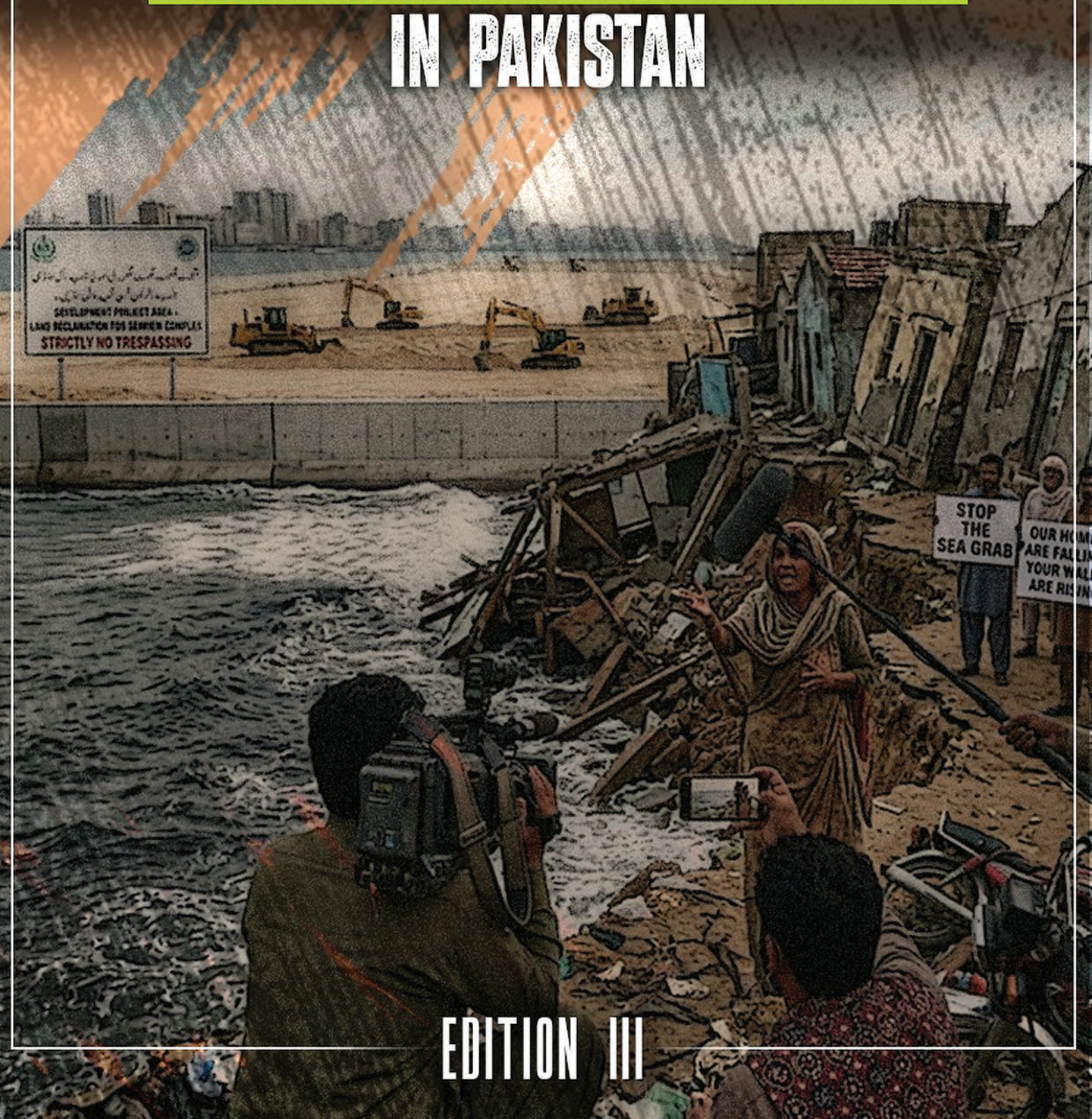


MONITORING DOCUMENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF **THREATS AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS** IN PAKISTAN



EDITION III

Published by:

Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation (GNMI)

Karachi, Pakistan

www.gnmionline.org

With the support of:

The Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Date of Publication: May 2026

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Preface

The Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation (GNMI) is a media development organization committed to strengthening Pakistan's media ecosystem through capacity-building, research, and advocacy that advance ethical, inclusive, and independent journalism. This third quarterly edition of the report *Monitoring, Documentation, and Analysis of Threats Against Environmental Journalists in Pakistan* builds upon the foundations established in the preceding two editions, continuing and deepening our systematic effort to document, analyze, and contextualize the threats faced by journalists who report on environmental governance, climate change, natural resource management, and ecological degradation. As environmental crises intensify across Pakistan and public scrutiny of governance failures grows more urgent, the work of environmental journalists has become simultaneously more consequential and more dangerous.

Supported by the UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF), this initiative advances GNMI's mission to safeguard press freedom and contribute to international efforts to end impunity for crimes against journalists. The cases documented in this edition reflect and reinforce patterns identified in earlier editions, while also surfacing new and evolving dimensions of the threat landscape. Economic coercion and editorial interference, most acutely observed in cases where industrial actors leverage financial relationships with media organizations to suppress inconvenient reporting, continue to operate as among the most effective and least visible mechanisms of censorship. Direct physical intimidation in the field, threats from criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking and land encroachment, and the deliberate targeting of recording equipment as a means of erasing evidentiary documentation all feature prominently in this report.

The findings of this edition also extend and deepen this series' analysis of structural vulnerability. Several cases documented here originate not from major urban media markets but from smaller, district-level reporting environments, where institutional protections are weakest, financial precarity among journalists is most acute, and the power asymmetry between reporters and the commercial, criminal, or political actors they cover is most pronounced. This geographic dimension of press freedom, the sharp disparity in safety and institutional support between journalists in metropolitan centers and those operating in the field or in smaller localities, warrants sustained analytical and advocacy attention as this series progresses. It further documents the continuing normalization of intimidation as a tool of environmental governance capture, a process whereby those responsible for ecological harm, whether industrial polluters, wildlife trafficking networks, or land encroachment interests, seek to foreclose public accountability by rendering its documentation too costly for the individuals tasked with it.

These findings sit in direct and unresolved tension with Pakistan's stated commitments under international frameworks, including the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, most notably Sustainable Development Goal 16, which affirms the centrality of access to information, press freedom, and accountable institutions to sustainable development. The gap between these commitments and the lived reality of environmental journalists across the country and its closure demands more than rhetorical affirmation.

As this quarterly series enters its third edition, we are committed to expanding the scope of its documentation, refining the analytical frameworks through which these cases are understood, and contributing to collective national and international advocacy efforts on behalf of journalists working in conditions of risk. Protecting environmental journalists is not a peripheral concern of media freedom discourse alone, it is a foundational prerequisite for environmental transparency, ecological justice, and the kind of informed public discourse upon which democratic governance ultimately depends.

Acknowledgments

This publication has been developed under the UNESCO GMDF-supported project "Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action." GNMI gratefully acknowledges UNESCO GMDF's continued commitment to journalist safety, and environmental awareness in Pakistan, which has made this initiative possible.

We thank the GNMI Network including Sabz Journalism Community, civil society organizations, media institutions, and local partners who contributed to data collection, verification, and advocacy throughout this research.

GNMI acknowledges the following individuals for their contributions to this edition: Najia Ashar, President of GNMI, for her overall supervision and strategic direction; Afia Salam, senior environmental journalist and project consultant, for her expertise in data analysis, fact-checking, and contextualizing the findings; and the GNMI Team for authoring this report, documenting cases collected from independent and verified sources, and producing the design and artwork for this publication.

Finally, GNMI thanks the journalists who shared their experiences to make this documentation possible.

Acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
CSO	<i>Civil Society Organization</i>
CPJMP	<i>The Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals</i>
FIR	<i>First Information Report</i>
GNMI	<i>Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation</i>
GMDF	<i>Global Media Defense Fund</i>
LEA	<i>Law Enforcement Agencies</i>
NGO	<i>Non-Governmental Organization</i>
PECA	<i>Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act</i>
PJMP	<i>Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021)</i>
SDGs	<i>Sustainable Development Goals</i>
SLAPP	<i>Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation</i>

