

Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action

Monitoring, Documentation, and Analysis of **Threats Against Environmental Journalists** in Pakistan



First Edition

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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 report forms part of GNMI's ongoing efforts to support journalists working in sensitive and high-risk reporting environments, particularly those covering environmental and climate-related issues. As the impacts of the climate crisis intensify, the contribution of environmental journalists has become indispensable; they serve as a critical bridge between scientific knowledge, public awareness, and policy discourse, often undertaking this work under considerable pressure and in the face of significant threats.

This publication is part of the project "Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action," supported by UNESCO Global Media Defense Fund (GMDF). It emerges from GNMI's commitment to uphold press freedom and protect those who courageously report on environmental issues. By documenting and analyzing threats against environmental journalists, this report captures the complex challenges that reporters and media outlets face in the line of duty and advocates for stronger institutional, legal, and societal mechanisms to ensure their safety.

Through this initiative, we are committed to creating a more informed, transparent, and resilient media environment where journalists can work freely and safely to advance sustainable development and climate awareness. This publication also represents GNMI's contribution to global efforts advocating for the protection of journalists, aligning with global frameworks such as the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

This publication stands as part of a broader global movement to defend those who bear witness to the truth in the face of rising threats and intimidation. Each account included here reflects an act of courage, a journalist choosing to report on the environment despite the risks driven by a sense of duty to the public and the planet. Their struggles mirror those of countless others worldwide who face harassment, censorship, or violence simply for revealing how human actions are reshaping our shared ecosystems. It serves as a national monitoring framework and, as a moral and collective call to action; urging governments, policymakers, civil society, and media institutions to uphold press freedom and stand in solidarity with those who courageously expose environmental degradation and advocate for climate justice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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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
AC	Assistant Commissioner
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FIR	First Information Report
GNMI	Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation
GMDF	Global Media Defense Fund
LEA	Law Enforcement Agencies
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PECA	Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act
RSF	Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontieres)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Executive Summary

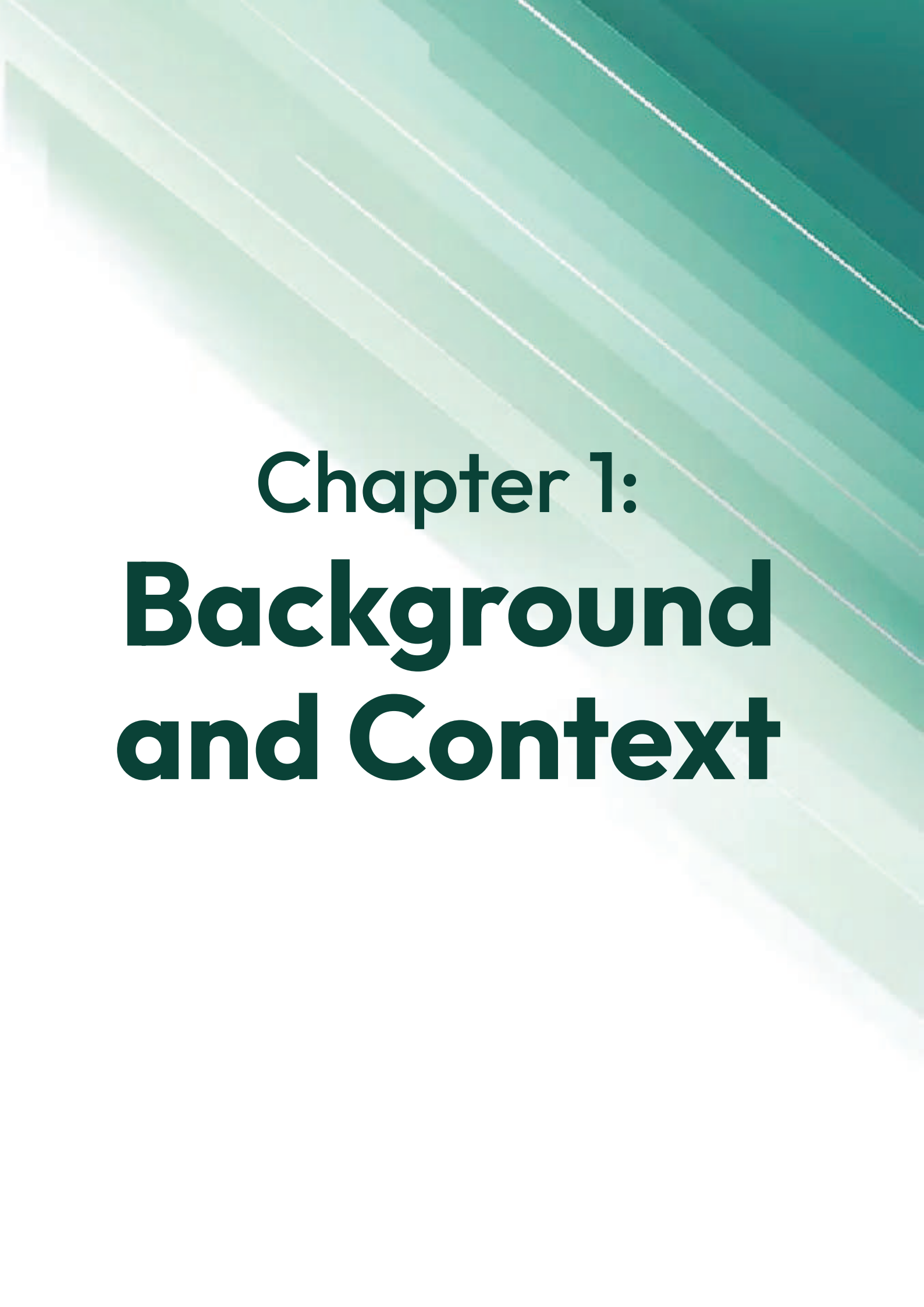
This first quarterly edition of the publication documents and analyses verified cases of threats, harassment, and intimidation faced by environmental journalists across Pakistan. Developed by the Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation (GNMI) with the support of UNESCO Global Media Defense Fund (GMDF), the publication contributes to global efforts to monitor, prevent, and respond to crimes against journalists. It aims to strengthen press freedom, promote journalist safety, and advance the principles of transparency, accountability, and environmental justice, and values central to both democratic governance and sustainable development.

