

Chapter 3

Media, the reluctant stakeholder – gaining more commitment and improving practices among the media sector

Though the nucleus to all stakeholders for SoJ, the media sector itself has not always been the most engaged. In many countries, individual journalists and FoE groups have pointed to the media sector as a weak link when it comes to implementing good practices for the safety of journalists, addressing sexual harassment and other threats specific to female journalists, as well as in advancing advocacy.

The reasons for this are multi-fold. Firstly, media is a business and investing financial and human resources into safety can be seen as a cost drain. Media companies also tend to be cautious when it comes to public advocacy because it may compromise their reputation for independence. Media groups, like much of the corporate world, are dominated by patriarchal structures in which men hold most of the management positions.⁷⁶ In this environment, harassment, sexual violence and other gender-specific concerns are more likely to go unaddressed.⁷⁷

Some outlets find the costs of implementing robust proactive and reactive safety measures genuinely prohibitive, while others hold to a corporate culture that prioritises copy over care. Competition among outlets pushes news managers to send journalists out on risky assignments. In many places, journalists, particularly freelancers, work under a precarious status, without strong rights or recourses, making it hard to push demands that might improve their safety. Meanwhile, media outlets must adapt to changing landscapes and respond to new threats such as online abuse, commercial pressure and fake news campaigns.

Without the weight of the media fully behind them and media houses committed to taking internal measures to improve safety, broader efforts to develop multi-stakeholder plans for safety of journalists are limited in what they can achieve. One journalist from Somalia who participated in a focus group discussion organised by IMS in 2018 noted that

⁷⁶ Griffin (2014).

⁷⁷ Nusrat (2018).

media must do more for its own, rather than relying on NGOs and others to step in. “Civil society [organisations] have always helped us when journalists are arrested or facing other problems,” he said, “But they cannot protect our lives.”⁷⁸

Galvanising the media has been the focus of several SoJ initiatives taking place in the six countries looked at for this report. SoJ platforms such as the PPASJ recognise that promoting SoJ goes well beyond one-off steps like security training workshops, and encompasses a broad approach that includes improving editorial practices, education and working conditions.

A question of commitment more than cost

Costs are often cited as a barrier to implementing a robust safety system in-house. These can certainly run high. The most comprehensive approaches can involve expensive undertakings such as hostile environment training, high-end equipment, security details, and insurance and psychological care for journalists experiencing trauma. Large global media groups like the BBC, with an annual budget in the hundreds of millions, have built these into their operating expenses over time. But smaller outlets, internet news sites, community radio stations and others, particularly those based in countries where journalists routinely face threats, operate under much greater resource pressure.

In the Philippines, for example, Nini Cabero, editor-in-chief of the SunStar Network Exchange (Sunnex), an online network of community newspapers, has a training budget of less than 1,000 USD a year for her staff. “With the many demands on our financial resources, not much is set aside for safety concerns, said Cabero, adding, “although the company recognises that the security safety of journalists is important.”⁷⁹

At the same time, FoE practitioners argue that the hurdles are more than financial. Many strategies to mitigate risks to journalists such as risk assessments, communication plans, online threat monitoring and basic digital safety measures require more of an institutional commitment rather than financial investment. News outlets caught up in a fast-paced competitive business will not always take time out for safety training, risk assessments or other preventative actions recommended by safety experts. For small outlets, sparing staff for multi-day workshops is not always feasible. AJSC’s Ilias Alami noted that even when his organisation offers free security training workshops, outlets are reluctant to give their staff the time out to attend.

“Implementing security measures does not have to be expensive,” said Jonathan Bock Ruiz, Coordinator of the Centre for Freedom of Expression Studies at Colombian press freedom group *Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa*, known as FLIP. “It is more a question of time not money.” In Colombia, said Bock, many outlets do not take basic steps to organise and implement protocols.⁸⁰

One of Colombia’s most prestigious national newspapers, *El Espectador*, for example, has no protocol or written procedures on security, in addition to having no budget or funds allocated, admitted its managing director Fidel Cano. The paper has helped its

78 IMS Focus Group Discussions (2018), unpublished research.

79 Interview with IMS in 2018 by email.

80 Interview with IMS in 2018 in Bogotá, Colombia.

journalists under threat in the past, but this has been done ad hoc. In 2015, when one of its regional correspondents received threats in connection to his reporting on illegal mining, the paper relocated him to Bogotá, where he was able to continue his work. The paper also liaised with FoE groups providing emergency response and Colombia's federal protection programme for journalists to supplement the help it could offer.⁸¹

For over 20 years, FLIP conducted self-protection workshops with journalists in the regions of Colombia that see the highest numbers of threats and attacks against the press. During a recent series of visits to newsrooms however, the group found that recom-

mendations from the workshops were not being implemented and that there were no protection protocols in any of the outlets they visited.