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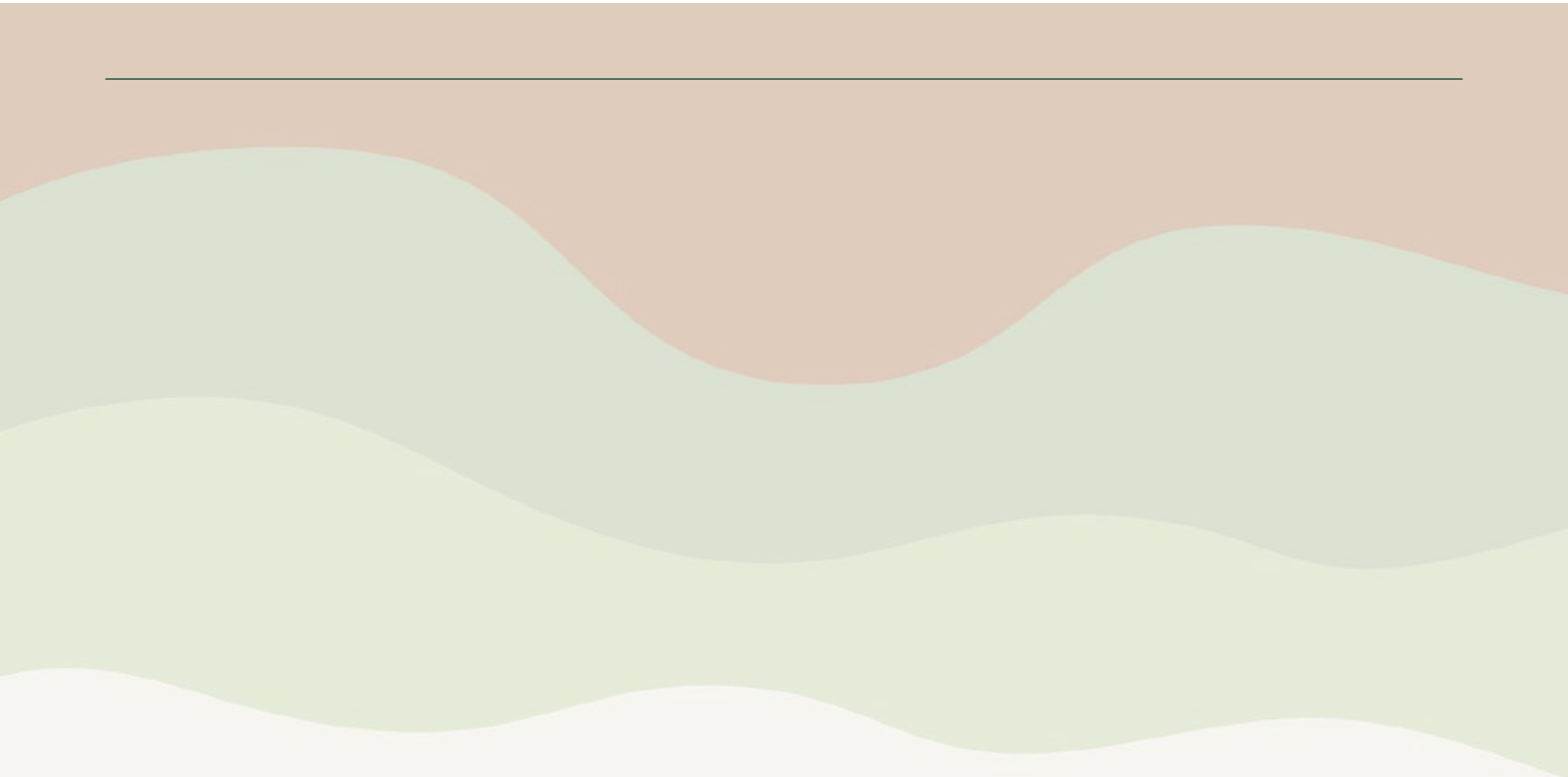
Executive Summary

This third quarterly edition of Monitoring, Documentation, and Analysis of Threats Against Environmental Journalists in Pakistan, published by the Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation (GNMI) under the UNESCO-supported project Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action, continues a systematic effort to document and analyze the conditions under which environmental journalism is practiced in Pakistan. Building on six cases established in the first two editions, this report adds three further verified cases, bringing the cumulative total to nine, and extends the series' geographic focus to district-level and field reporting environments in northwestern region of Pakistan.

The three cases documented in this edition introduce economic coercion, criminal network intimidation, and field-level physical obstruction as distinct and increasingly visible mechanisms of suppression. In a small city of Bannu Division, a print journalist investigating air pollution and respiratory health impacts linked to a cement factory was offered a bribe, threatened upon refusal, and ultimately forced to resign after the factory's ownership pressured his newspaper's editorial management into suppressing the story. In Mardan District, a freelance reporter investigating illegal wildlife trafficking received threatening communications from criminal network-linked individuals and abandoned the investigation entirely, subsequently imposing a self-directed reporting boundary on sensitive environmental stories in his home locality. In Swat region, a field correspondent covering flood impacts and illegal riverbank encroachments was directly confronted during reporting, warned to stop filming, and threatened with the destruction of his recording equipment by individuals associated with a politically connected property. In all three cases, no formal complaint was filed, no protective response was extended, and no perpetrator faced consequence of any kind.

The analytical picture that emerges across nine cumulative cases is one of structural vulnerability rather than isolated incident. The threat environment facing environmental journalists in Pakistan is systemic, operating through an expanding repertoire of tactics that now spans legal harassment, digital intimidation, economic coercion, editorial capture, criminal network threats, and physical obstruction in the field. Geography is a material determinant of risk, journalists operating in district-level and rural environments face qualitatively greater exposure than those in major urban centers, with fewer institutional resources, weaker professional support networks, and more pronounced power asymmetries relative to the commercial, criminal, and political actors they cover. Self-censorship has emerged as a documented and durable systemic outcome, producing ongoing information vacuums in precisely the localities where environmental accountability journalism is most needed. And institutional failure is consistent across every case in this series, existing legal frameworks, including the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021), have not translated into effective protection, investigation, or accountability in any documented instance.

The consequences of this failure extend beyond press freedom. Pakistan faces acute and accelerating climate vulnerability, and the suppression of reporting on industrial pollution, wildlife trafficking, flood encroachments, and ecological degradation directly undermines the capacity of affected communities and policymakers to understand and respond to environmental harm. The report advances recommendations for government and law enforcement, media institutions, journalist associations, civil society, and international partners, all oriented toward closing the gap between existing legal commitments and the lived reality of journalists working in conditions of risk. Sustained monitoring, cumulative documentation, and evidence-based advocacy remain the foundation of GNMI's approach and the essential tools for the systemic reform this evidence demands.



Chapter 1:

Background and Context

1.1 State of Environmental Journalism in Pakistan

Environmental journalism in Pakistan occupies a significant space at the intersection of climate change, governance, public health, and sustainable development. As the country confronts growing climate pressures including recurrent floods and water scarcity, deforestation, urban environmental stress, and extractive resource exploitation, the demand for accurate, independent, and investigative environmental reporting has increased considerably.

Journalists covering environmental issues serve as important intermediaries between scientific data, policy processes, and affected communities. Their work informs public discourse, subjects governance practices to scrutiny, and documents the human consequences of environmental degradation. Whether examining municipal mismanagement and water distribution failures or investigating illegal extraction networks and corporate environmental misconduct, environmental journalists contribute meaningfully to transparency and accountability.

Yet environmental reporting frequently intersects with entrenched political, economic, and, at times, criminal interests. Coverage of land use, water governance, mining, housing development, and natural resource management often implicates actors with considerable influence. In this context, public-interest reporting can be perceived as adversarial, exposing journalists to pressures that extend beyond professional risk.

Building on the findings of the first and second editions of this report, it is apparent that environmental journalism in Pakistan continues to face structural vulnerabilities: limited institutional protections, inconsistent enforcement of journalist safety provisions, and a broader pattern of shrinking civic space. These conditions form the backdrop against which the cases in this edition must be understood.

1.2 Challenges and Risks Faced by Environmental Journalists

Environmental journalists in Pakistan are exposed to many of the risks common across the broader media community, including legal harassment, surveillance, intimidation, reputational attacks, and economic pressure. Their work, however, carries additional dimensions of risk given the financial and political interests frequently at stake in environmental governance and resource management.

The cases documented in this edition reflect an identifiable and evolving pattern of threats. Economic coercion and editorial interference, where industrial or commercial actors leverage financial relationships with media organizations to suppress reporting, continue to operate as effective and structurally entrenched mechanisms of censorship. Direct physical intimidation in field environments, threats originating from criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking and illegal land encroachment, and the deliberate obstruction of documentation through threats to destroy recording equipment all feature in this edition's findings. Across these cases, a consistent institutional failure is evident: the near-total absence of formal complaints, legal recourse, or protective response, reflecting a rational calculus among affected journalists that existing mechanisms offer insufficient protection.

Gendered dimensions of risk also warrant continued consideration. Women journalists face distinct structural barriers, reputational attacks, social stigmatization, and professional isolation that shape their working conditions and reporting capacity. Journalists operating in rural and peri-urban areas face a separate and compounding set of vulnerabilities, frequently without institutional support, security provisions, or ready access to legal assistance. This edition's cases further underscore the geographic unevenness of press freedom in Pakistan, the disparity in safety and institutional support between metropolitan and district-level reporting environments is sharp and demands sustained attention.

Taken together, these factors create conditions in which environmental reporting is constrained not only through overt threats but through sustained psychological, financial, and professional pressure over time.

1.3 Rationale for the Report

A structured monitoring mechanism is essential to identifying patterns of intimidation, establishing evidentiary records of impunity, and supporting advocacy for systemic reform. Isolated incidents of threats against journalists often fail to generate sustained institutional response. However, when documented collectively and analyzed over time, they reveal structural weaknesses that require policy attention.

This quarterly publication forms part of GNMI's national monitoring framework under the project Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action, supported by the UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF). The initiative is grounded in relevant international human rights standards, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and supports Pakistan's obligations under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 16 on access to information, justice, and accountable institutions.

By documenting cases across regions and thematic areas, the report contributes to broader efforts to strengthen accountability and reduce impunity for crimes against journalists. Beyond recording violations, it aims to generate evidence-based analysis that can inform legal reform, institutional strengthening, and coordinated advocacy at both national and international levels.

