



ANNUAL REPORT

2024



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1. MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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In 2024, the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ) has made significant strides toward reinforcing media self-regulation and driving social transformation across Zimbabwe. Our work spans robust investigative journalism, a highly effective media complaints mechanism, comprehensive capacity-building initiatives, and dynamic advocacy campaigns. With a renewed focus on youth engagement and ethical journalism, our projects have led to tangible improvements—from increased distribution of condoms in Binga to government pledges to expand health services and agricultural support in Mutoko. I am immensely proud of our dedicated team, our partners, and every journalist who has helped us advance our mandate. Our

commitment to transparency, accountability, and collaboration remains unwavering as we build on this year's successes and set an ambitious course for the future.

2. OUR MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES



OUR MISSION

At VMCZ, our mission is to foster a media environment that is both accountable and ethically robust. We champion investigative journalism, facilitate a trusted self-regulatory framework, and empower media practitioners through capacity building and advocacy.



OUR VISION

Our vision is a Zimbabwe where the media serves as a true watchdog for democracy—informing the public, holding power to account, and catalyzing positive social change.



OUR CORE VALUES

Core values that guide our work include integrity, transparency, inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation. Our strategic framework is built on these pillars as we continuously work toward a future where informed citizens drive societal progress.

3. PROGRAM SUMMARIES & IMPACT STORIES

Our work in 2024 is structured around three core program areas: media complaints handling, capacity building, and lobby and advocacy. Each program is designed not only to address immediate challenges but also to create lasting change in the media landscape.

3.1 Media Complaints Handling and Professionalism

Our project “Enhancing Media Professionalism in a Changing Media Landscape”—funded by IMS SIDA—has reasserted the value of media self-regulation in Zimbabwe. This year, we witnessed a remarkable 200% increase in the use of our media self-regulatory mechanism by high-profile figures. The President of Zimbabwe, through his Deputy Chief Secretary, Mr. George Charamba, started utilizing the media complaints mechanism when he lodged a media complaint with the Zimbabwe Media Commission and copied VMCZ. This was a first for the Executive. This unprecedented move, served as an endorsement of the media self-regulatory framework.

Further, A high resolution rate of complaints against registered media was achieved in 2024, with 82% of cases successfully resolved and 100% of the cases cleared. Clearing a case means that it has been processed and closed, regardless of the outcome. VMCZ cannot force compliance, making resolution unpredictable. Since resolution is not entirely within VMCZ’s control, setting a target percentage for resolved cases is impractical. Instead, the focus is on ensuring that all cases are cleared through the appropriate process. Although 100% resolution is ideal, international best practices recognize that not all cases reach full resolution due to factors beyond regulatory control. A case resolution rate of 82% is considered high and effective because in industry Standards for Self-Regulatory Bodies – many media councils globally do not exceed 80% resolution rates, as some media houses refuse to engage, and complainants may choose litigation instead, meaning VMCZ’s 82% would be on the high end. Further, in legal and arbitration processes, a resolution rate above 80% is considered strong since some cases naturally require alternative avenues (e.g., courts, alternative dispute resolution). In judicial systems, a case resolution rate of 75%-85% is generally regarded as effective. Other African media regulatory bodies rarely publish resolution rates above 80%, reinforcing that VMCZ’s 82% is a high standard.

3.2 Capacity Building

Capacity building remains at the core of our mission. We have organized extensive training sessions for journalists, including first-time election reporters in Harare and Bulawayo, focusing on ethical reporting, fact-checking, and digital security. Our capacity-building initiatives have reached 31 media outlets, resulting in a significant increase in published articles and broadcasts covering previously under-reported issues in rural areas like Mutoko and Binga. Under the Action Aid-funded project, “Strengthening Social Accountability and Oversight in Health and Agriculture in Southern Africa,” VMCZ empowered investigative journalists to produce in-depth reporting that has spurred policy commitments. Eight investigative stories and 10 broadcasts on agriculture and health issues in the districts of Binga and Mutoko have driven concrete actions by duty bearers. For example, investigations by Mandla Tshuma and Melissa Chatikobo revealed critical deficiencies: Tshuma’s exposé on the severe shortage of Agritex officers in Binga led to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee pledging to advocate for an increase in these officers, while

Chatikobo's investigation into the lack of sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) education in Mutoko resulted in a government proposal to construct a dedicated youth-friendly health center. Additionally, capacity-building efforts included the development of educational animations on administering scorecards and social accountability reporting. These efforts culminated in a range of outcomes: a 300% increase in condom distribution frequency in Binga, improved food security measures, and enhanced public accountability in health service delivery.



2024 Trainings in Pictures

3.3 Lobby and Advocacy Initiatives

Furthermore, we have built strategic partnerships with organizations and institutions such as Media Alliance of Zimbabwe, Southern African Editors Forum, Amnesty International and Zimbabwe Media Commission, Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services. These partnerships have amplified our advocacy efforts, enabling us to lobby for policy reforms and secure high-level endorsements for media self-regulation. Our proactive engagement with government entities and civil society groups has ensured that our training, research, and advocacy efforts translate into tangible improvements in media accountability and public service delivery.