FLIP looked for ways to link media companies into the training outcome and support the media in implementing internal measures for reducing risks. In February 2017, the organisation launched a new project: the "Certification in Security Protocols and Risk Prevention".⁸²

“Implementing security measures does not have to be expensive ... It is more a question of time not money.”

For the initial stage, FLIP has been working with 11 print, radio, and television outlets throughout the country. The newsrooms committed to reaching a series of objectives in four main categories to receive certification. The four areas are:⁸³

- Institutional strengthening in security issues (e.g. commitment to developing risk policies from high levels of the organisation, implementing administrative measures that ensure human and physical resources for safety)
- Reports and communication (a system to monitor and follow up on the development and use of self-protection measures within the newsroom)
- Risk assessment for journalistic activity (application of instruments for risk measurement and the specific vulnerabilities of the media outlet as well as differential risk for specific groups such as female journalists)
- Implementation of attack prevention protocols (individual workers have knowledge of and apply self-protection strategies and tools, including digital security)

One of the outlets FLIP has been working with is the internet news site La Lengua Caribe (Caribbean Tongue) in the city of Montería, the capital of the northern Department of Córdoba, where drug-trafficking gangs, largely formed by demobilised right-wing paramilitary death squads, are known to be hostile to the media. With a staff of less than ten

81 Interview with IMS in 2018 in Bogotá, Colombia.

82 IMS supports FLIP in this project.

83 Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (2018a).



and a small budget, it offers a good model for integrating physical and digital security and other safety recommendations into its day-to-day operations at modest costs.

“We have a check-in system for when our journalists are on assignment and do risk assessment,” said Marcia Ramos Castillo, La Lengua Caribe’s editor. Before each assignment, Ramos reviews any safety concerns and she and the dispatching reporter agree on the frequency and mode of communication. They also determine whether special transportation arrangements such as taxis need to be made. In some cases, the director will drive reporters himself. No one at the office is allowed to stay past six in the evening and staff know to change their routes periodically. Their digital protocols, said Ramos, still have to be elaborated, but as a general rule staff change their passwords frequently and turn off computers both at lunch and at the end of the day. Per FLIP’s recommendations, they set aside a small amount of funds, dedicated to responding to emergencies.⁸⁴

For the most part, the steps La Lengua Caribe take are small adaptations to the staff’s daily routine. “It may seem just common sense moves but it’s surprising how often newsrooms neglect them,” said Julián David García, who is working on the project.

In the case of Pakistan’s *Dawn* newspaper, the flagship publication of the family-owned Dawn Media Group, editor Zaffar Abbas developed in-house guidelines to enhance the safety of his journalists. These include a communication protocol to enable

In a show of solidarity, journalists and photojournalists in Kathmandu, Nepal lit candles to pay tribute to the journalists killed in a double bombing on 30 April 2018 in Kabul, Afghanistan. The program was jointly organized by Photojournalist Club, Nepal and the Federation of Nepali Journalists. Photo: Narayan Maharjan/NurPhoto/Getty Images

⁸⁴ Interview with IMS, June 2018 in Montería, Colombia.

district reporters working in volatile areas, like the tribal regions, to report and respond to threats through a chain of command. In some cases, they relocate journalists to urban areas. They also inform security officials, putting threats and attacks on record. Abbas said these efforts help reduce the risks for journalists but do not eliminate them. “All are aware of the fact that this is not enough,” said Abbas. “If someone really wants to take out a journalist it is hard for us to provide total safety.”⁸⁵

In Pakistan, safety also involves an editorial tightrope walk between good judgment, self-censorship and security. Field reporters can be subjected to threats for their newspaper’s coverage on a troubled region, even if it is a case of a Karachi-based editor publishing an international newswire story. “Militants may just assume the local correspondent reported it and go after him,” said Abbas. As a preventative measure, the newspaper often does not publish by-lines from some areas. On bigger stories involving insurgents, they have the journalist write it up in Karachi and put that dateline on it. Abbas added that these guidelines are always under review and evolving.

Editorial caution can tip to extreme self-censorship, however. “Some media houses in recent years have been driven to change their policy on news coverage in the light of threats,” said Pakistani Press Foundation’s (PPF) Owais Islam Ali. *The Express Tribune* newspaper came under criticism by some in Pakistan’s media community after it openly admitted it would not overtly criticise the Taliban and some other sectarian groups. The internal guidance came after a series of deadly attacks in 2014.⁸⁶

Stakeholders in several countries have developed safety protocols or guidelines with accompanying campaigns to encourage media outlets to adopt them. In Afghanistan, the AJSC worked with experts in 2018 to draft a safety protocol, which it shared with media outlets throughout the country [see sidebar]. In Pakistan, in addition to the work *Dawn* has done in-house, the Pakistan Coalition for Media Safety also produced safety protocols in consultation with key media personnel and senior journalists for adoption by media houses several years ago.⁸⁷ The Somalia Mechanism for Safety of Journalists has introduced training and equipment to media houses, while the Somalia Media Association, a member of SMSJ, has been developing a safety protocol for media houses. Some good practices drawn from these different country experiences include that these documents should be context-specific, taking into consideration not just the national context, but the diverse regions within those countries, and that there needs to be a system of follow-up engagement with media houses to monitor and continue to campaign for implementation.