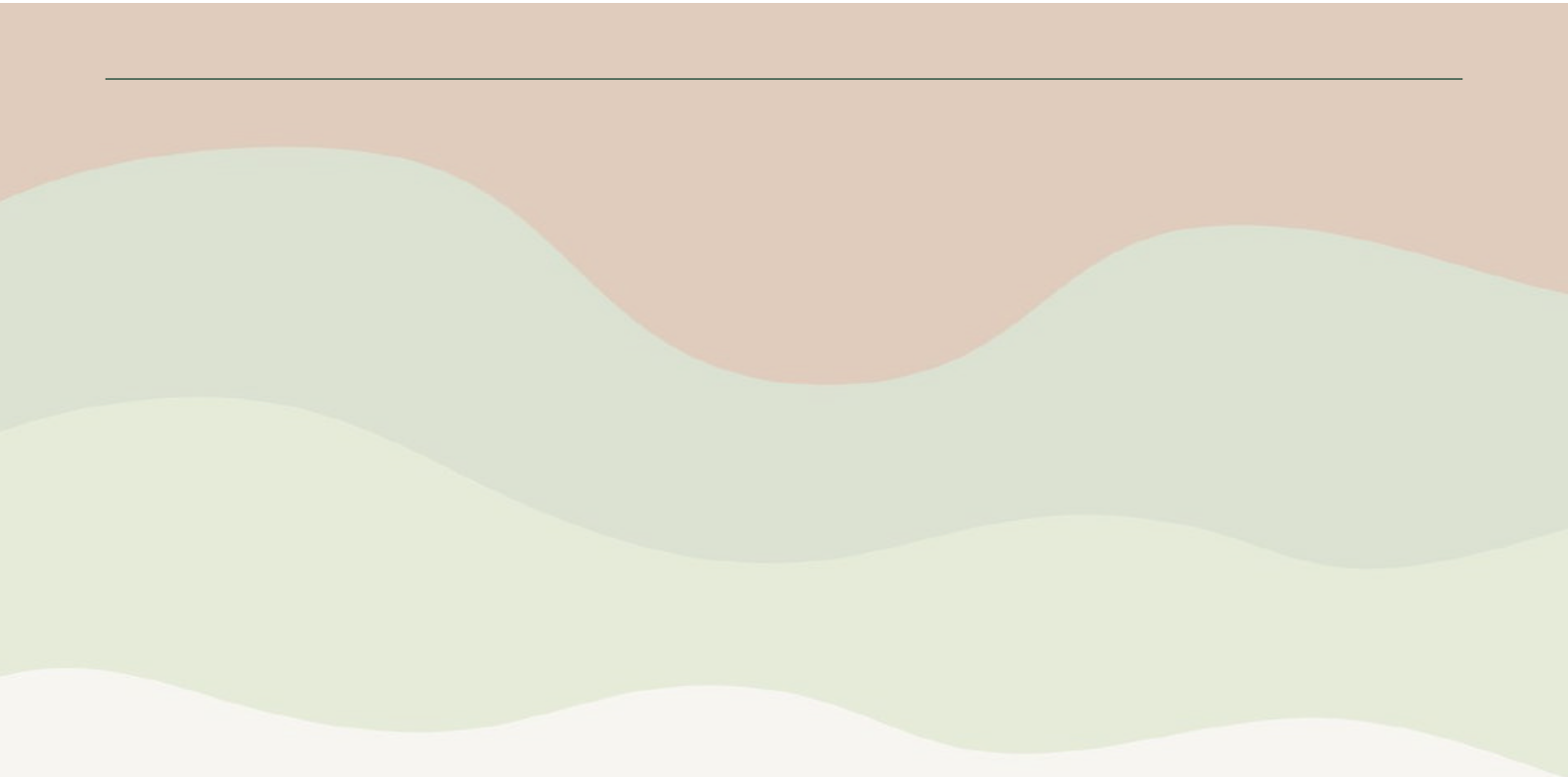
1.4 Nature of the Publication

This report represents the third quarterly edition in a four-part annual series, each of which documents verified cases of threats or intimidation faced by environmental journalists and situates them within a broader analytical framework. As with preceding editions, cases are selected on the basis of verification, relevance to environmental reporting, and their capacity to illuminate wider patterns of risk.

The current edition presents three case studies encompassing economic coercion and editorial interference following environmental reporting on industrial pollution; threats and self-censorship arising from investigations into illegal wildlife trafficking; and direct physical intimidation during field reporting on flood impacts and riverbank land encroachment. These cases extend the thematic and geographic scope of the series, introducing criminal network intimidation and land mafia interference as documented categories of threat, and drawing from reporting environments in different regions of Pakistan.

To protect the safety and privacy of those involved, no personal identifiers are disclosed. Each case study focuses on the nature of the incident, its implications for the journalist's work, and the institutional or legal response or absence thereof that followed.

As the series progresses toward its fourth and final edition of the annual cycle, GNMI will continue to expand its documentation, refine its verification processes, and identify trends across editions. This cumulative approach is intended to move the publication beyond case-by-case recording toward sustained monitoring, comparative analysis, and evidence-based policy advocacy.



Chapter 2:

Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

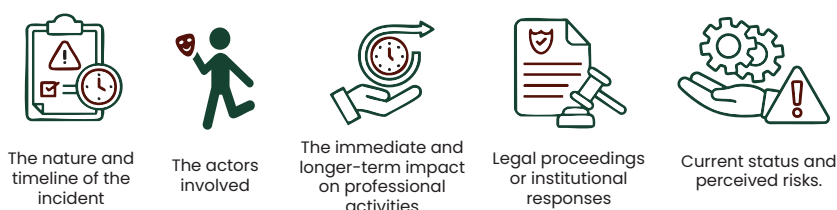
This report adopts a qualitative, evidence-based research approach combining primary documentation with secondary verification to ensure accuracy, ethical rigor, and reliability of findings.

Building on the framework established in the first and second editions, the third edition continues to document verified incidents of threats, harassment, legal intimidation, and obstruction faced by environmental journalists in Pakistan. The research approach emphasizes triangulation of information, careful verification of claims, and adherence to ethical standards, including protection of sources and, where necessary, anonymization of identities.

This mixed-method design enhances the credibility of the findings and allows for a deeper understanding of the working realities of journalists who report on environmental and climate-related issues. The objective is to record individual cases, identify emerging patterns, recurring tactics of intimidation, and systemic weaknesses in accountability and protection mechanisms.

2.2.1 Primary Data Collection

Primary data for this edition was gathered through direct engagement with affected journalists. In-depth interviews were conducted with media professionals whose experiences formed the core case studies of this report. Interviews were structured to gather detailed information regarding:

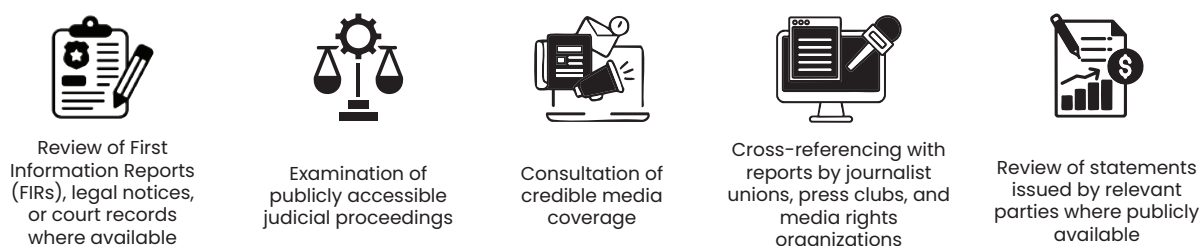


Where necessary, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity and security of interviewees. Care was taken to ensure that publication of these cases does not expose individuals to further harm.

Special attention was given to journalists operating in high-risk environments, particularly those reporting on governance failures, environmental crimes, land disputes, and illicit economic networks. The methodology reflects the reality that regional and investigative journalists frequently face heightened vulnerability, compounded by limited institutional support and restricted access to legal or security resources.

2.2.2 Secondary Data Collection

All documented cases were subjected to a secondary verification process to ensure accuracy and fairness. This included:



All verified data were incorporated into a centralized database developed specifically for this project. The database was structured to include the following standardized categories:

◆ Name (or pseudonym) of journalist.



◆ Date and location of incident.



◆ Nature of attack or threat.



◆ Alleged actors or suspected parties.



◆ Immediate impact and response.



◆ Outcome or current status.



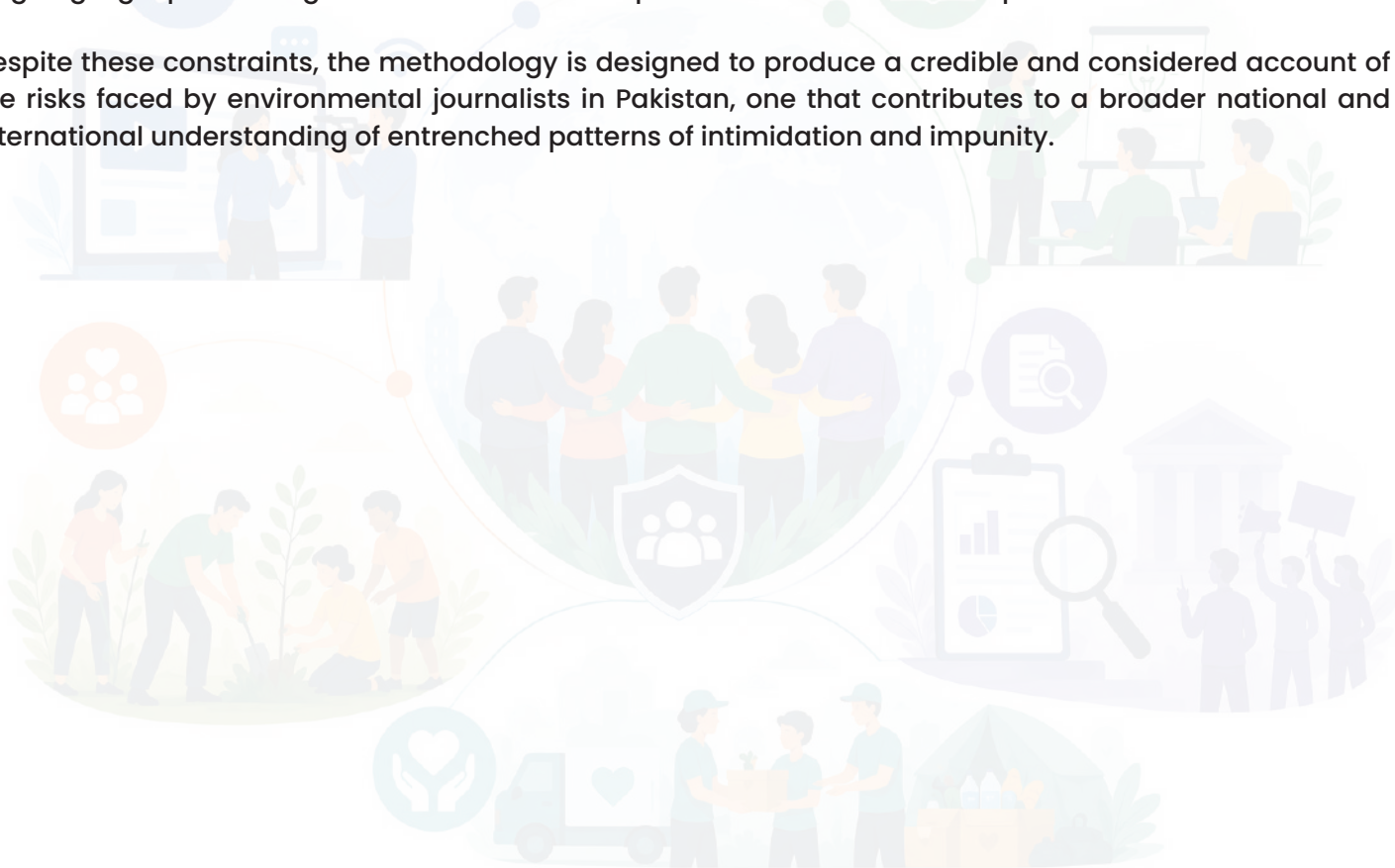
The verification process seeks to distinguish documented facts from allegations, and to present incidents in a balanced and neutral manner consistent with international reporting standards.

