role of *Tsopano*, and indeed the other provincial

newspapers, in informing the rural people. They were also asked to state what problems ZIS was facing in publishing *Tsopano*. Some of them made written submissions while others made oral ones.

Results

Thirty-five percent of the news sources and the general public said they were happy with the coverage they got in the *Tsopano*; another 35 percent said they were unhappy and 20 percent said they had never seen a copy of the newspaper. Some 10 percent said they were 'somewhat' happy. But the newspaper had a high rating on accuracy: 30 percent said *Tsopano* was 'very accurate', 40 percent said it was 'fairly accurate', while only 10 percent said it was not accurate. Although the newspaper had a high rating on accuracy, it did not satisfy respondents in giving coverage to all aspects of their activities. Sixty percent said *Tsopano* was 'unsatisfactory' in this respect, while only 20 percent said they were happy.

Replies from the questionnaire for information sources and the general public revealed that ZIS reporters in the districts did not seek information from the people for publication in *Tsopano*. Sixty-five percent of the respondents said nobody had gone to them to seek information for publishing in the newspaper. Only 5 percent said information had been frequently sought from them. They consisted mainly of workers in the health inspectorate at provincial and district levels. Ten percent said information had seldom been sought from them.

Seeking information and submitting a story based on the information to the editor is one thing; publishing the story submitted is another. Not every story or picture a newspaper office receives gets published. Only about 1 percent of the respondents, who said information was sought from them for publishing in *Tsopano*, had stories based on that information actually published. For instance, during August/September 1985, the ZIS file showed that 24 stories which were sent to Lusaka by district information officers in the Eastern Province for publishing in *Tsopano* were 'spiked', a journalistic jargon meaning thrown away or 'not published'. Eight of the stories were from Chipata and the rest almost evenly distributed among the rest of the districts.

Almost half of the stories, 11 of them, were interesting hard news stories which should not only have been published but given prominent places in the newspaper. They included an excellent and well-written story from Lundazi about 30 farmers and 11 hammer mill owners marching to the office of the district governor to protest about insufficient diesel allocated to Lundazi district. The protectors said unless diesel allocation was increased, produce in the district would not be collected. The district administrative secretary agreed with the protestors and called on the

government to increase diesel allocation to the district — an excellent story by any standards.

Another good story that was 'spiked' was about farmers marching to the office of the district governor in Chipata protesting their not being paid by the Eastern Province Co-operative Union. The cheques they had been given had bounced. In addition to this story was another interesting piece which highlighted the complaint of the Kapata township residents in Chipata about blocked sewages. This too was not used.

It was remarkable that all three stories submitted about farmers complaining of lack of empty grain bags for their produce were 'spiked'. They included two from Chipata, one about farmers in Malambo Valley complaining over lack of empty grain bags and the other about the Chipata district political secretary telling farmers not to panic over the shortage of the bags. The third was from Perauke in which farmers in the district also complained about the same problem. Indeed, concluding from these examples, the general trend was to leave out all stories about complaints or protests by the peasants. There was a deliberate attempt by the *Tsopano* editors to paint a picture of 'all is well' even when all was not well.

Twenty-two stories were used in one issue of the newspaper. All but six were speech stories highlighting party and government officials at meetings and gatherings. Four of the stories were about the Eastern provincial political secretary alone — a rather unjournalistic practice. Few of the stories published were good stories. They included a story from Chama where health inspectors seized 2,768 bags of mealie meal from the Eastern Province Co-operative Union depot because the food was reportedly unfit for human consumption. The story said the mealie meal had been infested with maggots and had to be destroyed. Another good story was about the Minister of State for Power, Transport and Communications saying construction of the Chipata/Mchinji railway line was at a standstill due to failure by government to allocate sufficient funds for the project. The third good story was about Chieftainess Nsefu of the Kunda people blaming Zambia Broadcasting Services for not recording for radio and television the annual 'Malaila' ceremony that had taken place at her palace.

The research team was unable to establish the cause of the poor gate-keeping at *Tsopano* headquarters that resulted in good news stories being 'spiked' and poor ones published. The decisions concerning the gate-keeping were done a year prior to the research and the gate-keepers were unable to remember what their reasons for choosing or dropping a particular story were. But, as indicated earlier, one of the reasons was, obviously, an attempt to paint an 'all-is-well' picture — a case of self-censorship.