Safety of journalists intrinsically linked to work status and employment rights

Lack of knowledge and resources are partly behind the failure of media outlets to install good safety protocols, but underlying this is a larger set of issues around the work status and employment rights of journalists. Job insecurity is one. In Somalia for example, journalists work with little protection for their employment status. Mohamed Ibrahim, Secre-

85 Interview with IMS by phone, June 2018.

86 Boone (2014).

87 IMS (2017), pp. 208-208. Note the Pakistan Coalition for Media Safety has since disbanded.

tary General of FESQJ, explained that many journalists work under arrangements tantamount to internships that extend for years. This precarious status makes journalists and media workers hesitant to refuse dangerous assignments or push for individual safety resources. In focus group discussions IMS held in different regions of Somalia in 2017, several participants said media houses threatened to fire journalists who ask for more safety support and training.

Similar dynamics impact journalists in countries around the world, making the strengthening of rights for journalists an important component of national SoJ frameworks.

An assessment of journalists' safety in the Philippines from 2016 to 2017 conducted by the media watchdog Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility based on UNESCO's Journalist Safety Indicators found that the media lacked safety policies, protocols and equipment in the workplace and in particular neglected the safety needs of freelancers and correspondents.⁸⁸ In response, the PPASJ, launched in November 2019, named "Conducive Working Conditions" as one of five flagship areas. Key actions the plan calls for are: the creation of an industry-wide association of journalists and other media workers; advocating with media houses/owners to fulfil their duties and obligations and observe occupational health and safety (OSH) standards; and work towards the operationalisation of the Industry Tripartite Council for the media sector at the national and local levels.

“... precarious status makes journalists and media workers hesitant to refuse dangerous assignments or push for individual safety resources”

Media has high potential but low will to be advocates

Though potentially a powerful force for raising awareness and mounting political pressure, the media has traditionally been reluctant to become vocal advocates for press freedom. This is due to concerns that high levels of coverage of attacks against journalists would give the appearance of partiality,⁸⁹ lack of solidarity and competition among outlets. In some environments, governments wield commercial power as either direct advertisers or through their influence on advertisers. Media rely on governments for licences and other tools that impact their business. The end result is that media management tend to stick to the sidelines of multi-stakeholder bodies for SoJ coalitions.

88 CMFR presentation of findings to stakeholders at national consultation held on 7 November 2018.

89 Loughran (2014).

For many years Pakistan's media groups, with some exceptions, gained a reputation for neglecting SoJ. Media in Pakistan, whether staff or freelance, predominately work with little support for safety from their media organisations, according to journalists and press freedom advocates. "There is a callous attitude by media leadership," said Ali of PPF, adding that most initiatives are driven by civil society groups. UNESCO's 2014 Pakistan Journalist Safety Indicators found most media houses have no formal safety policy or risk assessment process in place and rarely do journalists receive safety related training.⁹⁰

Due to fierce competition among media houses in Pakistan, there has traditionally been little solidarity. When a journalist affiliated with one outlet was attacked, other media would give it minimal or no coverage. Advocates pushed for a change and in 2015, in conjunction with the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, editors and news directors from different newspapers and television channels came together and established Editors for Safety (EFS).

EFS operates through a WhatsApp group. Its roughly 20 members exchange information on when an attack has taken place or on other security threats. They support each other with joint coverage of incidents and coordinating approaches to authorities for a response. Though simple in concept, it has been impactful. In one case profiled in IMS' 2017 publication *Defending Journalism*, EFS efforts led to the safe return of an abducted journalist. Ali, of PPF, who serves as the project's secretariat, said he was pleased by the level of commitment it received from media participants. Not only are many outlets active in the forum, but several volunteered to host meetings and cover some of the costs. "To me this was an indication of something they wanted to do themselves," said Ali.⁹¹

More can be done by this forum and others to combat impunity, noted Ali, who says there is little follow-up in the news after a journalist is killed or attacked. "If media made it an issue it could really have an impact," he said. "These efforts don't require money, just commitment, which is lacking."