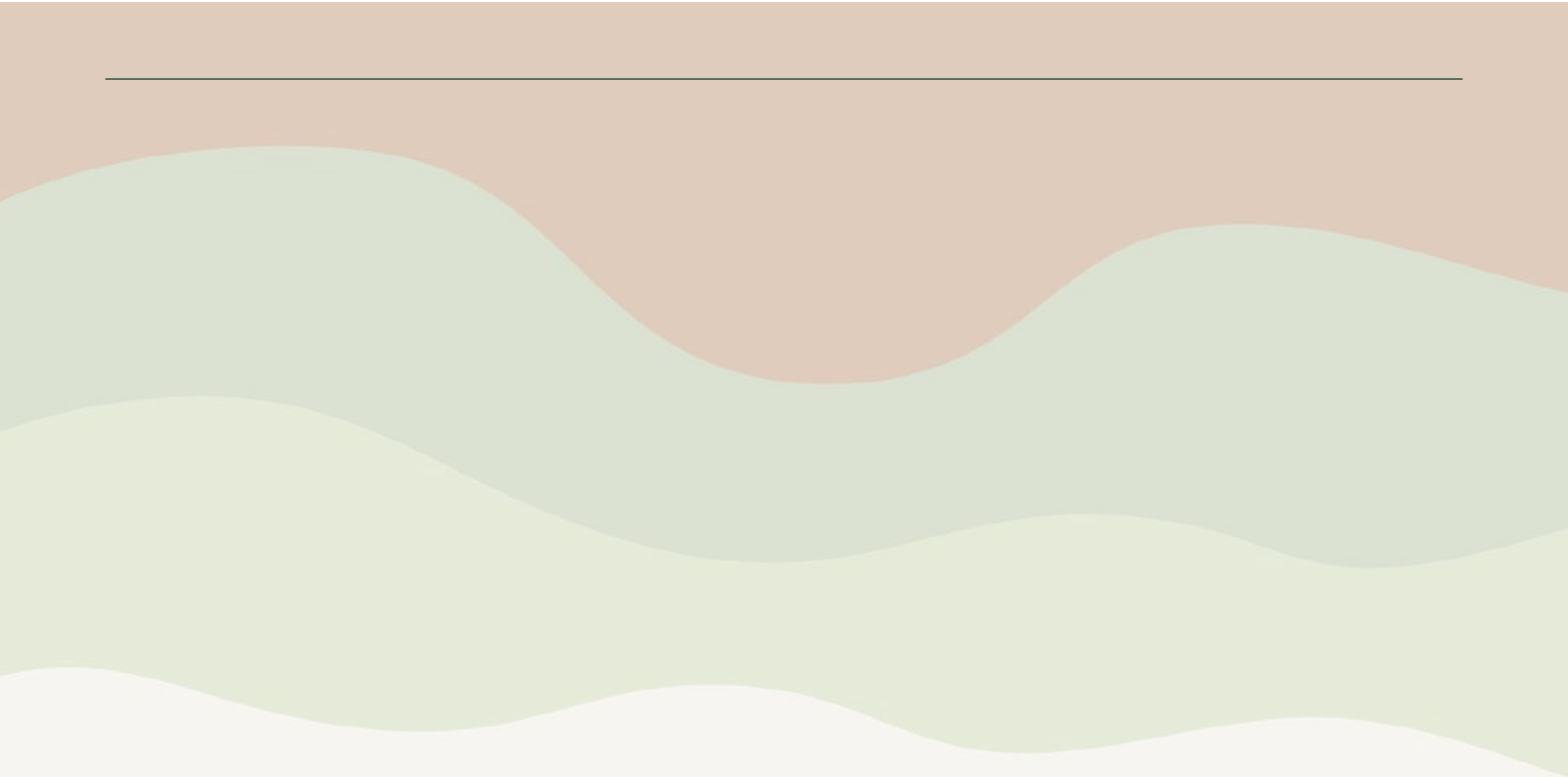
2.2 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The research process adheres to core principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and risk mitigation. Where public identification could expose journalists to further harm, pseudonyms are used and sensitive details are carefully contextualized to protect those involved.

This report is based on documented evidence and verified testimony. However, some limitations should be noted. Underreporting remains a major concern, as journalists may choose not to disclose incidents because of fear of retaliation, limited access to legal records, or lack of trust in institutional mechanisms. Ongoing legal proceedings limited access to complete records at the time of publication.

Despite these constraints, the methodology is designed to produce a credible and considered account of the risks faced by environmental journalists in Pakistan, one that contributes to a broader national and international understanding of entrenched patterns of intimidation and impunity.





Chapter 3: **Case Studies**

3.1 Selection Criteria

The cases included in this third quarterly edition were selected through GNMI's established monitoring and verification mechanism. Each case meets the following criteria:

- The journalist was engaged in environmental, civic, governance, or public-interest reporting linked to environmental issues
- The incident involved a credible allegation of threat, harassment, intimidation, obstruction, economic coercion, or physical risk
- The case was verified through direct engagement with the journalist and supported, where possible, by documentary or secondary evidence
- The incident reflects broader patterns of risk relevant to environmental journalism in Pakistan.

In selecting cases for this edition, efforts were made to ensure thematic and geographic diversity. The three case studies are drawn from North-West region of Pakistan and illustrate varied forms of intimidation:

economic coercion and editorial interference by industrial actors following environmental reporting; threats from criminal networks involved in illegal wildlife trafficking leading to self-censorship; and direct physical intimidation during field reporting on flood impacts and illegal riverbank encroachment.

Cases span both district-level and field reporting environments, with particular attention to under-reported localities, where institutional support for journalists is limited and power asymmetries between reporters and the actors they cover are most pronounced.

3.2 Types of Case Studies Included

The following categories outline the types of incidents included in this and future editions of the publication. The categories highlighted in tan colour represent those shortlisted for inclusion in the first edition, reflecting the principal forms of threats and violations documented through GNMI's monitoring mechanism.

Physical Attacks and Harassment

Incidents involving physical assault, detention, or intimidation of journalists during field reporting on environmental or climate-related issues.



Legal Harassment and Intimidation

Cases where journalists have been subjected to legal notices, defamation suits, or judicial actions designed to restrict environmental reporting or inquiries or discourage public scrutiny.



Cases from Conflict or Sensitive Zones

Reports from environmentally and administratively sensitive regions, such as areas affected by illegal logging, mining, wildlife trafficking, or industrial pollution, where journalists face increased risk exposure and limited access to remedies.



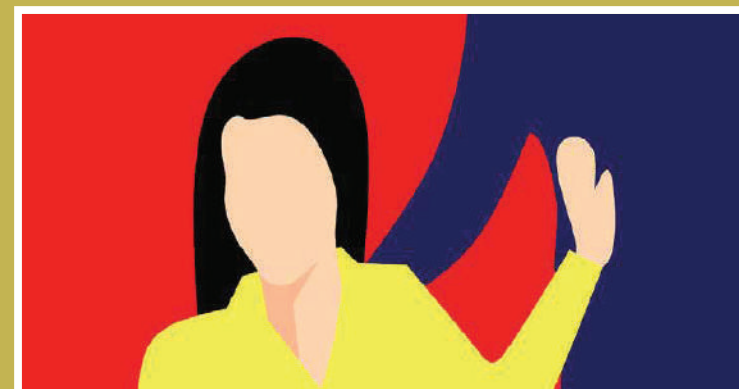
Online Threats and Digital Harassment

Instances of cyberbullying, hacking, surveillance, and online abuse, particularly gender-based digital harassment, aimed at discouraging or deterring journalists through intimidation and reputational harm



Workplace and Institutional Pressures

Situations where journalists have faced editorial censorship, employment loss, or indirect editorial or economic pressure within media institutions to withhold or alter coverage of sensitive environmental stories.



3.3 Introduction to the Case Studies (Third Edition)

The following case studies represent verified incidents of threats and harassment encountered by environmental journalists during the current reporting period. Each case was documented through direct interviews and corroborated through independent verification with local and international press-freedom bodies. Across the first two editions of this series, six (06) case studies were documented; this edition adds three (03) further verified cases, bringing the cumulative total to nine (09). These narratives exemplify the complex realities of reporting on environmental issues in Pakistan, where journalists confront both visible and structural risks in their pursuit of public-interest reporting.