Out of the 60 pictures used in four issues of *Tsopano* (Numbers 400, 401, 403 and 404) slightly more than half, 52 percent, showed politicians presiding over ceremonies or visiting some place. The provincial Member of the Central Committee appeared in every issue on an average of two times. Of the remaining 48 percent pictures that did not involve politicians, some were hardly newsworthy, such as the picture showing journalists viewing game in the Luangwa National Park and another showing a 15-year-old Malawian girl crowned in Blantyre as Miss Independence. A few of the pictures, however, were newsworthy. These included the picture of a nearly-tame elephant at Chichere Lodge in the Luangwa Game Park; others captured workers building a self-help clinic in Chipata; Eastern Province health extension workers getting bicycles; starving people in Chama receiving food relief; and Kachasu brewing. The quality of the 60 pictures used in the four issues was poor in content and composition. In nearly all of them, the faces of the subjects were hardly discernible. In some, the reproduction in the newspaper was to blame. The researchers were unable to compare the pictures published with those 'spiked' since the latter were not available.

The information supplied to *Tsopano*, which was often rejected for publication, included news on disease control for livestock, hybrid plants, use of fertiliser and co-operative news. An officer of co-operatives in Petauke complained bitterly that all the news he had given to *Tsopano* on the sector was not published. When the information given was not published, news sources were, almost in every case, never told why it has not been published. Again in almost every case, the information given was never followed up by the reporters.

A surprise finding was the high regard for the competence of the information officers who reported for *Tsopano* held by the news sources and the public. In response to the question 'Do you feel that the information officer covering your activity is competent and professional?' only 5 percent said 'No'. The majority, 40 percent, said 'Yes' and 25 percent said 'Somewhat'. But the confidence in the competence and professionalism of the *Tsopano* reporters was not reflected in the sharing of confidential information with them. Only 25 percent of the sources said they were prepared to share information with information officers, including that which was not suitable for publication.

Only one person, the provincial agricultural officer in Chipata, said he read every issue of *Tsopano*. All the other respondents said they never read every issue of the newspaper because of its erratic distribution. Even the Provincial Agricultural Officer (whose office is in the same building with that of the Provincial Information Officer) had great reservations about the lateness of the newspaper. He said *Tsopano* was sometimes six months late. Of those who did not read every issue of the newspaper, 60

percent said they 'Seldom' read it while 40 percent said they 'Never' read it. Almost all the respondents who never read *Tsopano* said they never saw it being sold in their area. Some even said they had never heard of it. But 75 percent of the respondents said *Tsopano*, being a local language newspaper, was an important communication medium in the Eastern Province. Only 5 percent said it was not an important medium in the province.

In response to the question 'In your opinion do most people in your area read *Tsopano*?' 40 percent of the respondents said 'No', 35 percent said 'Yes', and 25 percent 'Didn't know'. Some of those who said 'No' said the newspaper would be read if it came to the area. A few respondents who answered 'No' said they had seen marketeers buying the newspaper being used in the making of cigars in the villages. Nearly all the respondents who said they had supplied information to officers for publication in *Tsopano* said they had not protested about inaccurate or biased coverage. Only 5 percent admitted protesting.

Tsopano was so unknown among the respondents that none of them even knew how often it was published. Eighty-eight percent did not even want to guess but simply answered 'Don't know', while 5 percent answered 'fortnightly' — which was, of course, wrong. Thirty percent of the respondents said they did not know where to get a current issue of *Tsopano* and 20 percent said the newspaper was simply not available. Another 20 percent said they were only able to buy it when they went into town (either the provincial or district headquarters).

The majority of the respondents said they liked or would have liked reading *Tsopano* mainly because it was a newspaper published in Nyanja, a language most people in the province spoke. Some even said the newspaper would improve their competence in the Nyanja language. Other reasons for liking the newspaper included the fact that it contained interesting farming news, helped readers educate themselves about 'what was going on', covered the news of the province both town and rural news, and provided entertainment through sports coverage and short stories.

Asked what information was not in the *Tsopano* that they would have liked included, 35 percent of the respondents said they wanted to see more agricultural news. Others were current affairs, business news, health news, co-operative news, development news, information on road and railway conditions, consumer news, employment possibilities, crime news, including news about poaching, news on the accidents, news about the needs of the people that were not being met by the authorities and more information on what the people living in the province were saying as opposed to what the politicians were saying.

The biggest criticism about news carried by *Tsopano* was that it was awfully outdated. Most of it was lifted from the national press and/or radio and television news bulletins. Even worse was the fact that the news was mostly what the politicians were saying and rarely about what the people were saying. Another remarkable finding was that 10 percent of those interviewed said they did not or would not like *Tsopano* because it was published in a language they did not understand. The 10 percent included those who were new to the province as well as some elderly people in Lundazi District. They said they could not read Nyanja, although normally Tumbuka speakers can read Nyanja since it is taught in Tumbuka schools.

