

Executive summary

Putting principles into action: Lessons learned in implementing a multi-stakeholder approach to safety of journalists

Though journalists face a growing number of threats from state and non-state actors, multi-stakeholder efforts are making headway to improving safety of journalists (SoJ).

Building on previous IMS research and drawing on six country experiences – Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Somalia and the Philippines – this IMS report explores how stakeholders are working through institutional mechanisms, coalitions, national plans of action, partnerships and joint actions to implement robust approaches that not only respond to threats and attacks against journalists, but also proactively address conditions that make practising journalism a risky profession. In addition to the six focus countries of the report, IMS also includes examples of mechanisms in Mexico and Nepal.

The report identifies five major challenges for developing national plans for SoJ and how stakeholders are tackling them:

- gaining engagement by state actors in SoJ
- uniting and focusing efforts of disparate stakeholders into a durable, well-anchored structure
- increasing commitment by the media sector to SoJ
- integrating a gender perspective throughout SoJ mechanisms
- supporting stronger tools for combatting impunity.

Approaches to engagement with state actors: Dialogue and solidarity

According to IMS' research, authorities treat journalists with hostile attitudes that often emanate from the country's leadership and permeate throughout the national authority structure, creating direct threats to journalists by state actors, and undermining confidence in the state's ability to investigate attacks and protect journalists.

Stakeholders are employing several strategies to break through this impasse. One is bringing media and security forces together into a dialogue framework. In the Philippines, since 2018, the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication organised a series of dialogues between media and security forces on a provincial level and held national consultations among a broad range of participants from different communities. This contributed to bringing government actors into a coalition committed to implementing the Philippine Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists in November 2019.

In Myanmar, the country's press council held four-pillar dialogues among repre-

sentatives from the country's legislative, administrative, and judicial branches of government and the media. These have been aimed at easing the harassment journalists face there. In Afghanistan, the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee implemented a community approach to safety that engages officials and other local power figures to promote SoJ. In Somalia, the Puntland Journalist Security Committee held Peace Council dialogues that have opened communication channels to mitigate threats to journalists there.

Finding the best structure and body to anchor a mechanism is a lengthy, context-specific process

While a handful of countries, most notably Colombia, have established state-housed mechanisms for protection, stakeholders in other countries have looked to other models such as coalitions to implement a broader SoJ agenda. Some 80 entities from national civil society, international organisations, and government have committed to implementing the Philippine Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists. Representatives from the media community across Somalia came together to form the Somalia Mechanism for Safety of Journalists. The Mechanism set up a country-wide monitoring network, promotes better safety practices among journalists and media houses and responds to abuses against journalists with emergency help and advocacy. In both countries, a lengthy consultative process was instrumental in bringing stakeholders to the table, identifying concrete actions and instilling a core leadership structure.

Some key lessons have been learned from the experience of coalition-building in Pakistan, such as the value of building decentralised structures on a provincial level, where actors may affect change more nimbly than a coalition focused on a national level. The report also found that national human rights institutions are proving to be strong partners in promoting SoJ. The Nepal Human Rights Commission, for example, is setting up a mechanism for freedom of expression cases. The national human rights institutions in the Philippines and Pakistan are also active participants in multi-stakeholder structures there.

Media sector can and should do more to promote and practice safety

IMS research also indicated that engagement by the media sector in SoJ advocacy, implementation of better safety practices and improvement of working conditions are essential components to developing a national approach to SoJ. In many countries, journalists work under precarious employment statuses, are pushed through competition to take on risky assignments and/or are not provided with sufficient training, information or equipment to carry out their work safely. In the countries researched for this report, few workplaces have protocols in place for basic safety measures, risk assessments, online abuse or sexual harassment.

SoJ advocates have been working with media houses to develop and promote protocols aimed at improving the work culture around safety. One example highlighted in the report is a process of safety certification the Colombian group Foundation for Press Freedom (FLIP) is piloting at media outlets. The report concludes that many measures

that can mitigate physical and digital risk exposure require institutional commitment, but not necessarily heavy financial investment. It also notes an increase in global awareness of duty of care for freelancers and in cases of trauma.