Case Study 07: Economic Coercion and Editorial Interference Following Environmental Reporting

Name/Pseudonym:	<i>“Journalist G”</i> Local Print Journalist (Reporter, regional newspaper)
Date and Location:	2019–2024, Bannu Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
Nature of Attack/Threat:	Economic coercion, bribery attempt, sustained threats, editorial interference, and forced resignation
Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:	Ownership and management of a local cement manufacturing facility; indirect institutional pressure exerted on editorial leadership
Immediate Impact:	Suppression of investigative reporting; threats following refusal of financial inducement; progressive professional marginalization culminating in resignation
Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:	No formal complaint filed; no institutional protection sought or offered; complete absence of accountability mechanisms
Current Status/Outcome:	Journalist ceased reporting on the subject matter and vacated his position, exemplifying a broader, structural pattern in which economic leverage is deployed to silence environmental journalism in under-resourced media markets

Narrative

Between 2019 and 2024, Journalist G, a print reporter based in Bannu Division, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, conducted an investigation into environmental pollution attributable to the operations of a local cement manufacturing facility. His reporting documented a statistically and anecdotally observable rise in respiratory illnesses, including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary conditions, among residential communities in the immediate vicinity of the factory.

The investigation drew upon community testimonies, field observations, and locally documented evidence of deteriorating air quality, and pointed to systemic failures in regulatory enforcement by the relevant environmental and industrial oversight authorities.

The case unfolds across three distinct phases, each reflecting an escalation in the tactics employed to suppress the reporting.

In the first phase, following the publication, Journalist G was approached with a financial inducement, a bribe offered by parties associated with the factory's ownership, with the explicit condition that he discontinue his coverage. This approach reflects a well-documented strategy in contexts where media markets are small, journalist incomes are precarious, and the financial resources of industrial actors vastly outstrip those of local news organizations. The journalist refused.

In the second phase, the refusal triggered a shift from inducement to intimidation. Journalist G began receiving threats, warning him to abandon the story. This escalation is consistent with patterns observed across South Asian media environments, where the failure of financial coercion prompts more coercive forms of pressure, particularly when the subject of reporting has significant economic and political capital in the local context.

In the third and most consequential phase, pressure was redirected away from the journalist individually and applied instead to the institutional structure of his employer. The factory's ownership allegedly intervened at the level of the newspaper's editorial management, leveraging what appears to have been an advertising, financial, or social relationship to compel the suppression of the story. The investigation was withheld from publication. Journalist G faced increasing professional isolation within his own newsroom, a form of internal ostracism that rendered continued employment untenable.

Unable to sustain his reporting under conditions of institutional complicity and absence of any protective framework, Journalist G resigned from his position.

Case Study 08: Threats and Self-Censorship in Reporting on Wildlife Trafficking

Name/Pseudonym:	"Journalist H" Local Print Journalist (Reporter, regional newspaper)
Date and Location:	January 2022, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
Nature of Attack/Threat:	Verbal threats via telephone and WhatsApp communications; sustained intimidation resulting in deliberate self-censorship
Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:	Local criminal networks and influential individuals allegedly operating within and facilitating illegal wildlife poaching and trafficking supply chains
Immediate Impact:	Complete abandonment of the investigative story; heightened fear for personal safety; voluntary restriction of reporting scope on sensitive environmental issues within the local area
Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:	No formal reporting of threats to law enforcement or press freedom bodies; absence of any protective institutional response
Current Status/Outcome:	Journalist remains professionally active but has imposed a self directed geographic and thematic boundary on sensitive environmental investigations in his immediate locality due to persistent safety concerns

Narrative

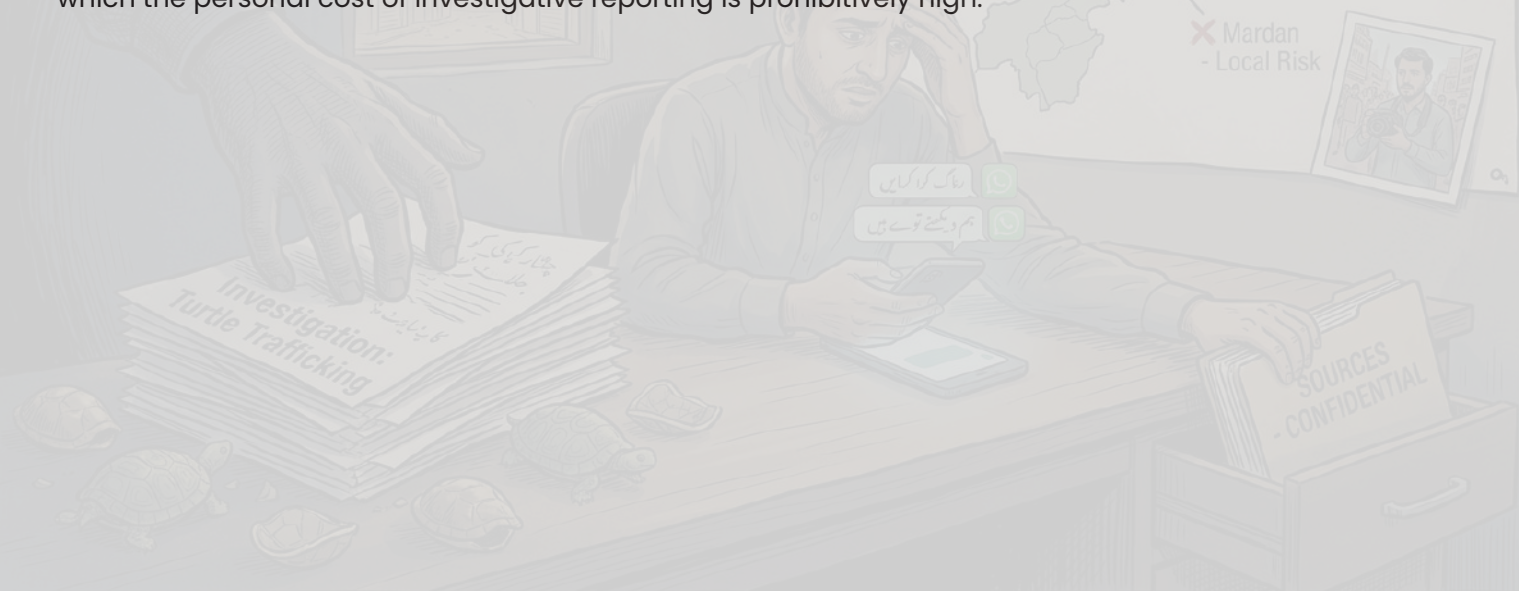
In January 2022, Journalist H, a reporter operating out of Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, initiated an investigation into illegal wildlife trafficking networks, with a particular focus on the systematic poaching of endangered freshwater turtle species within the province. The investigation sought to illuminate the scale of ecological loss being inflicted upon indigenous wildlife populations, document the operational structure of the criminal networks responsible for their extraction and trade, and interrogate the institutional failures that permitted such activity to continue with apparent impunity. Documented reports indicated that significant numbers of large turtles had been removed from their natural habitats within the region, forming part of a broader and likely transnational illegal wildlife trade.

The case is structurally distinct from other documented instances of journalist intimidation in that the threat did not originate from a corporate entity or state-affiliated actor, but from informal criminal networks, a category of perpetrator that poses particular challenges for both personal safety and institutional recourse.

As the investigation progressed and Journalist H's inquiries presumably became known within the relevant networks, he began receiving threatening communications via telephone calls and WhatsApp messages. The individuals behind these communications were believed to be directly connected to the local criminal groups involved in wildlife trafficking and to influential actors who provided these networks with cover, logistical support, or political protection. The threats were explicit with their intent: Journalist H was warned to abandon the story and cease further investigation into the matter.

The response of the journalist, while entirely rational given the threat environment, is itself analytically revealing. He chose not to name his sources, a decision that reflects not a failure of journalistic methodology but a considered act of protection for individuals whose cooperation with the press in such contexts carries genuine physical risk. More significantly, he abandoned the investigation in its entirety. No formal complaint was filed with law enforcement authorities, a decision that speaks to a broader and well-founded distrust of institutional responsiveness, particularly in cases where criminal networks may enjoy relationships with the very enforcement bodies to whom a complaint would be directed.

Perhaps the most consequential dimension of this case is the geographical specificity of the resulting self-censorship. Journalist H explicitly noted that he was capable of reporting on comparably sensitive subjects in larger urban centers, where diffuse power structures, greater media visibility, and the relative anonymity of the reporter provide some measure of protection. In his hometown, however, the calculus is fundamentally different: social proximity to criminal actors, the heightened visibility of the journalist as a local figure, and the weakness of local enforcement mechanisms combine to produce an environment in which the personal cost of investigative reporting is prohibitively high.



Case Study 09: Physical Threats and Field-Level Intimidation During Flood and Land Encroachment Reporting

Name/Pseudonym:	<i>"Journalist I"</i> Local Reporter (Field Correspondent)
Date and Location:	July–August 2025, Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
Nature of Attack/Threat:	Direct physical confrontation and explicit threats during active field reporting; seizure and destruction of recording equipment threatened
Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:	Local hotel proprietors and land encroachment interests, commonly referred to as the "land mafia", operating in riverbank zones with alleged political patronage
Immediate Impact:	Forced and immediate suspension of reporting activity; credible fear of physical violence; effective obstruction of journalistic coverage in the field
Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:	No formal complaint filed; no protective measures extended by authorities or employing media organization
Current Status/Outcome:	Journalist remains professionally active but has adopted a posture of strategic avoidance with respect to direct confrontation with influential actors; the underlying risk environment persists unaddressed