Fifty percent of the respondents said they bought rather than got *Tsopano* free of charge. But 10 percent said they got it free. Those who got the newspaper *gratis* included senior civil servants, such as the Provincial Agricultural Officer and senior agricultural and co-operatives officers. A rather surprising finding was that none of the people interviewed knew the price of *Tsopano*. Not even those who said they bought it could remember its cover price. But most people thought, whatever it was, it was reasonable.

Thirty-five percent of the respondents said they 'sometimes' required official clearance before supplying information to an information officer (presumably for publication in *Tsopano*). Only 5 percent said they did not need any clearance. The type of information for which clearance was 'sometimes' required included 'anything likely to cause alarm (for instance an outbreak of disease),' 'anything that might embarrass the state,' 'anything touching on policy or political organisation' and 'anything that might result in legal proceedings.' Nearly all those who 'sometimes' needed clearance before supplying information said they obtained it from provincial officers in Chipata. But 5 percent said they required it from the ministry headquarters in Lusaka. These were mainly provincial heads of ministries. Fifteen percent said clearance was normally granted within a day. Five percent of the respondents, all of whom were in Lundazi, said they obtained clearance in less than a week. (There is no telephone link between Lundazi and Chipata or Lusaka). Sources whose requests for clearance were turned down were always told the reasons for this. The respondents said clearance was most often denied for information dealing with thefts by co-operative officials since such information was damaging to the image of the co-operatives. Also denied was information that contradicted pronouncements of the United National Independence Party, the country's sole ruling Party.

Asked whether there was any other reason why information a respondent wanted to publicize did not appear in *Tsopano*, 20 percent of the respondents said they had only themselves to blame for not supplying the information to the information officers in their district. However,

some said the problem was that the *Tsopano* reporters (the information officers) preferred to publicize political events to farming information. Other reasons given included: DIO (District Information Officer) is incompetent; all information is channelled through Lusaka where our stories are 'spiked'; DIO is too far away for me to supply him with information; don't know where DIO is; lack of space; DIO does not come to us.

The respondents also said *Tsopano* was read by villagers (25%), lower class people (18%), primary school teachers and pupils (17%) and old people (7%).

Discussion

Factors Affecting *Tsopano* Publishing and Circulation

The absence of *Tsopano* in Chipata and the districts can only be explained by the high demand for paper — any kind of paper — in the rural areas. Although the nominal cover price of *Tsopano* is 6 ngwee, respondents reported paying anything from 20 to 50 ngwee for it some years ago. Even those who had never seen the paper suggested that it sold for somewhere between 20 and 230 ngwee per copy. Indeed, one respondent said that its value to him was at least 50 ngwee.

In the light of these findings, it is easy to see that *Tsopano* represents, at 6 ngwee, an unbeatable buy for wrapping paper, regardless of its information value. Indeed, one storekeeper in Chipata, who is an agent for *Tsopano*, said that the newspaper was so much in demand that he only sold it to his preferred clients. Several respondents said that they were sure that the paper ended up being used in markets for bundling vegetables and other perishables. This means then that *Tsopano* could easily be retailed at 25 ngwee without any decline in its sales or readership. It is not surprising therefore that *Tsopano* fails to reach many of the readers for which it was intended. The paper is wholesaled to agents at 4 ngwee per copy, whereas its market value ranges from 20 to 50 ngwee per copy. Little wonder that it does not find its way to readers in villages.

Even more revealing in explaining the absence of *Tsopano* is the cost for its publication compared with the amounts budgetted for printing. The printing cost for all the six vernacular provincial newspapers in Zambia in 1986 was K60,000 per issue. But the total amount allocated to ZIS to publish these newspapers, plus *Z-Magazine* costs, would only have funded publication of six issues of the vernacular newspapers in the whole of 1986. This explains why the publication of *Tsopano* and other vernacular newspapers had become 'irregular' during and after 1986 to the extent that at one time the newspaper only appeared quarterly instead

of monthly. It is important that government makes up its mind whether it wants to publish the newspaper as intended or shut it down. A newspaper published once every three months is no newspaper. It does not meet the journalistic definition of a newspaper.