The findings presented in this report reveal an alarming escalation in multidimensional threats to environmental journalists. Legal harassment, digital intimidation, and social or institutional pressures have become increasingly prevalent, creating a climate of fear that undermines independent reporting. The three case studies featured in this edition exemplify these challenges: a journalist in Sindh threatened after reporting on gendered vulnerabilities in flood-affected communities; a reporter in South Punjab targeted through a fabricated cybercrime case for investigating illegal logging and environmental misconduct; and an Islamabad-based journalist facing legal and economic retaliation following investigative reporting involving influential actors. These illustrate the intersecting risks of political influence, weak institutional protections, and a growing culture of impunity.

The analysis indicates that local journalists, particularly those in remote or politically sensitive regions, bear the brunt of these risks. The misuse of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) has emerged as a recurring mechanism to suppress critical reporting, while gender-based intimidation further isolates women reporters from the field. At the national level, the absence of effective enforcement of the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021) has deepened mistrust between the media and state institutions. Despite Pakistan's commitments under international frameworks such as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UNESCO's UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, implementation gaps remain widespread. The cumulative effect is a chilling impact on press freedom, increased self-censorship, and reduced public access to essential environmental information.

This report reaffirms that the protection of journalists is inseparable from the pursuit of climate justice and sustainable governance. Without safeguarding those who document environmental degradation and advocate for accountability, broader development environmental goals cannot be achieved. It calls for urgent, coordinated action by government agencies, media institutions, civil society, and international partners to strengthen legal safeguards, reform laws misused for censorship, and institutionalize rapid response mechanisms for journalist protection.

Looking ahead, GNMI will continue to document, analyse, and disseminate quarterly reports to sustain national and international attention on the safety of environmental journalists. Each upcoming edition will build on this foundation, expanding the database, deepening regional insights, and amplifying advocacy for systemic reform, so that the voices reporting from the frontlines of Pakistan's environmental crises are heard, protected, and empowered.

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Chapter 1:

Background

and Context

State of Environmental Journalism in Pakistan

Environmental journalism and climate reporting in Pakistan has emerged as a paramount field within the broader media landscape, gaining prominence alongside the intensifying impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. Journalists continue to report on catastrophic floods, droughts and disasters and have produced coverage on deforestation, water scarcity, and air pollution; they have played an increasingly critical role in shaping public understanding of environmental issues and their socioeconomic consequences.