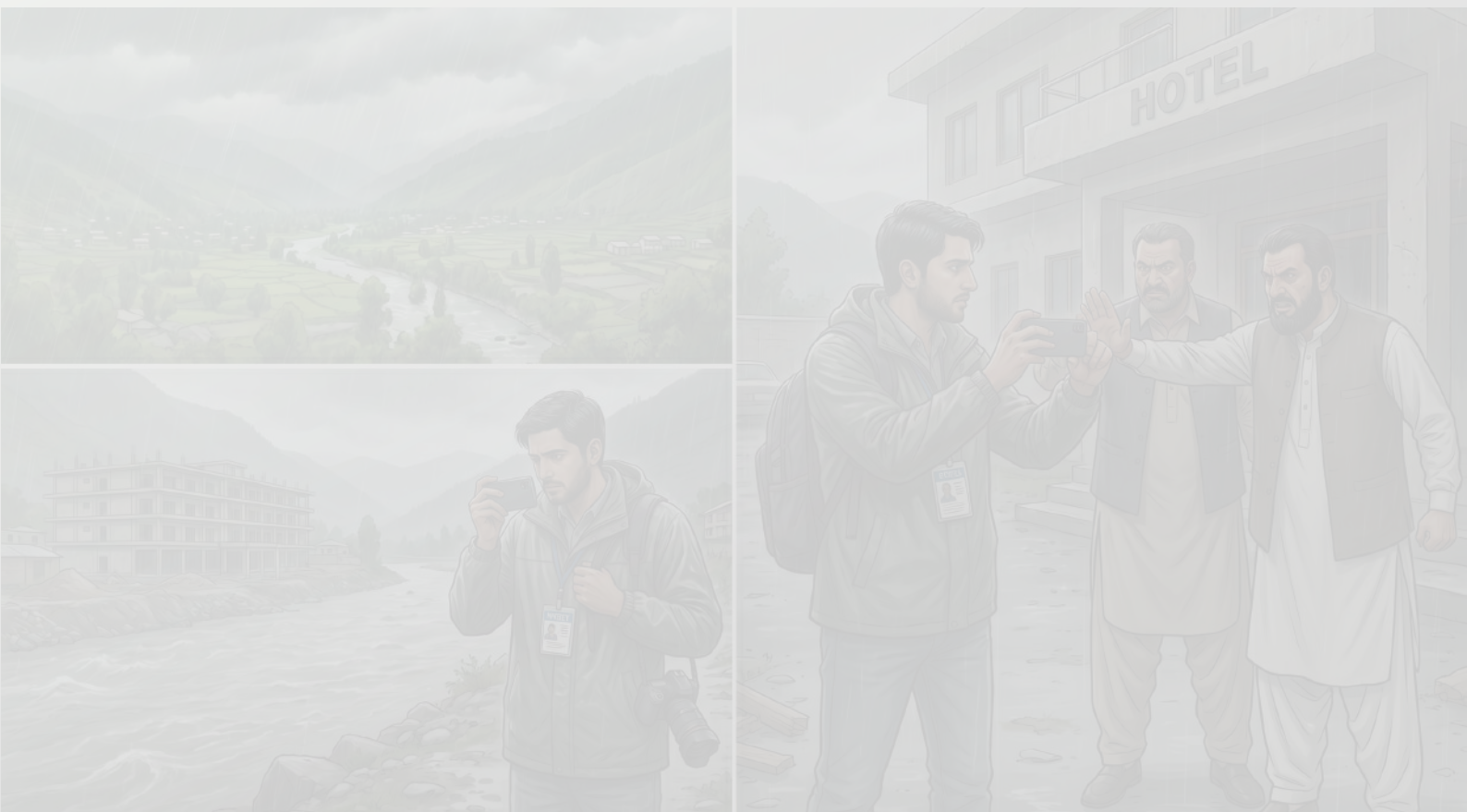
Narrative

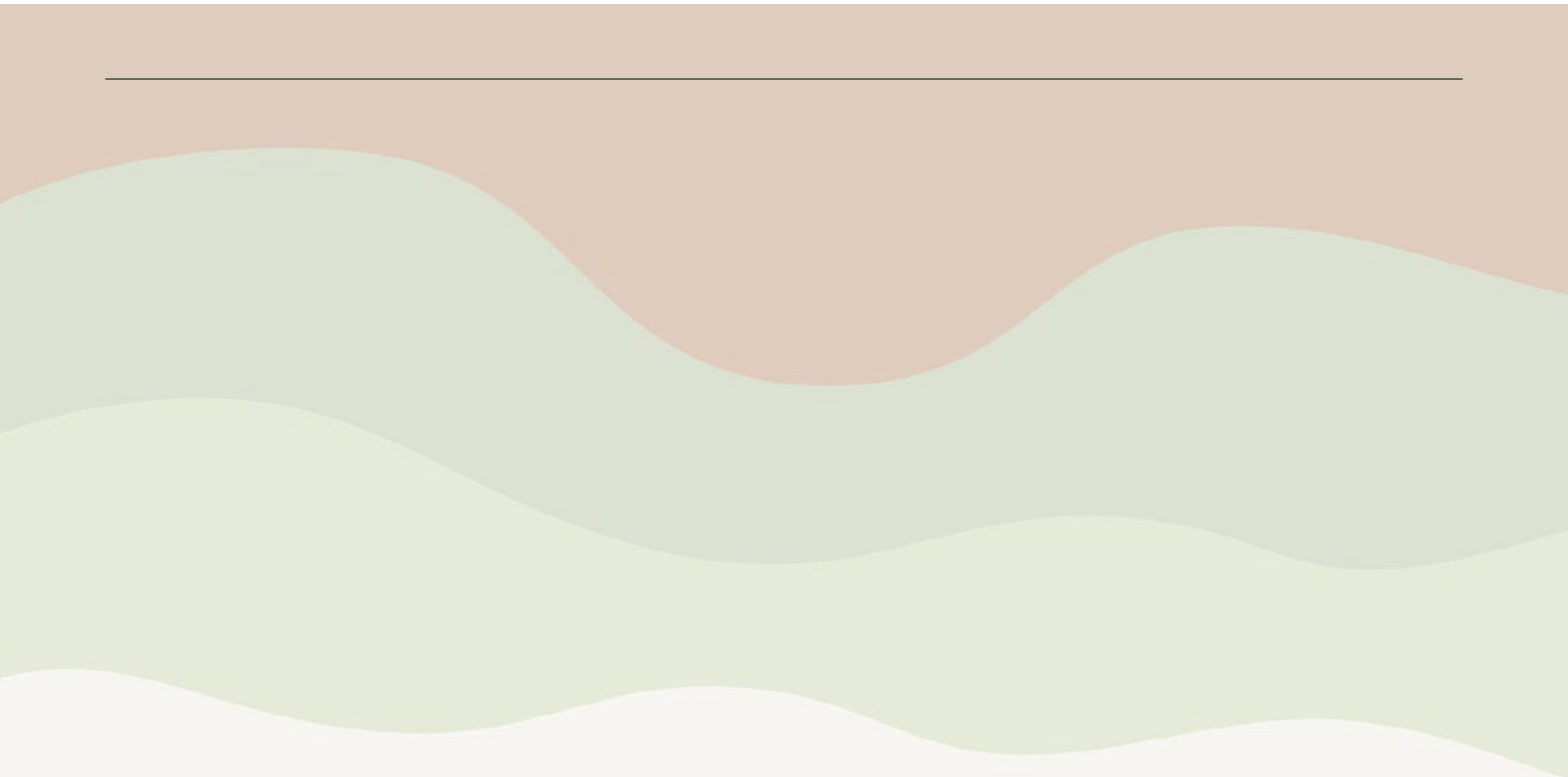
During the monsoon period of July and August 2025, Journalist “I”, a field correspondent stationed in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, was engaged in coverage of flood-related impacts across the district, with a specific investigative focus on the role of illegal land encroachments in exacerbating environmental vulnerability and flood damage. His reporting concentrated on the unauthorized occupation of riverbank land and riverbeds along the Swat River by commercial interests, most notably hotel proprietors, whose constructions had materially altered the river’s natural flood dynamics, narrowed its drainage channels, and contributed to increased inundation of surrounding communities during periods of high water flow.

The intersection of environmental degradation, commercial interest, and political protection that characterized this story placed Journalist “I” in one of the most dangerous reporting environments that field correspondents routinely encounter in the region.

While conducting field reporting on a hotel property allegedly linked to a figure of political influence, the journalist was directly confronted by individuals associated with the establishment. The confrontation was not ambiguous in its intent: they were issued an explicit verbal warning to immediately cease filming and discontinue his reporting on the premises and the surrounding encroachment. The threat was materially reinforced by the warning that their mobile phone, primary recording instrument and, in field journalism contexts, an essential tool of documentation would be physically destroyed if they persisted. The individuals involved were perceived to be acting with the confidence of those who believe themselves shielded from accountability, a confidence likely derived from the political connections of the property’s alleged owner.

Faced with a credible and immediate threat of physical harm and equipment destruction, and operating without any form of institutional security support, Journalist I made the pragmatically necessary decision to suspend his reporting and withdraw from the scene. No complaint was subsequently filed with law enforcement authorities, a decision consistent with the broader pattern observed across these case studies, wherein journalists perceive, with considerable justification, that formal complaint mechanisms offer inadequate protection and may in some contexts invite further retaliation.





Chapter 4: **Analysis**

4.1 Emerging Trends and Evolving Patterns

The cases documented in this third edition reveal a further consolidation and geographic deepening of the threat patterns identified in preceding editions. Where earlier editions established legal harassment, digital intimidation, and field-level threats as primary risk categories, the current cases point to something structurally distinct: the deliberate deployment of economic and editorial mechanisms to suppress environmental reporting, the entrenchment of self-censorship as a rational survival strategy, and the direct physical obstruction of journalists in the field by commercial and criminal interests operating with apparent impunity.

The most structurally significant finding of this edition concerns economic coercion as a form of censorship. The case of Journalist G illustrates how industrial actors can suppress environmental reporting not through legal proceedings or physical force alone, but by exploiting the financial dependence of small media organizations on local commercial interests. When a cement factory's ownership successfully pressured editorial management to withhold an investigated story, following a failed bribery attempt and direct threats to the journalist, the mechanism of suppression became institutional rather than individual. The journalist's eventual resignation reflects the endpoint of a process in which the newsroom itself was converted into an instrument of censorship. This pattern is particularly difficult to document and challenge precisely because it operates within ostensibly legitimate institutional relationships.

The case of Journalist H in Mardan introduces criminal network intimidation as a documented and distinct category of threat in this series. Threats delivered via telephone and WhatsApp by individuals connected to illegal wildlife trafficking networks produced a swift and total abandonment of the investigation and, more consequentially, a durable geographic boundary on the journalist's future reporting. The resulting self-censorship is analytically significant: it represents not a single suppressed story but an ongoing foreclosure of environmental accountability journalism in a specific locality. That the journalist felt able to report on comparable issues in larger cities underscores the geographic unevenness of press freedom and the degree to which localized criminal influence shapes the information environment in district-level settings.