Factors Inhibiting the Circulation and Distribution of *Tsopano*

At least four main factors were identified as inhibiting the circulation and distribution of *Tsopano*. First was the problem of insufficient copies. Eastern Province had, at the time of the research, a population of more than 250,000 people, yet only 9,500 copies of *Tsopano* were distributed there. The second circulation and distribution problem was that *Tsopano* invariably arrived late, in some places as late as six months. Because of this, some people had stopped looking out for it as they believed it was no longer being published or that the news in it would be outdated. The unavailability of the newspaper itself was the third circulation and distribution problem. Because the newspaper was distributed through the 'agents', it seemed the average person on the street could not get it. Only those who knew the designated agent and where he or she could be found were able to buy it. Moreover, the agents were few and far between. The villages that we visited had no agents. As one villager put it: 'That paper doesn't come here.'

The fourth circulation and distribution problem for *Tsopano* was irregular transport. *Tsopano* was transported by bus to the outlying districts, but often this service was suspended or could not be paid for because of lack of funds. It was these researchers who carried two issues of *Tsopano* from the provincial headquarters in Chipata to the district office in Lundazi, some 200 kilometres away. Provincial personnel told us: 'We don't know when we would have been able to get the paper there if you had not been here to take it.'

Tsopano's erratic circulation meant that the newspaper had few readers. Forty percent of our respondents categorically said they never saw the newspaper while the remaining 60 percent said they 'seldom' read it. This is particularly striking since most of the villages visited and people we interviewed were close to the main roads or to the district or provincial towns. No wonder, most respondents did not know how often the newspaper was distributed, where they could buy a copy or how much it cost.

Qualitative Factors Influencing the Selection of News for *Tsopano*

At least six qualitative factors influencing the selection of news for *Tsopano* were identified. First, district information officers generally

lacked material resources to get to the people they could write stories about. A frequent complaint during the course of our survey was that there was no means of transport to travel to outlying areas, or no fuel for the government vehicle when it was available. Many information officers said that the only time they could get to the villages in the hinterland was when a politician was visiting the area and they hitched a ride from someone in his or her entourage. It is the observation of these researchers that sometimes district information officers used the excuse of lack of transport to sit and do little work at the ZIS district offices. A resourceful reporter would always find a means to get information from sources. It is not always by visiting a place in person that one gets news from the particular place. Moreover, some of the remote villages did not have roads for motor vehicles and could only be reached by bicycles or on foot. At some point the reporter had simply to behave like the other villagers — and walk!

Second, it was the conviction of these researchers that some district information officers lacked motivation to do development reporting. Some of the officers were products of the pre-independence days and the immediate post-independence era, when the coverage of aspiring politicians and nationalist leaders and their activities was new. Many of them continue to hold on to the politics-is-news value even to this day as is evidenced by the bias to political coverage in *Tsopano*. Time has come for *Tsopano* readers to be fed with an alternative news menu. News should simply be news, regardless of the status of the person who makes it. It is not always true that politicians always make news. Sometimes they can even unmake it by repeating the same old stuff that make readers bored stiff.

Third, it was the informed opinion of these researchers that some district information officers lacked incentives to write stories about problems of rural people, as seen from the people's point of view. There was an obvious attempt by some of these officers to please their bosses — the politicians, particularly the district governor — instead of genuinely reporting on the situation as it is. Job tenure as a district information officer did not depend on whether a story had a development angle or whether it included comments from the common man or woman, that is, provided a voice for the masses. Instead, a district information officer's performance was gauged by the number of stories submitted per day about the goings on by district government officials. In a way, some of the district information officers behaved purely and simply as public relations officers for the governor and his/her fellow district government and party colleagues.

Consequently, and as a fourth reason, politicians who travelled to villages in the hinterland expected to get coverage in *Tsopano* (as well as on the radio). District information officers felt obliged to write and

submit stories about them regardless of whether what they said was newsworthy or not. This mentality was not conducive to allowing the common man and woman to gain access to *Tsopano*.

Fifth, many administrators in Chipata and in the district centres did not seem to consider the vernacular press, in particular *Tsopano*, an efficient vehicle for communicating with the people. In some cases, they did not understand the local language themselves and therefore were prejudiced towards using it. As one administrator put it: 'I don't even understand the language.' The inefficiency in the distribution of *Tsopano* and the irregularity of its publication seemed to justify the disdain they expressed for it as a communication aid.

Sixth, the prestige needs of district information officers were not met by covering the needs of the common man, and woman, but by association with high-ranking politicians, administrators and government leaders. There was no psychological reward in going out to talk to the villager. Status came by moving with the people at the top.