Despite its growing relevance, environmental journalism remains a specialized and often underrepresented area within mainstream media. Limited institutional support, scarce training opportunities, and the dominance of political and crime-related reporting have historically marginalized environmental stories. However, a new generation of journalists, motivated by the urgency of the climate crisis and the need for accountability in environmental governance, continue to bring these issues to the forefront of national dialogue.

By documenting the effects of environmental mismanagement, climate-induced disasters, and the human toll of ecological neglect, these journalists bridge the gap between scientific evidence, policy discourse, and public awareness. Their work contributes directly to national policymaking and establishes greater civic engagement in sustainable development and climate resilience. In this context, environmental journalism functions as a medium of information and serve as an accountability mechanism, encouraging institutions, industries, and policymakers to uphold environmental stewardship of Pakistan's natural resources.

Challenges and Risks Faced by Environmental Journalists

While environmental journalists fulfill an essential public service, they often operate under precarious and unsafe conditions. Like their peers in other fields, they face common threats such as censorship, intimidation, legal harassment, and, in some cases, physical violence. These challenges are particularly acute for those reporting from remote or conflict-affected areas, where governance structures may be limited and competing interests around natural resources are present.

Journalists covering issues such as illegal logging in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab, wildlife trafficking in Sindh and Punjab, illegal mining in Balochistan and KP, or industrial pollution (Karachi and megacities) often encounter direct pressure from influential actors attempting to restrict reporting of environmental wrongdoing or misconduct. In certain instances, threats extend beyond professional interference to personal safety, resulting in harassment, surveillance, pressured silence or withdrawal from reporting.

Gender-specific risks also persist. Women journalists frequently experience gender-based discrimination, online abuse, and social stigma, which increase the professional and psychological pressures associated with their work. Male journalists, particularly those reporting from rural areas, face unique barriers including community-level intimidation and the absence of institutional protection. The intersection of gender, geography, and occupational vulnerability demands a nuanced understanding of safety and support mechanisms for all journalists engaging in environmental reporting.

Rationale for the Report

The establishment of a systematic monitoring mechanism for documenting attacks and threats against environmental journalists stems from the pressing need to address gaps in protection and institutional response. Despite Pakistan's growing environmental challenges and its active media community, there is currently no consolidated database or regular reporting structure dedicated to tracking violations against journalists working in this field.

This report responds to that need by creating a structured documentation process that records, verifies, and analyzes incidents of harassment, intimidation, and violence targeting environmental journalists. The initiative aligns with international frameworks on human rights and press freedom, including the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, as well as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