UNESCO's Director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development, Guy Berger, shares similar sentiments. At a 2014 symposium on safety of journalists hosted by the BBC, he recommended that newsrooms appoint a staff member to be the "champion" of a story on a killed journalist, ensuring investigations are reported on and monitored and the case stay in the public eye. "While out there, justice is falling short in the cases of fallen journalists; you can at least do justice to this story if you make it a duty for someone to follow it," he remarked.⁹²

Drive to change

On a global level, there has been increasing recognition that media houses have a duty of care not only to their staff, but also to freelancers and other media workers, as well as a growing consensus on what that should look like. Under the UN Plan of Action, 300 representatives from media organisations laid out ideas on what media can do to strengthen the safety of journalists at a 2016 meeting held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. In

⁹⁰ Institute for Research Advocacy and Development (2014).

⁹¹ Interview with IMS by phone, June 2018.

⁹² Berger (2014).

2015, the International Press Institute (IPI), Al Jazeera Media Network, Geneva Global Media and the Geneva Press Club presented the International Declaration and Best Practices on the Promotion of Journalists Safety.

The situation for freelance journalists has raised concern. Preliminary findings of a survey undertaken by the Frontline Freelance Register, a representative body for freelance journalists, conducted in 2019 found 70 percent of freelancers do not take out insurance, and over half of those surveyed had not done any safety training or owned any personal protective equipment. Three hundred and eighty journalists from 70 countries took part in the study.⁹³

After the brutal killings of freelance journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff in the summer of 2014, news organisations, freelance journalist associations and press freedom NGOs came together to form the Alliance for a Culture of Safety. The coalition developed Freelance Journalist Safety Principles that have been endorsed by nearly 100 news outlets and non-profit groups. The principles outline the responsibilities news organisations have to local and freelance journalists they hire, emphasising they must show “the same concern for the welfare of local journalists and freelancers that they do for staffers” by, among other steps, ensuring they receive training, insurance and safety equipment. The guidelines are intended to apply to international freelance correspondents, as well as local ones.

In addition to greater awareness, news managers are taking on a more holistic perspective on safety than in the past, when it was largely synonymous with physical protection. Safety training for example has expanded to encompass different aspects of journalism, digital security and a threat awareness mindset. “Training used to be a one-size-fits all solution – five-day hostile environment training – but now outlets are realising the need for tailored training such as covering protests,” said Anna Bevan, assistant director of the London-based International News Safety Institute.⁹⁴

Another aspect that newsrooms have begun to take on is the impact of trauma. “There is a greater emphasis on psychological care,” Andrew Roy, International Editor at BBC news, said regarding how global media has evolved its approaches to safety. “There is more acceptance that it is needed, and it is okay to talk with managers about it.”⁹⁵ In a landmark case in 2019, an Australian court awarded over 120,000 USD in damages to a journalist for the post-traumatic stress disorder she suffered. The judgment held that *The Age* newspaper where she worked failed to provide a safe workplace and that a newspaper, like any employer, has “a duty to take reasonable care against the risk of foreseeable injury, including foreseeable psychiatric injury,”⁹⁶ to its staff. Many see the ruling as a potential push to newsrooms to provide more support for journalists.⁹⁷

“... the media has traditionally been reluctant to become vocal advocates for press freedom.”

93 Giaziri (2019).

94 Interview with IMS by phone, July 2018.

95 Ibid.

96 *YZ (a pseudonym) v. The Age Company Limited*.

97 Ricketson and Wake (2019).

There is still far to go towards seeing media owners and managers fully confront safety challenges in-house as public advocates and engaged partners in multi-stakeholder initiatives but, said FLIP's Jonathon Bock, there is a positive drive to change. According to Bock, "The industry's interest is real, and this is about finally realising that much of the issue of prevention and protection of journalists is in their own hands."

Developing and disseminating safety guidelines for journalists in Afghanistan

Few places see journalists under attack as much as Afghanistan, but in a media economy that is largely dependent on international donors, organisations are locked into intense competition, leaving little room in day-to-day operations to develop or implement safety practices. "Journalists are in a rush, affecting everything from digital to physical security and safety," said Stephen Smith of Separ International, a risk management and security firm, regarding the media in Afghanistan. Add to that the immense pressures and trauma of working in an insecure environment and you get journalists caught up in just "trying to survive," he explained.

On 30 April 2018, a double bomb attack on journalists in Kabul killed nine journalists and injured five others, a deafening message that the media must take more preventative measures. The Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC), a local media support group, began working with media houses and experts to develop a safety guideline for journalists, outlining steps crucial for covering war and terrorist incidents, including context-specific measures, and setting up institutional procedures. Over 40 field reporters and war correspondents provided input into the document, which was launched during a media summit hosted by AJSC on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists in November 2018.

Following the launch, AJSC disseminated the document to media houses throughout the country, reaching out to editors-in-chief and media owners at 44 TV stations, 138 radio stations, and 27 print media throughout the country to advocate its use as the basis of their security policies or procedures. A social media campaign stressed the responsibility of the media houses and media owners related to the duty of care for staff and freelancers.