Gender-specific threats and responses need a more comprehensive approach

The report looks at how state mechanisms in Colombia and Mexico have integrated a gender perspective. It found that in Colombia some positive reforms creating gender-specific pathways to protection have been implemented, but this is not the case in Mexico. Both countries fail to employ a gender-sensitive approach to prosecutions into attacks against journalists and tackle broader issues such as sexual harassment and cyber abuse.

IMS' research points to the importance of including gender-balanced representation early on in consultations and development of mechanisms. The inclusion of civil society in mechanism-building leads to better integration of gender-specific responses as well. It also emphasises that the risk analysis process and protection measures should be context-specific, taking into consideration unequal power structures existing in societies in addition to social and psychological aspects of sexual violence.

Impunity also takes a gendered form. Abuses against female journalists such as sexual harassment and online abuse targeted at women can reach extreme levels without being investigated. In cases of violence against female journalists, investigations often fail to take up gender considerations.

Outside of state mechanisms, the report notes important work by civil society in several countries to combat sexual harassment and other mistreatment of female journalists. One example is in Somalia, where freedom of expression advocates, led by the group Somali Women Journalists, developed a "Gender Respect Declaration" to address sexual harassment.

Strategies focused on investigations needed for combatting impunity

IMS found that though impunity is widely acknowledged as one of the most serious threats to journalists around the world, there is a lack of effective responses at the national and international level to the most severe attacks, including murders, of journalists, particularly when it comes to monitoring, supporting or waging investigations.

Though a small number of countries examined for this report have established mechanisms to support the prosecution of crimes against journalists, these have had limited impact, due to flaws in their implementation and lack of resources and capacity. Lack of political will, however, is also a major factor behind the failure of states to investigate attacks or bring redress, particularly where government officials are implicated.

Elements that are needed for more effective state mechanisms addressing impunity include civil society participation as well as long-term mandates and resourcing backed by legislation that allows mechanisms to operate independently of a specific political administration. From the threat assessment to the investigation and prosecution, measures

to detect and act on gender-specific concerns should be employed. In addition, parallel efforts must be undertaken to create and promote an enabling environment for journalists, through state policy and practice, and to strengthen the capacity of the judiciary, law enforcement and military to apply international and regional standards on SoJ and freedom of expression, as well as to address gender-based attacks.

The report also notes the strong progress made by civil society initiatives to investigate the killings of journalists and report on their unfinished work. IMS concludes that stronger international approaches are needed, including support for proposals by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, to establish protocols to mobilise international investigations. It introduces IMS' work towards a hybrid model of justice that incorporates criminal and human rights legal frameworks to address threats against journalists, media workers and human rights defenders (HRDs).

Recommendations

The report offers 15 recommendations to strengthen SoJ. These emphasise not only the need to take a comprehensive approach to national plans that look at specific responses to attacks and threats, but also towards country conditions, taking into consideration legislation, media literacy and working conditions, among other factors. They also stress the inclusion of a gender perspective in all aspects of SoJ through female representation, establishment of gender-specific safety pathways, training of relevant authorities handling attacks and threats against journalists and addressing harassment and inequality in newsrooms.

This publication is the latest in IMS' *Defending Journalism* series, which IMS has undertaken in its Global Safety Programme with the aim of identifying, documenting and sharing good practices and lessons learned in work being done around the world to promote SoJ. The first report, *Defending Journalism: How national mechanisms can protect journalists and address the issue of impunity, a comparative analysis of practices in seven countries*, was published in 2017. In November 2019, IMS published *The safety of women journalists: Breaking the cycle of silence and violence*, a study on how gender-specific threats against women journalists are being tackled in nine countries. *Safer together: Considerations for cooperation to address safety in the media support, humanitarian and human rights sectors* was published in December 2019 to inform and inspire action among the media support, human rights and humanitarian sectors to address pressing safety and protection issues. For more details on these reports and our methodologies please refer to the section on methodology and background.