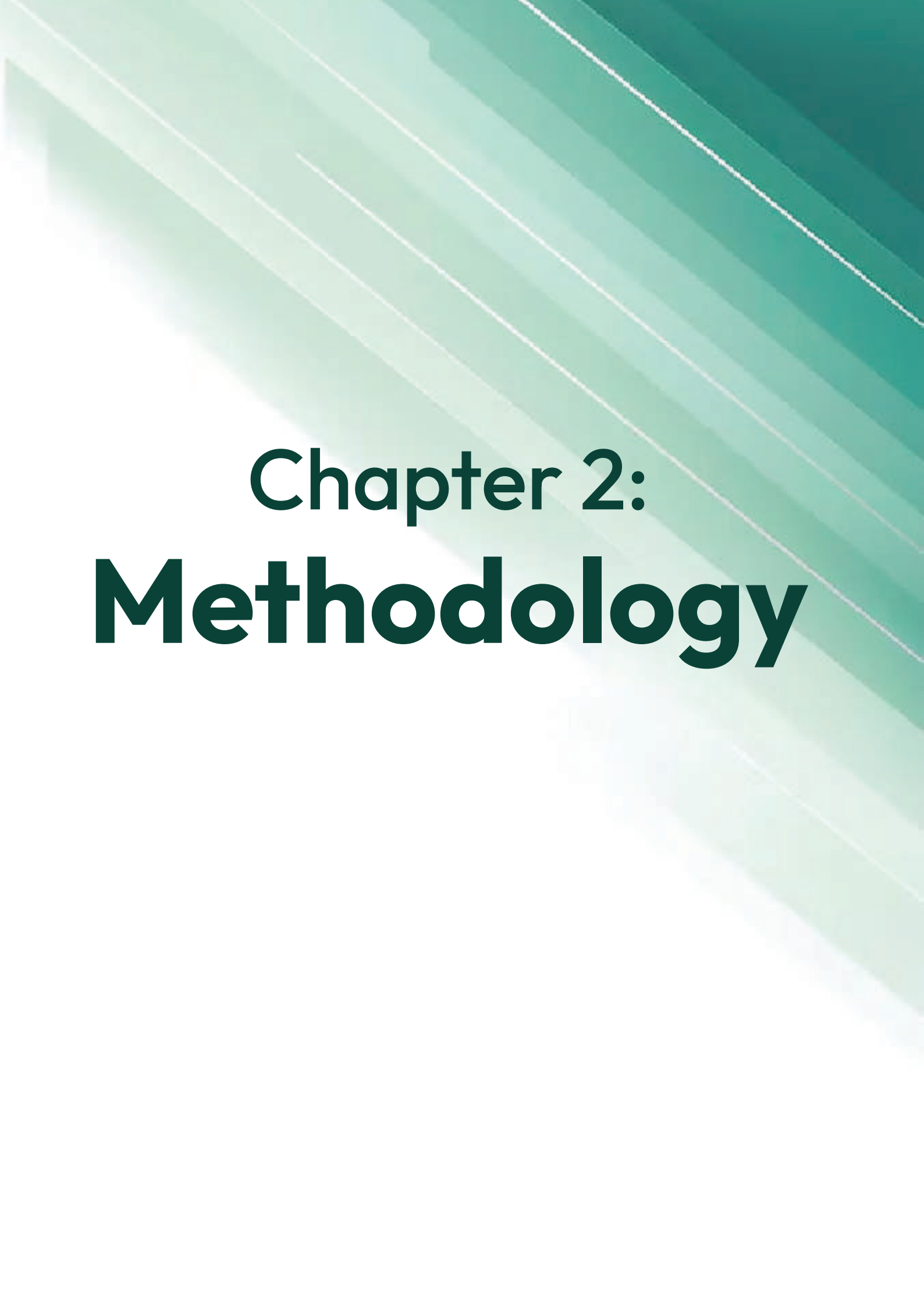
This report incorporates national monitoring within these international commitments and contributes to the global effort to promote journalist safety and strengthen democratic accountability. It also complements Pakistan's obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16, which calls for inclusive societies, access to justice, and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

Nature of the Publication

This research publication represents the first edition of a quarterly publication series developed under the project "Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action." The series is designed to document and analyze patterns of threats, harassment, and incidents of interference or intimidation against environmental journalists across Pakistan, providing an evidence-based foundation for advocacy and policy reform.

Each quarterly report will build on the preceding one by ensuring thematic continuity and progressive depth of analysis. The current edition includes three case studies, all drawn from verified incidents involving working journalists who have faced threats, harassment, or intimidation while reporting on issues such as natural disasters, deforestation, environmental harm or degradation, and the impacts of climate change on local communities.

To protect the safety and privacy of those involved, no personal identifiers are disclosed. Instead, each case study focuses on the nature of the incident, its implications for journalistic work, and the subsequent institutional or legal response. . Collectively, these cases offer critical insights into the conditions under which environmental journalism is practiced in Pakistan and underscore the ongoing need for strengthened protection mechanisms

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Chapter 2:

Methodology

Research Approach

The methodology adopted for this publication combines both primary and secondary data collection techniques to ensure accuracy, ethical rigor, and reliability of findings. The research framework was designed to capture the multifaceted nature of risks faced by environmental journalists in Pakistan, incorporating both individual experiences and institutional perspectives.

The approach is guided by principles of ethical documentation, confidentiality, and verification. Special attention was given to ensuring that all information presented in this report was collected, validated, and analyzed in accordance with established standards for monitoring and reporting on press freedom and journalist safety, as recognized by international human rights frameworks and UNESCO's own guidelines on the safety of journalists.

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.

2.1 Primary Data Collection

Primary data was gathered through in-depth interviews with three environmental journalists, including those engaged in investigative reporting whose experiences form the basis of the case studies presented in this publication. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to allow flexibility in capturing both factual and experiential dimensions of each case.

The selection of participants prioritized journalists from remote and underreported regions of Pakistan, where risks related to environmental coverage are often compounded by limited institutional support, visibility challenges, and constrained protection mechanisms. The inclusion of diverse geographic perspectives provides a more representative understanding of the challenges faced by journalists operating outside major urban centers.

