

Conclusion: Lessons learned and recommendations

The threat landscape most of the world's journalists work in today is complex, involving dangers on many fronts. Journalists in the countries featured in this report, and in many others around the world, carry out their work under immense risks. Their physical safety is threatened by individuals of wealth or in positions of power, armed groups, security forces or criminal organisations, among other actors. But intimidation by blunt force is only part of a troubling picture.

Journalists are being jailed in record numbers.²¹¹ Pervasive abuse of security laws and legislation that criminalise speech online and offline are some of the trends behind these numbers. Use of spurious charges and arbitrary detention and imprisonment are others. There have also been incidents of enforced disappearances²¹² and torture²¹³. The frequent use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) also have a chilling effect on news coverage.²¹⁴ On another front, journalists are besieged with hostile social media campaigns. High rates of impunity in killings and other attacks against journalists increase their insecurity.²¹⁵

Female journalists not only contend with these threats; they face an array of other perils in connection to their gender. These include sexual harassment, aggression and violence in the field, in custody or even in the workplace.²¹⁶ For women journalists, the attacks they face are amplified not only by the impunity that more broadly accompanies attacks against the media, but also by the stresses women must endure in the pursuit of justice. In addition to widespread social inequality, there is a lack of psycho-social support within SoJ mechanisms and state institutions, as well as stigmas around sexual violence, demeaning online attacks and other hostile treatment of women journalists aimed at censoring them.

There is no single tool that can improve the hostile conditions many journalists work under. It takes a multi-pronged approach that promotes the three Ps (prevention, protection and prosecution) as adopted by UNESCO, the UN agency coordinating the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. To effectively address such a wide scope of actions, it takes unity, collaboration and a joint strategic approach among different stakeholders. In practice, achieving this is a long-term, difficult endeavour.

Though far from exhaustive, this report honed in on some specific challenges to

211 Beiser (2018).

212 United Nations Support Mission in Libya (2019).

213 Hopkins et al. (2019).

214 Verza (2018).

215 Witchel (2019).

216 Chocarro (2019).

implementing multi-stakeholder safety structures: gaining engagement by state actors in safety frameworks, anchoring mechanisms, building strong coalitions among disparate stakeholders, weak media sector commitment to SoJ, need for greater integration of gender-specific concerns into safety mechanisms and ineffective tools for combatting impunity.

The report explored how stakeholders are working to tackle these in a selection of countries where the media operates under intense pressure, looking not only at institutional mechanisms, but also at multi-stakeholder initiatives led by civil society. The structures in place are far from perfect. Some initiatives are nascent and in need of further development, while some are well established but flawed. They offer valuable lessons for SoJ stakeholders to take on board.

Some lessons learned are:

- Bringing media and security forces together into dialogue frameworks can ease tensions between media and authorities and in some cases, reduce numbers of attacks. In Afghanistan, Myanmar, the Philippines and Somalia, stakeholders have introduced dialogue processes with police and/or military to address the rights of journalists and concerns on both sides. In some instances, this has been followed by a decrease in incidents against journalists by authorities and opened communication channels for resolving cases. Conducting these on the provincial or community level and maintaining consistent engagement or follow-up, rather than a one-off training, are key implementation elements.
- Aligning civil society stakeholders behind an actionable demand can engage governments in developing concrete responses to safety crises. Colombia established its state protection programme for journalists in response to a call by leading media figures. Similarly, in Afghanistan, the government set up the Joint Committee for the Safety and Security of Journalists (JCSSJ) following a united campaign by media there. Identifying SoJ allies within the government and other pillars is also an important tactic.
- Independent national bodies such as National Human Rights Institutions and Press Councils can be strong partners for implementing safety mechanisms. Encouraged by the Nepal Human Rights Commission's efforts to launch a safety mechanism for FoE cases, stakeholders in Pakistan and the Philippines have been working with their respective NHRIs to build up national safety coalitions. Myanmar's press council has worked with CSOs to implement trainings and respond to attacks and legal harassment against journalists among other safety activities.
- Broad national coalitions can be unwieldy without a strong leadership structure. Pakistan, the Philippines and Somalia have put committees made up of leading SoJ groups in place to coordinate development and/or implementation of safety structures. In Pakistan, the coalition has been localised in the shape of provincial chapters to catalyse forward movement on intended outcomes.

- Important foundations for state mechanisms for protection or investigating crimes against journalists include: an independent mandate that is not tethered to one political administration and is backed by statute; long-term resourcing and direct civil society participation in both development and implementation.
- Proactive outreach and a system of monitoring safety practices increase awareness of safety and/or improve practices in newsrooms. SoJ groups in several countries in this study worked to develop guidelines or protocols for media houses. The Afghan Journalists Safety Committee consulted 90 practitioners to develop guidelines following the 2018 double bombing. In Colombia, FLIP is piloting a safety certification process for newsrooms. Key elements to these projects include tailoring for local context, including budgets and capacity, and engagement of and ownership of the initiatives by the media houses. In Pakistan, the Journalists Safety Coalition has allied with the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors and the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists to form a coalition to pool verified data on attacks and produce annual reports on the state of impunity of crimes against journalists, thereby informing safety advocacy and conducting annual safety audits of media houses on their compliance with joint Protection, Prevention and Prosecution strategies.
- Diverse representation among stakeholders from the start of consultations and development of mechanisms leads to better integration and responses to the FoE concerns that impact different geographic communities, women and ethnic minorities throughout the country. Measures to strengthen and monitor investigations into attacks on journalists, such as mobilising investigative teams that are independent from local authorities, advance justice in some cases. Such teams or other bodies benefit when they include representation from the media, CSOs, national human rights commissions and/or related experts alongside relevant government and security officials. This helps ensure there is a balance of interests and expertise and that the body can function with political independence alongside the official capacity to investigate and prosecute.