Field-level physical intimidation, documented in the case of Journalist "I" continues to represent one of the most immediate and underacknowledged risks facing environmental reporters. The direct confrontation during flood reporting including explicit threats to destroy recording equipment reflects the confidence of actors who believe themselves insulated from accountability by political connection and institutional inertia. The targeting of the journalist's phone is also notable as an attempt to destroy the evidentiary record itself, suppressing not merely the report but the documentation upon which any future accountability might rest.

Across all three cases, a consistent and troubling institutional pattern holds: no formal complaints were filed, no protective measures were extended, and no accountability followed. This near-universal absence of recourse is not incidental. It reflects a rational calculation by affected journalists that existing mechanisms legal, institutional, and professional offer insufficient protection and may invite further exposure. Cumulatively, the nine cases documented across this series point to an environment in which threats against environmental journalists are systemic rather than episodic, and in which economic, criminal, and physical pressures operate in concert to discourage scrutiny of environmental governance failures and ecological crimes.

4.2 Geographic and Institutional Dimensions

The cases in this edition are concentrated in Northwestern region of Pakistan, district-level and field reporting environments that sit at a considerable remove from the institutional resources, legal support networks, and media solidarity mechanisms available in larger urban centers. This geographic profile is analytically significant. It shifts the series' cumulative documentation away from metropolitan risk environments and toward the under-examined vulnerabilities of journalists operating in smaller localities, where power asymmetries between reporters and the actors they cover are most acute.

Across all three cases, the urban-rural distinction that characterized earlier editions is complicated by a more precise finding: it is not merely rurality that determines risk, but the degree to which local power structures like industrial, criminal, or political are able to operate without meaningful oversight or accountability. Environmental reporting on land encroachment, wildlife trafficking, and industrial pollution tends to implicate actors with significant local leverage, and it is precisely in settings where that leverage is least checked by institutional counterweights that journalists face the greatest exposure.

The absence of timely and effective institutional response remains a defining and recurring concern across all geographic contexts documented in this series.

4.3 Accountability and Legal Protections

Despite the existence of legal frameworks designed to protect journalists including the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021), significant implementation gaps persist. None of the cases documented in this edition reflect a proactive protective response, a formal investigation into reported threats, or any accountability for those alleged to have carried out intimidation.

Notably, the cases in this edition did not produce formal complaints at all, a departure from earlier editions in which legal proceedings, though often wielded against journalists rather than in their defence, were at least initiated. Here, the absence of complaints reflects not an absence of harm but a rational calculation by affected journalists that formal recourse offers insufficient protection and may invite further retaliation. This dynamic points to a deeper institutional failure: when journalists consistently opt against engaging available legal mechanisms, it signals that those mechanisms have lost credibility as protective instruments in the eyes of those they are designed to serve.

The cases also illuminate the inadequacy of existing frameworks in addressing economic coercion and editorial interference as forms of journalist intimidation. The Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act and related provisions speak primarily to physical threats and legal harassment; they offer little to a journalist whose newsroom has been financially pressured into suppressing his story and professionally isolating him into resignation. This gap in the legal framework warrants explicit policy attention.

The absence of any investigative or enforcement response to field-level threats including direct physical confrontation and threats to destroy recording equipment, further reinforces a perception of impunity among non-state actors engaged in environmental exploitation. This gap endangers individual journalists and also undermines the broader enforcement of environmental regulations, judicial directives, and ecological governance commitments. Where those responsible for environmental harm can suppress its documentation without consequence, the accountability chain that connects journalism to policy response is severed at its first link.

4.4 Impact on Journalism and Public Discourse

The cumulative effect of economic coercion, criminal network intimidation, physical obstruction, and the editorial suppression documented in this edition extends well beyond the individual journalists affected. The cases presented here point to a specific and measurable narrowing of environmental reporting in precisely the localities and on precisely the subjects where public-interest journalism is most needed.

In smaller, under-resourced media environments, the silencing of one journalist carries disproportionate consequences for the breadth and depth of local environmental coverage.

The normalization of intimidation as a tool of environmental governance captures also carries generational implications. Where investigative environmental reporting is visibly costly, professionally, financially, and physically and where institutional protection is absent or ineffective, younger journalists are unlikely to pursue it. Over time, this produces not merely individual acts of self-censorship but a structural retreat from accountability journalism in sectors central to sustainable development, including land governance, wildlife protection, and industrial regulation.

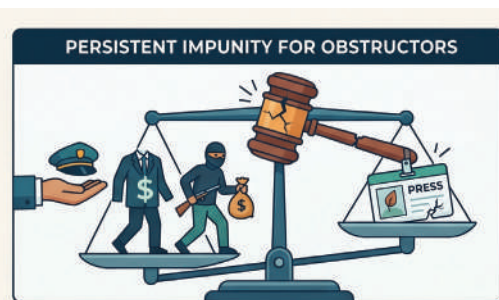
Pakistan's accelerating climate vulnerability makes this contraction particularly consequential. Accurate, independent reporting on flood encroachments, ecological degradation, and environmental health impacts is not peripheral to public welfare, it is a prerequisite for informed community response and effective policy intervention. When that reporting is suppressed, the communities most exposed to environmental harm lose a critical channel through which their experience can be documented, communicated, and acted upon.

4.5 Comparative Observations: Edition I and Edition II

Read alongside the first and second editions, the cases in this report indicate both the persistence of established threat patterns and the emergence of new dimensions of risk that warrant explicit recognition in the series' evolving analytical framework.

Across three editions, the following patterns are now consistently documented:

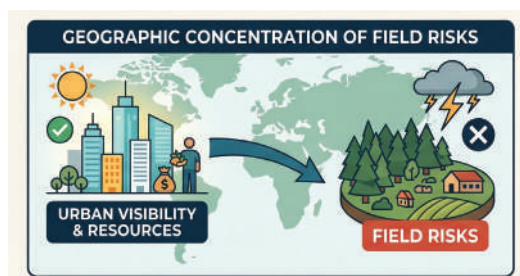
- ◆ Persistent impunity for those who intimidate, threaten, or obstruct environmental journalists, whether state-adjacent, corporate, or criminal in character.



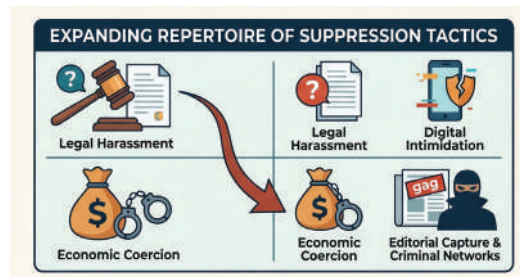
- ◆ A consistent and rational preference among affected journalists for non-reporting of threats, reflecting a collapse of confidence in available protective mechanisms



◆ The geographic concentration of the most severe and structurally entrenched risks in district-level and field reporting environments, away from the relative visibility and institutional resources of major urban centers

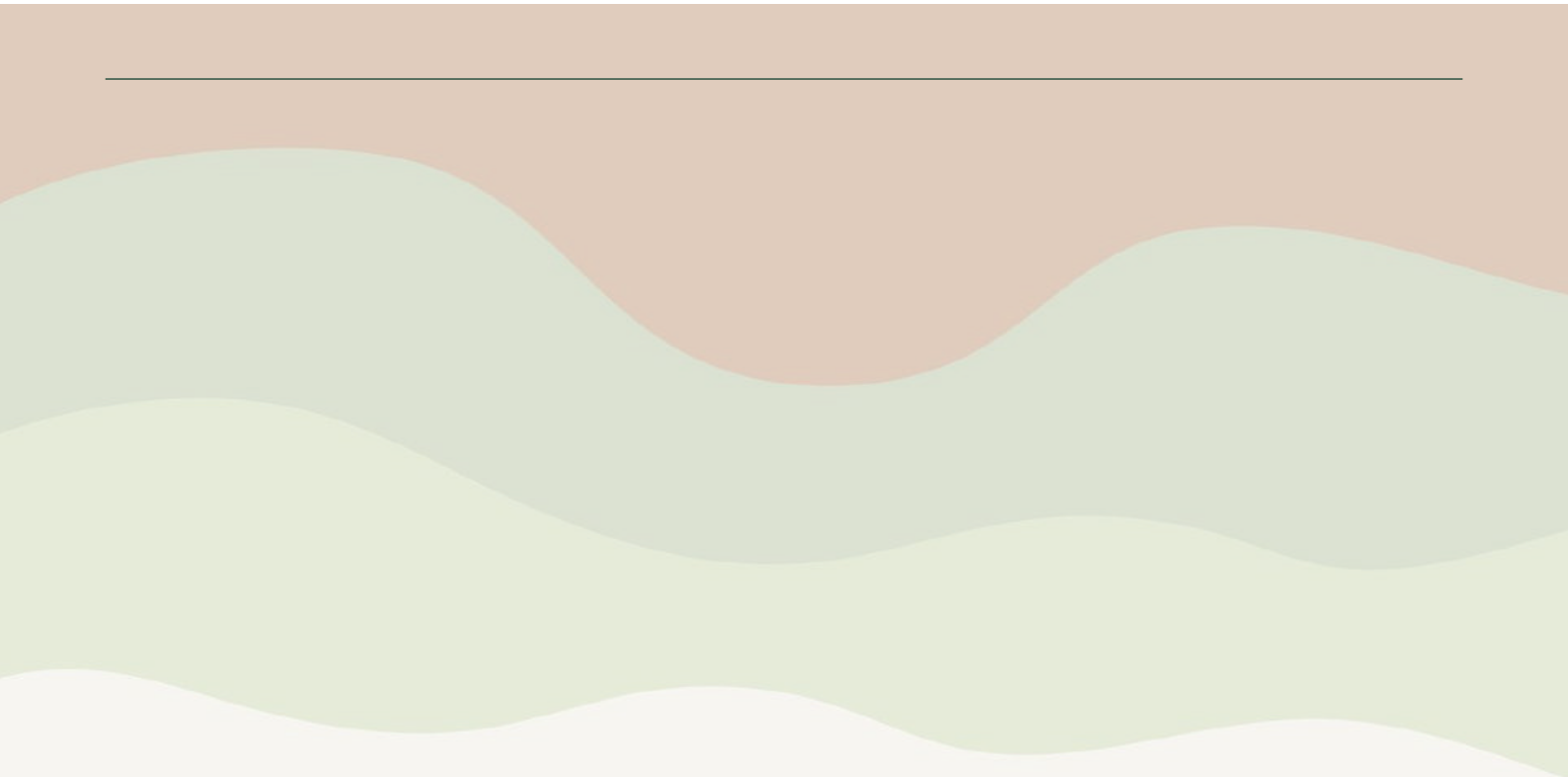


◆ The expanding repertoire of suppression tactics, from legal harassment and digital intimidation in earlier editions to economic coercion, editorial capture, and criminal network intimidation in this edition.