During the interviews, respondents shared detailed accounts of risks, pressures, and forms of harassment encountered while reporting on issues such as natural disasters, deforestation, environmental degradation, and climate change impacts on local communities. To ensure support, each narrative was cross-verified through available documentary evidence, corroborative testimonies, and secondary data sources, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings.

Ethical considerations guided all interactions with participants. Personal identifiers have been withheld to safeguard privacy confidentiality, and security, and all information has been presented in a manner that prevents retribution or further risk to those involved.

2.2 Secondary Data Collection

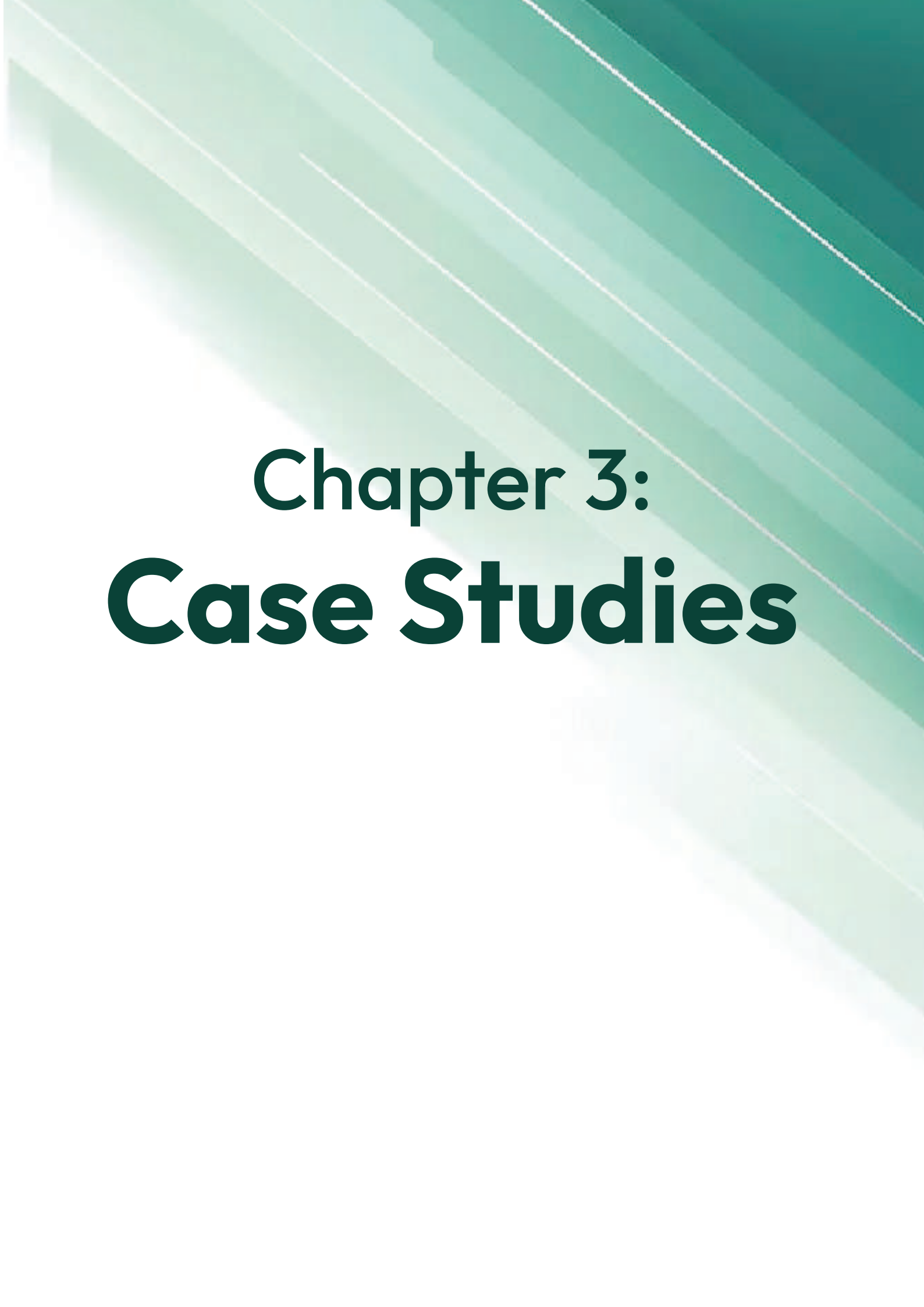
Secondary data collection supported the primary research by establishing a broader contextual framework and verification mechanism. The project team conducted an extensive review of national and international sources, including:

- Reports from journalist protection organizations and press freedom bodies, both domestic and global.
- Publications and alerts issued by UNESCO, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).
- Records and statements from local press clubs, media associations, and civil society organizations.
- Online and archival news reports documenting relevant incidents of threats, harassment and incidents of interference or coercion.