In addition to the above lessons, the following are recommendations, based on the practices and pitfalls featured in this publication, that should be integrated into ongoing and future efforts to develop and implement collaborative strategies to promote SoJ:

- National multi-stakeholder bodies should encompass the full SoJ cycle of prevention, protection and prosecution, including robust systems for early warning and rapid response to urgent threats and investigations into the perpetrators of those behind threats and attacks. Stakeholders should promote public awareness of international norms around SoJ and threats to journalists in the context of how these infringe on rights of all citizens to benefit from the free flow of information.
- National plans and state mechanisms must address the specific challenges and threats that women journalists and other media actors face on account of their gender. As a starting point, ensure female representation in consultations for developing these plans and mechanisms in the makeup of implementing bodies; a gender-sensitive approach should be incorporated into assessing risk and providing protection and

throughout investigations into attacks against women, while devising specific protocols and training programmes for state agents.

- National plans should balance the need for focused, practical action-based solutions and longer-term goals, take into account existing SoJ programmes run by national media support groups and seek to strengthen rather than replace them. Regular reviews to respond to major political developments, changes in the threat landscape and corresponding shifts in safety needs should take place.
- Stakeholders should work with donors and potential anchoring bodies to ensure that well-laid foundations for national plans, coalitions and other mechanisms receive long-term funding in recognition that multi-stakeholder structures take time to build and CSOs and other stakeholders may not have the resources to support this process.
- Stakeholders should engage NHRIs as partners or anchors for implementing SoJ mechanisms. These bodies can offer advantages, including acting as a bridge between government, civil society and the international community, providing documentary evidence in some countries and provision of expertise on relevant legislative initiatives.
- Coalitions should determine a clear leadership structure and assignment of action points to members; local strategies developed at a provincial level can provide a fillip to customised safety advocacy and implementation strategies.
- National plans should increase safety resources dedicated to female journalists, such as safety training programmes and training in identifying and tackling illegal (online) harassment for female journalists; they should develop or strengthen support associations, networks and forums for women journalists, particularly those working to counter online abuse.
- National plans should promote an enabling legal environment for journalists by advocating to repeal problematic laws, and reviewing existing and draft legislation. This is particularly relevant for laws that concern terrorism, extremism and national security, cyber regulations and other legislation that affects the right to FoE and media freedom. These efforts should also address arbitrary detention and misuse of the criminal justice system to silence journalists.
- National plans should develop legal support programmes for journalists, such as pro-bono lawyer networks and training on media rights aimed at helping journalists understand their vulnerabilities under local laws and how to engage in protocols to resolve legal disputes such as press council arbitration.
- Coalitions should implement programmes aimed at improving the outlook of state authorities towards journalists and create constructive communication channels such as formal dialogues between media and security forces at a provincial or community level.

- Coalitions should develop a system for documenting and sharing not only good practices, but also the tools to achieve them, such as safety protocols, security-media dialogue formats and training curriculums. Even if tailored to their specific environments, they can provide a strong starting point for stakeholders in other locales pursuing similar strategies.
- Stakeholders should work together to improve safety practices used by media outlets, including developing safety protocols and training programmes; they should ensure gender equality in newsrooms and introduce protocols for reporting and addressing sexual harassment and online abuse. Not all aspects of safety must come with a high price tag. There are low-cost measures to improve in-house practices that can be implemented regardless of the size or budget of a media outlet such as risk assessments, communication plans and a good cyber-safety routine.
- Media outlets should set up coalitions or more informal networks to share and verify information on attacks and the judicial status of different cases as well as advocate. Stakeholders should work together to link SoJ to working conditions by promoting the adoption and implementation of adequate labour and employment laws that protect journalists and other media actors from arbitrary dismissal or reprisals and encourage fair pay and individual safety resources; laws should also protect the rights of women in the workplace. Stakeholders should advocate for and support proposals by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to: create a UN instrument to mobilise international criminal investigations into killings and other extreme attacks on journalists and human rights defenders; convene response teams made up of UN representatives (Rapporteurs, UNESCO) and CSOs to monitor and support investigations and compile best practices on investigations.
- Stakeholders should develop and implement measures that promote prosecution such as investigative commissions that include both civil society and state actors, special prosecutors or national investigative units. These steps should be accompanied by efforts to strengthen police and judicial institutions.
- Investigations into attacks should ensure links between attacks and the victim's professional work are fully investigated, as well as links to the victim's gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual identity.