This edition also introduces a finding not prominently documented in earlier editions: the institutional newsroom as a vector of censorship. Where editorial management acts under external financial pressure to suppress reporting and isolate journalists, the threat environment becomes internal as well as external and existing journalist protection frameworks, designed primarily to address external actors, offer limited recourse.

Cumulatively, nine documented cases across three editions present a coherent and evidence-based picture of structural vulnerability. The pattern is sufficiently established to move advocacy beyond individual case response toward systemic reform of legal frameworks, institutional accountability mechanisms, and the economic conditions that render small media organizations susceptible to commercial pressure. Sustained monitoring, comparative documentation, and coordinated advocacy remain essential tools for generating the evidentiary foundation that such reform requires.



Chapter 5:

Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The three cases documented in this third edition of *Monitoring, Documentation, and Analysis of Threats Against Environmental Journalists in Pakistan*, read alongside the six cases established in preceding editions, present a consolidated and evidence-based account of the conditions under which environmental journalism is practiced in Pakistan. The cumulative picture is one of structural vulnerability, not exceptional or isolated incidents of intimidation, but a functioning system of suppression in which economic, criminal, institutional, and physical pressures operate in concert to foreclose accountability reporting on environmental governance, ecological crimes, and industrial misconduct.

Several conclusions can be drawn with confidence from the evidence assembled across this series.

First, the threat environment facing environmental journalists in Pakistan is diversifying. Earlier editions documented legal harassment and digital intimidation as primary risk categories. This edition adds economic coercion and editorial capture, criminal network intimidation, and field-level physical obstruction as documented and distinct mechanisms of suppression. The expanding repertoire of tactics reflects the adaptability of those who seek to suppress environmental reporting and underscores the inadequacy of protection frameworks that address only the most visible forms of threat.

Second, geography is a determinant of risk. The cases in this edition, drawn from northwestern regions, confirm that journalists operating in district-level and field environments face a qualitatively distinct threat landscape from those based in major urban centers. Institutional support, legal assistance, media solidarity, and public visibility, factors that provide partial protection in metropolitan contexts are largely absent in smaller localities. In these environments, the power asymmetry between journalists and the actors they cover is most pronounced, and the consequences of intimidation are most durable.

Third, self-censorship is now a documented and systemic outcome of the threat environment, not a marginal or individual response. The cases in this edition demonstrate that intimidation need not produce a single dramatic incident to be effective sustained pressure, credible threats, and the demonstrable absence of institutional protection are sufficient to produce voluntary reporting restrictions that persist long after the immediate threat has passed.

Fourth, institutional failure is consistent and cross-cutting. Across all nine cases documented in this series, no formal complaint produced a protective or accountability response. No perpetrator faced legal consequence. No media organization provided meaningful institutional support to an affected journalist. This consistency is not coincidental, it reflects structural deficits in legal implementation, institutional capacity, and professional solidarity that cannot be addressed through individual resilience alone.

Fifth, the suppression of environmental journalism carries consequences that extend beyond press freedom. In a country facing acute and accelerating climate vulnerability, the silencing of reporters who document flood encroachments, industrial pollution, wildlife trafficking, and ecological degradation directly undermines the public's capacity to understand and respond to environmental risk. The cost of impunity for crimes against environmental journalists is ultimately borne by the communities whose environment is being degraded and whose story is not being told.

5.2 Recommendations

In light of the findings and analysis presented across the first, second and third editions of this publication, the following recommendations are proposed:

5.2.1 – For Government and Law Enforcement

- Enforce existing journalist protection legislation. The Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021) must move from legislative text to operational practice. The Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals (CPJMP) should establish clear protocols for receiving, investigating, and responding to complaints filed by journalists facing threats, with defined timelines and accountability for inaction.
- Investigate threats against journalists as a priority. Field-level intimidation, criminal network threats, and economic coercion directed at journalists should be treated as serious offences warranting proactive investigation, not merely reactive response. The current pattern, in which perpetrators face no legal consequence while journalists bear the full burden of risk, must be addressed as a matter of rule of law, not merely press freedom.
- Review the application of cybercrime legislation to journalistic expression. The use of PECA provisions against public-interest reporting, documented in earlier editions of this series, requires legislative and judicial scrutiny. Clear statutory and regulatory safeguards should be established to prevent the criminalisation of reporting on environmental governance, corporate misconduct, and public-interest matters.
- Establish anti-SLAPP provisions. Strategic litigation against journalists and media organizations used as a tool of intimidation rather than a genuine legal remedy should be curtailed through procedural reforms that enable early dismissal of vexatious suits and the award of costs against abusive claimants.
- Extend protection frameworks to address economic coercion. Existing journalist safety legislation does not adequately address the suppression of reporting through financial pressure on media organizations. Regulatory frameworks governing media ownership, advertising relationships, and editorial independence should be strengthened to reduce the structural vulnerability that makes editorial capture possible.

5.2.2 – For Media Institutions and Journalist Associations

- Develop and enforce editorial independence policies. Media organizations, particularly those operating in smaller markets, must establish clear internal policies that insulate editorial decisions from commercial pressure. Owners and managers who suppress reporting under external financial inducement should be subject to professional accountability mechanisms.
- Provide institutional support to journalists facing threats. Affected journalists should not bear the consequences of intimidation alone. Media institutions and journalist associations should establish accessible support mechanisms, legal assistance, psychological support, temporary security provisions, and professional solidarity for journalists who face threats in the course of their work.
- Invest in journalist safety training, particularly for field and district-level reporters. Safety training, digital security awareness, and threat assessment capacity should be systematically extended to journalists operating outside major urban centers, where risks are highest and support is most limited.
- Document and report threats publicly. Journalist associations should maintain and publish records of threats against their members, contributing to the cumulative evidentiary base needed for advocacy and legal reform. Silence about threats, whether by journalists themselves or by their professional associations, reinforces the impunity of perpetrators.
- Strengthen protections for freelance journalists. Freelance and regional reporters, who feature prominently in this series' case studies, lack the institutional backing available to staff journalists. Associations should extend membership benefits, legal support, and advocacy coverage to freelance journalists working in high-risk environments.

5.2.3 – For Civil Society and International Partners

- Sustain and expand monitoring and documentation efforts. The evidence base generated by systematic monitoring, such as this series, is essential for advocacy, policy engagement, and accountability. Civil society organizations and international partners should support the expansion of structured monitoring to additional regions and reporting contexts across Pakistan.
- Support legal aid and litigation support for affected journalists. Civil society organizations should develop or strengthen legal aid mechanisms capable of providing timely and effective support to journalists facing criminal proceedings, civil litigation, or other legal pressure arising from their reporting.
- Engage international accountability mechanisms. Cases of journalist intimidation in Pakistan should be brought to the attention of relevant UN mechanisms, including the UNESCO Director-General's condemnation procedure for attacks on journalists, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and the Universal Periodic Review process. International attention does not substitute for domestic accountability but contributes to the pressure environment in which reform becomes more likely.
- Support the economic sustainability of independent media. The vulnerability of small media organizations to commercial pressure, a central finding of this edition, is in part a function of economic precarity. International development partners and civil society funders should consider media economic sustainability, including diversified revenue models and editorial independence support, as a component of journalist safety programming.
- Promote regional knowledge exchange on environmental journalism protection. Mechanisms for sharing documentation practices, legal strategies, and advocacy approaches across South Asian countries facing comparable threat environments can strengthen the collective response to the suppression of environmental reporting regionally.

5.3 The Way Forward

This series was conceived on the premise that isolated documentation of threats against journalists is insufficient, that what is required is cumulative, comparative, and analytically grounded monitoring capable of revealing structural patterns and generating the evidentiary foundation for systemic reform. Three editions in that premise have been borne out. The nine cases documented across this series are not read as a collection of individual misfortunes. They read as a coherent account of a functioning system of suppression, one that operates through diverse mechanisms, across varied geographic contexts, and with consistent institutional impunity.

The fourth and final edition of this annual cycle will complete the series' first year of continuous monitoring. GNMI's priorities for that edition, and for the broader initiative going forward, are threefold. First, to continue expanding the geographic and thematic scope of documentation, ensuring that the monitoring framework captures threats across Pakistan's diverse regional media environments and across the full range of environmental reporting subjects. Second, to deepen engagement with affected journalists, media organizations, and legal advocates to move from documentation toward actionable advocacy, translating evidentiary findings into concrete inputs for legal reform, institutional strengthening, and policy dialogue. Third, to sustain and develop the analytical framework of this series so that it evolves from quarterly case documentation into a recognized national resource for understanding and addressing the threat environment facing environmental journalists in Pakistan.

Protecting environmental journalists is not an end in itself. It is a condition for transparency, accountability, and informed public discourse without which environmental governance cannot function, and environmental justice cannot be pursued.



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