

The media must not give South Africans a raw deal leading to Mangaung

 By [Talifhani Munzhedzi](#)

8 Oct 2012

Last week marked the beginning of a very significant period for the ANC if not the whole of South Africa. The ruling party officially opened the leadership nomination process at all its branches leading to 53rd ANC National Conference in December. Already on Monday, the Eastern Cape ANC Youth League had put names forward for the top six.

The media will play a central role informing the public how provinces are nominating their preferred leaders. But the opening of the nomination should also open an opportunity for the media to look at the policy direction that the ANC is likely to adopt at the conference. Hence reports should also be about possible policy resolutions rather than simply the presidential race between Motlanthe and Zuma. If all we hear in the media in the run-up to Mangaung is about the Presidential race, the media will be giving us a raw deal.

During the 2007 elective conference, there were major issues, which although not equal to the contest between former President Mbeki and President Zuma, were nevertheless important, but fell through the cracks and the media failed to bring those issues to the fore. Issues such as climate change and political stability never made it to the front pages.

Look at policies and resolutions

The media, together with the general public, should be concerned with policies and resolutions likely to be adopted at the conference as it is these that will define South Africa going forward. South African politics has somehow been defined as personality driven by the number of reports on individual conduct by public servants, rather than by policy and implementation. People who are elected to positions of power in government simply act on policies and the mandate from their party. Where South African media has failed is when they pay too much attention to the president and his individual cabinet members as if they are running their own personal agenda or policies. Yes, their conduct affects public opinion and attitude towards the government, but the media should give space to serious issues.

The president, as an individual, does not have policies of his own but of his party that he represents. This is where the media fails dismally to look at policy formation at party conferences - which ultimately ends at government level. Too often the media is concerned about *who* is being nominated instead of focusing on *what* is *not* being implemented from previous conferences. [Or possibly has been implemented and how well - Editor.]

It's not just about Motlanthe and Zuma

Leading up to Mangaung in December, it will be interesting to see how well the media will cover the events and issues leading up to the conference. Are we going to see a follow-up on resolutions from the historic 2007 Polokwane conference and scrutinise what has been achieved and where the ANC fell short? Failure to inform South Africans about real socio-economic issues likely to be tabled during the conference will simply mean that we all getting a raw deal from the media.

As we head towards Mangaung's elective conference can we please get the real story? Mangaung cannot only be about Motlanthe and President Zuma but should be about the kind of South Africa in which we want to live - and the media should lead the way.

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