Min of Information Perm Sec Nick Mangwana and former legislator Temba Mliswa greeting each other at the All Media Stakeholders Conference held on 2 October 2024.

3.4 Strengthening Media Accountability through Research & Knowledge

In our continuous effort to drive evidence-based change, VMCZ produced four critical knowledge documents this year. The Revised Code of Ethics for Zimbabwe Media Practitioners has been updated to include guidelines on the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) in newsrooms. The Annual Media Complaints Report, The State of the Media and Professionalism Research, and the report on AI and Ethical Considerations in Zimbabwean Newsrooms have become essential tools for understanding contemporary challenges. Through these documents, we have not only contributed to scholarly debate but also provided actionable recommendations for media houses and regulators. Our research projects have involved in-depth data collection, key informant interviews, and case studies—such as the comprehensive analysis of investigative journalism’s impact on social accountability—that continue to influence policy and practice.



4. FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

At VMCZ, we believe that financial transparency is critical to sustaining stakeholder trust. In 2024, we managed a diversified funding portfolio that included grants from international donors such as Action Aid, IMS SIDA, Friedrich Naumann Foundation and Internews, as well as contributions from membership subscriptions and private sector partners. Our financial statements for 2024 have been rigorously audited internally, and we have maintained a clear breakdown of all expenses. Our quarterly financial reports—available on request—detail the allocation of funds for capacity building, research, media monitoring tools, training programs, and advocacy events. These measures demonstrate our commitment to accountability and responsible stewardship of resources.



5. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS & RESULTS

To measure our success, we have defined and tracked several KPIs throughout 2024:

- **Investigative Impact:**

- 66.67% of the investigative stories supported through our initiatives led to concrete government actions, including increased condom distribution and commitments to improve health service delivery.

- Several investigations directly resulted in commitments from duty bearers, such as the pledge to increase Agritex officers and the promise to construct additional clinics.

- **Complaints Resolution:**

- Our media complaints mechanism achieved an 82–85% resolution rate.

- A 5% increase in media compliance was recorded, with 95% of registered media houses adhering to MCC resolutions in 2024 compared to 90% in 2023.

- **Capacity Building:**

- We trained 31 media outlets, resulting in 37 published articles, multiple broadcasts, and the production of engaging multimedia content on critical issues such as SRHR and food security.

- Trained First-time election reporters produced over 152 election-related stories, 34 radio programs, and 11 videocasts, with zero complaints lodged against their coverage—a marked improvement from previous elections.

- **Digital Engagement:**

- Our digital initiatives, including the media monitoring tool and social media outreach, have significantly increased public engagement and awareness. For example, after the introduction of WhatsApp as a complaints channel, 51% of complaints were lodged via mobile platforms.

These indicators not only reflect our operational performance but also demonstrate our strategic impact in fostering transparency, accountability, and effective media practices.

6. FUNDING SOURCES & RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Our success in 2024 would not have been possible without a diverse and robust funding portfolio. Our key funding sources include:

- **International Donors:**

- Action Aid provided critical support for our investigative journalism and social accountability projects.

- IMS SIDA funded our initiatives to enhance media professionalism and strengthen the media complaints mechanism.

- Internews contributed to projects aimed at bolstering media accountability and developing research outputs.

- Friedrich Naumann Foundation supported programmes that strengthened media literacy, investigative journalism and women empowerment.

- **Membership Subscriptions & In-Kind Contributions:**

- Various individual journalists and media experts have supported our capacity-building initiatives through membership subscriptions and voluntary services.

Our resource mobilization strategy has consistently secured grants, enabling us to implement high-impact projects and continuously expand our operational capacity. This diversified approach to funding ensures sustainability and the ability to innovate across our program areas.



**Funded by
the European Union**



7. STRATEGIC PLAN & FUTURE VISION

Looking ahead, our strategic plan for 2025 builds on the foundations laid in 2024 and focuses on four strategic pillars:

A. Expanding Capacity-Building Initiatives:

We will increase the scale and reach of our training programs, particularly in cities and towns outside Harare, ensuring that media practitioners are equipped with the skills needed to uphold ethical journalism in an evolving digital landscape.

B. Deepening Advocacy and Policy Engagement:

We aim to strengthen our role in influencing media policies by continuing to produce evidence-based research and knowledge products. Our updated Code of Ethics—which now includes guidelines on AI—will serve as a critical resource for media practitioners and regulators alike.

C. Enhancing Digital Transformation and Innovation:

Investing in digital tools and platforms will remain a priority. We plan to further develop our media monitoring tool, expand our digital complaints channel via mobile technologies, and harness social media for broader engagement and advocacy.

D. Strengthening Strategic Partnerships:

We will continue to leverage partnerships with international donors, government bodies, civil society organizations, and media associations. Collaborative efforts with partners such as MISA Zimbabwe, MAZ, and Zimbabwe Media Commission will be central to amplifying our impact and ensuring that media self-regulation is upheld as a core tenet of journalism in Zimbabwe.