Other Factors Affecting the Selection of News for *Tsopano*

One reason why more grassroots news was not present in *Tsopano* was that the journalistic ability of most district information officers was limited by the fact that few have had the advanced type of training required for development reporting. In fact, few or none have had reportorial training before they started work. The majority of the district information officers is in the 32-52 age range (63%) while the majority of the editors is between 20 and 31 years of age (56%) (Nyirenda and Kasoma 1983). This sets up a situation of natural conflict in which the district information officers, who have been out in the field for some time, think and feel that they know more than the young editors of *Tsopano* about how stories should be covered and are disinclined to follow their editor's advice. This was confirmed by the editor of *Tsopano*, who said, commenting on the absence of development features in *Tsopano*: 'We have met with them and discussed the matter and even sent stories back to them with comments indicating what we are looking for, but when the stories come back, they are always written the same way.'

According to the survey conducted by Nyirenda and Kasoma, the highest level of education attained by ZIS personnel was Form V; 25.1 percent of the workforce had only attained the Form II level and the remaining 18.9 percent were Form VI leavers. Since the district information officers are generally elderly people, they are most likely to be part of the less educated group of ZIS's workforce. In addition, many of the district information officers had no preservice professional training prior to entering the field as journalists (Nyirenda and Kasoma

1983 p. 373). In as much as they were trained 'on the job' they are likely to have a more narrow view of what the job of a development journalist is. In view of these facts, it is not surprising that much of the reporting in *Tsopano* follows a press release style, bulletin-boarding the pronouncements of politicians and government officials and neglecting in general investigative reporting and feature articles that explore the problems faced by the rural people.

Economics of *Tsopano*

At the current advertising rates, *Tsopano* generates about K600 per issue for business notices and K95 for display advertising which comes to K695 per issue. If advertising rates were doubled, as we suggest here, business notices would generate K1218 per issue and display advertising would produce K190 to add up to K1,403 in advertising per issue. In addition, if the proportion of the advertising hole were expanded from the current 37.5 percent to 60 percent — which is normal for the newspaper industry — total advertising revenue per issue would be K1,936.

Both these alternatives for the expansion of advertising revenue would require an aggressive advertising drive by the newspaper staff. This drive should aim at mainly localising advertising so that advertisers, like newsmakers, are local (to the province and districts) people announcing goods, services and other sentiments that are familiar to the people of the Eastern Province. Of course there would still be room for standard advertisements such as those of toothpaste, soap, detergents and similar toiletries and household goods. But care should be taken not to include advertisements that might pose danger to the safety or health of the simple village folk. For instance, advertisements of goods such as powdered milk for children should be discouraged because they are likely to endanger the lives of children in a country where child mortality rate, according to the World Health Organisation statistics of 1987, is as high as 80 for every 1,000, most of the children dying from malnutrition.

In the light of the dwindling resources available from government coffers to support provincial newspapers, such as *Tsopano*, the suggestion to increase advertising revenue is certainly the most logical since it would lead to the newspapers becoming self-supporting. It should be explored. But a newspaper that has poor distribution, resulting in low circulation, cannot justifiably increase its revenue from advertising. The principle is: the higher the circulation, the higher the advertising rates. The only hope for *Tsopano* to increase its advertising rates is for the newspaper to improve its distribution which in turn would lead to higher circulation. Since only a limited number of copies of *Tsopano* is available, it seems reasonable to suggest that the distribution of the newspaper should be

systematic, that is, that *Tsopano* should be selectively distributed to those who most need it — villagers who can read Nyanja. The suggestion made by the co-operatives that they serve as distribution centres for the newspaper, taking advantage of their network of 75 shops in remote areas, seems one way to implement a system of selective and efficient distribution.

The revenue from sales of the newspaper also needs to be reviewed. It is obvious that the current cover price of 6 ngwee per copy, of which ZIS receives only 4 ngwee, is uneconomical and far below what the market can bear and what readers are willing to pay for, as evidenced by this investigation. At the current rates *Tsopano* only generates K360 per issue or potentially K4,320 per 12-monthly issues in a year. If the rate were increased to 25 ngwee per copy, a rate many respondents say would be reasonable, *Tsopano* could generate K2,250 per issue or K27,000 per year for 12 monthly issues. This kind of revenue would not only help cover the cost of publication, but would also allow ZIS to generate funds for equipment, fuel and other administrative overheads.

Conclusion

This study has conclusively established that *Tsopano* is not effective as a vernacular newspaper in Zambia. We strongly recommend that measures we have suggested in this paper be taken to remedy the situation. If the findings of this report can be taken to be representative of the other rural/provincial newspapers in the country, we suggest that the Government of the Republic of Zambia takes a fresh look at the whole set up of the newspapers.

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