Our future vision is to build a resilient media landscape characterized by accountability, ethical reporting, and a vibrant culture of investigative journalism that contributes to social transformation and democratic governance.

8. LESSONS LEARNED, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Throughout 2024, VMCZ has encountered several challenges that have informed our evolving strategies:

- **Timely Disbursement of Funds:**

Delays in disbursement of funds have occasionally hindered timely project execution. We have since developed contingency plans and improved our financial monitoring to mitigate future delays.

- **Sustained Media Coverage:**

We learned that continuous media engagement is essential to maintain pressure on duty bearers. Ongoing training and mentorship for investigative journalists are critical to ensure stories have lasting impact and lead to concrete action.

- **Integration of Digital Tools:**

Introducing WhatsApp for complaint lodging significantly improved accessibility. Future investments will focus on digital transformation to further enhance public engagement and streamline our processes.

- **Collaborative Partnerships:**

Effective collaboration among consortium partners has been a cornerstone of our success. We recommend continued and deeper collaboration with organizations such as Action Aid, IMS SIDA, and Internews, as well as fostering new alliances with academic institutions and private sector stakeholders.

Our recommendations moving forward include:

- Expanding capacity-building sessions to include longer, more in-depth training workshops on investigative journalism, specialized beat reporting and data journalism.
- Developing a comprehensive Investigative Journalism Manual on Social Accountability Reporting to serve as a guide for media practitioners.
- Increasing proactive media monitoring and integrating regular data collection to support evidence-based advocacy.
- Sustaining and expanding our outreach initiatives to ensure underserved communities are aware of and can access our media complaints mechanism.

9. BENEFICIARY STORIES: TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA



The true measure of our impact lies in the stories of change among the communities we serve. In Binga District, a community radio talk show uncovered the severe shortage of free condoms—a finding that compelled the National AIDS Council (NAC) to triple distribution quantities and double the frequency, directly addressing a critical SRHR gap. Similarly, in Mutoko, investigative reporting led by Mellisa Chatikobo catalyzed a government proposal to construct a second youth-friendly health center, ensuring improved access to reproductive health services for vulnerable youth. These stories exemplify how our work in investigative journalism and media advocacy translates into real, tangible change in communities, ensuring that marginalized voices are heard and that duty bearers are held accountable.

Pic Above: Group of Journalists Trained under the PSA Project to Cover Binga issues on health and agriculture.

10. CONCLUSION

The VMCZ 2024 Annual Report stands as a testament to our unwavering commitment to promoting ethical journalism, strengthening media accountability, and driving social transformation in Zimbabwe. Over the past year, we have successfully navigated a complex media landscape, delivered impactful investigative reporting, enhanced our media complaints mechanism, and empowered media practitioners through extensive capacity-building initiatives. Our financial transparency, robust KPIs, and diversified funding sources underpin our achievements and pave the way for continued success.

This report reflects our continuous journey toward a more informed, empowered, and accountable society. Together, we are not only telling the stories that matter but also driving the change needed for a brighter future in Zimbabwe.

As we move forward into 2025, we remain dedicated to our mission, building on our accomplishments while embracing innovation and collaboration. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our donors, partners, stakeholders, and the communities we serve for their unwavering support. Together, we are forging a future where a free, fair, and accountable media landscape not only informs the public but also drives transformative change in Zimbabwe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our sincere thanks to all our partners—Action Aid Zimbabwe, IMS SIDA, Internews, Friedrich Naumann Foundation, MISA Zimbabwe, MAZ, and others—for their invaluable support. Special thanks to our dedicated team of journalists, adjudicators, trainers, and support staff whose commitment has been the cornerstone of our success in 2024.

11. APPENDICES & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For further details on our projects, methodologies, and financial statements, please refer to the following resources available on our website:

- Published Knowledge Documents:
 - Revised Code of Ethics for Zimbabwe Media Practitioners (with AI guidelines)
 - Annual Media Complaints Report 2024
 - The State of the Media and Professionalism Research
 - AI and Ethical Considerations in Zimbabwean Newsrooms
- Project-Specific Reports and Case Studies
 - Action Aid–Funded Project on Social Accountability in Health and Agriculture
 - IMS SIDA–Funded Project on Enhancing Media Professionalism
 - Internews–Funded Project on Strengthening Media Accountability in Zimbabwe
- Interactive Digital Platforms:
 - Newsletter Archives and Mini-Documentaries (Binga and Mutoko Districts)
 - Animation on How to Administer Scorecards (to be completed by 31 December 2024)
 - Animation for Journalists on Social Accountability Reporting

CONTACT US

For more information on our projects, strategic initiatives, or to access detailed reports and resources, please visit our website at <https://vmcz.co.zw> or follow us on social media. We welcome your feedback and look forward to collaborating with all stakeholders to advance media accountability and social transformation in Zimbabwe.



VOLUNTARY MEDIA COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE