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.

Each record underwent a process of multi-source verification, ensuring that only verified or credibly documented cases were included in the analysis. Through this approach, the research is committed to accuracy, ethical responsibility, and alignment with international standards on data integrity in monitoring violations and risks to journalists.



Chapter 3:

Case Studies

Selection Criteria

The case studies presented in this report were selected through a systematic and transparent process to ensure representativeness, accuracy, and ethical integrity. Each case was verified through methodology mentioned above. Selection was guided by the principles of geographic diversity, gender representation, and varied threat typologies, allowing this report to capture a comprehensive picture of the risks environmental journalists face across Pakistan. Cases were drawn from both urban and rural contexts, with particular attention to under-reported regions where institutional support is limited.

Types of Case Studies Included

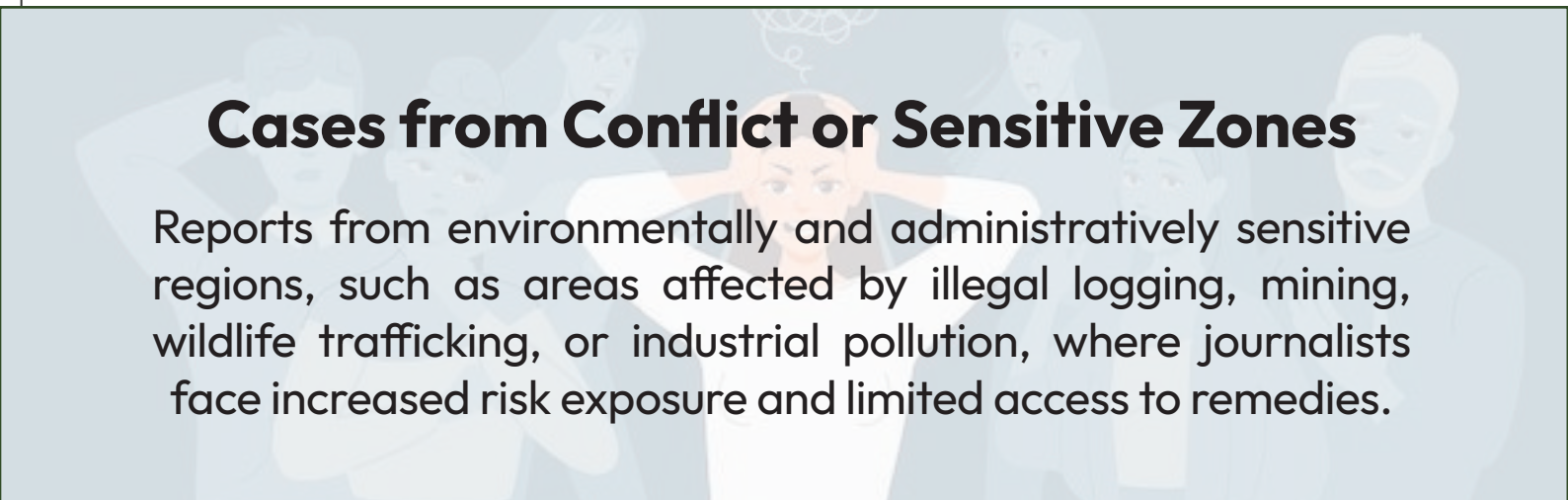
The following categories outline the types of incidents included in this and future editions of the publication. The categories highlighted in grey represent those shortlisted for inclusion in the first edition, reflecting the principal forms of threats and violations documented through GNMI's monitoring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

Physical Attacks and Harassment

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

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



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.



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.



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

Presentation Format

Each case study in this chapter follows a standardized presentation format to ensure clarity, comparability, and methodological rigor. This consistent structure facilitates cross-referencing across editions and supports the development of longitudinal data for policy and advocacy use.

The following elements are included for each case:

- Pseudonyms (to protect the identity of the journalist)
- Date and location of the incident
- Nature of attack or threat
- Perpetrator(s) or suspected parties
- Immediate impact on the journalists and their professional activities
- Legal, advocacy, or institutional follow-up
- Current status or outcome of the case

Introduction to the Case Studies (First 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. 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. The accounts presented here are anonymized to protect individuals' safety but retain the factual essence of their experiences, offering insight into the patterns of intimidation, resilience, and professional courage that define environmental journalism today.

Case Study 01: Reporting on Child Marriage and Gendered Vulnerabilities in Post-Flood Sindh

Pseudonym:	Reporter A
Date and Location:	September 2022, Sindh province, Pakistan
Nature of Attack/Threat:	After publishing an investigative report on child marriages in post-flood affected areas, the journalist began receiving telephone calls and WhatsApp messages that were perceived as threatening.
Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:	Influential local figures and community members alleged that the story was causing dishonour and shame for their community.
Immediate Impact:	The journalist, a seasoned environmental reporter with decades of experience, faced sustained pressure that raised concerns for personal safety and led to increased caution and self-censorship on sensitive issues.
Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:	The story was carried by international media outlet, and journalist associations and human rights defenders expressed solidarity. However, the provincial government and law-enforcement did not provide effective protective measures or pursue concrete action against those issuing the threats.
Current Status/Outcome:	The reporter remains active but continues to operate under elevated risk in an environment where formal protections for journalists, especially women, remain limited. The case highlights the intersecting vulnerabilities of disaster-affected communities, gendered threats, and the lack of effective consequences for those responsible for issuing threats.

Narrative

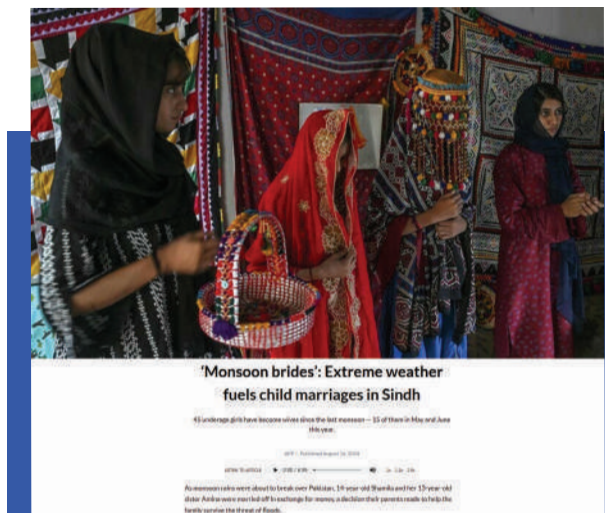
In September 2022, Reporter A, a veteran journalist with over two decades of experience in environmental and social reporting, published an investigative feature for an international media outlet highlighting reported increases in child marriages in flood-affected areas of Sindh, Pakistan. The report documented how widespread displacement, economic distress, and social insecurity following the 2022 floods had led some families to marry off their young daughters, framing the issue within broader themes of gender justice and post-disaster recovery.

Soon after the story's publication, Reporter A began receiving phone calls and WhatsApp messages perceived as threatening from local landholders and influential community figures. These actors accused the journalist of bringing “dishonor” and “shame” to their community and demanded that the story be taken down. The pressure was persistent and had the effect of discouraging further critical reporting on sensitive gender and cultural issues.

While the journalist's employer and professional networks, both local and international, expressed solidarity and public support, no formal protection mechanisms were activated by the provincial or federal authorities. Law-enforcement agencies did not take formal action in response to the reported threats, leaving the journalist to manage personal security largely independently. This incident stresses the systemic vulnerabilities faced by journalists, particularly women, who report on gender-based violence and cultural taboos in crisis-affected settings. Despite institutional support from media and human rights circles, Reporter A continues to operate in a high-risk environment marked by limited effective institutional protection and growing pressures on rights-based journalism. Her case illustrates the ongoing need for strengthened protection frameworks, effective legal remedies, and psychosocial support for journalists covering humanitarian and gender-sensitive issues in Pakistan.

Contextual Note:

The floods of 2022 severely affected large parts of Sindh, destroying agriculture and livelihoods. Research shows an increase in child and forced marriages in the aftermath of such disasters in the region.



<https://www.dawn.com/news/1852629>

<https://aa.unfpa.org/multiple-crises-facing-millions-women-and-girls-pakistan-reels-worst-flood-its-history>

Case Study 02: Reporting on Environmental Misconduct and Subsequent Legal Challenges in South Punjab

Pseudonym:	Journalist B
Date and Location:	Mid-2024 South Punjab, Pakistan
Nature of Attack/Threat:	Legal action in the form of an FIR under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) following investigative reporting on alleged illegal logging and environmental misconduct in the forest department
Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:	Local administrative authorities and actors allegedly linked to forest-department irregularities.
Immediate Impact:	Journalist B was presented before court after registration of the FIR. Legal proceedings initiated, causing disruption to reporting work and raising broader concerns about press freedom in the region. According to Freedom Network report, such use of PECA against journalists is part of a growing trend in Punjab.
Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:	Local journalist bodies and media workers' unions stood in solidarity. The court subsequently discharged Journalist B and ordered release. However, the case underscores the chilling effect that legal actions can have on investigative journalism.
Current Status/Outcome:	Journalist B remains free but faces ongoing legal uncertainty and a climate of pressure. The case contributes to broader calls for safe-journalism environments and reform of misuse of cyber-laws in Pakistan.

Narrative

In mid-2024, Journalist B, a local reporter from South Punjab, published an investigative story alleging irregularities within the provincial forest department. Drawing on firsthand accounts and community sources, the report suggested that certain officials were allegedly facilitating illegal tree-cutting operations and benefiting from deforestation across the district. The story gained traction on local media channels and social media platforms, prompting public debate on environmental degradation, pressures on natural resources, and concerns regarding enforcement by local authorities.

Shortly after the report's publication, the journalist faced administrative action. Local administrative authorities filed a First Information Report (FIR) against him under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), accusing him of disseminating “false information” and “defaming public officials.” This legal action drew widespread condemnation from journalist unions, civil-society organizations, and press-freedom advocates who viewed it as an effort that could discourage environmental reporting and investigative journalism in South Punjab.

After a brief detention, the journalist was presented before the court, which discharged him of all charges and ordered his immediate release, citing the absence of sufficient grounds for prosecution. Media associations and human-rights defenders rallied in his support, framing the incident as part of a broader trend of weaponizing cyber-laws against journalists.

Although freed, Journalist B continues to face professional uncertainty and security concerns. His case reflects concerns about narrowing civic space for local reporters investigating environmental and governance issues. It also highlights the ongoing need for legal reforms to prevent the misuse of PECA provisions against journalists, ensuring that laws designed to protect digital spaces are not repurposed to suppress press freedom.

Contextual Note:

Recent research by Freedom Network reveals that journalists in North and Central Punjab face a rapidly escalating climate of legal pressure and intimidation, with at least 31 FIRs filed under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) in North Punjab alone in 2025—underscoring how cyber-laws are increasingly used as tools of censorship and control.

<https://www.fnpk.org/journalists-in-north-central-punjab-face-legal-intimidation-censorship-to-direct-harassment/>



Case Study 03: Threats and Legal Pressure Following Reporting on Alleged High-Level Misconduct

Pseudonym:	Journalist C
Date and Location:	December 2022 – January 2023; Islamabad, Pakistan
Nature of Attack/Threat:	Direct threats by representatives of the accused party, public calls for large-scale civil claims, and legal measures perceived as intimidating (summons and threats of criminal or civil action).
Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:	Representatives and legal agents associated with a major private developer implicated in the reporting; actors reportedly aligned with powerful figures referenced in international monitoring reports.
Immediate Impact:	The reporter received a threatening phone call from a representative of the implicated company warning of unspecified consequences” and urging deletion of social posts; the journalist was also summoned and faced public threats of a damages claim reportedly valued at approximately PKR 10 billion). The threats prompted public condemnation by press-freedom groups.
Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:	Press-freedom organisations and international monitors publicly condemned the threats and called on authorities uphold journalist safety protections; human-rights defenders issued joint communications urging protection and investigation into intimidation tactics used against the reporter. The company in question issued a public response denying the allegations; both the company response and the journalist’s rejoinder are recorded in public timelines.
Current Status/Outcome:	The case drew international attention and condemnation from media-freedom organisations, reinforcing calls for protective measures for journalists and for restraint from using legal or economic pressure to deter reporting . At the time of reporting by international monitors, the journalist continued to face legal pressure and public scrutiny while advocacy groups continued to press for his protection.

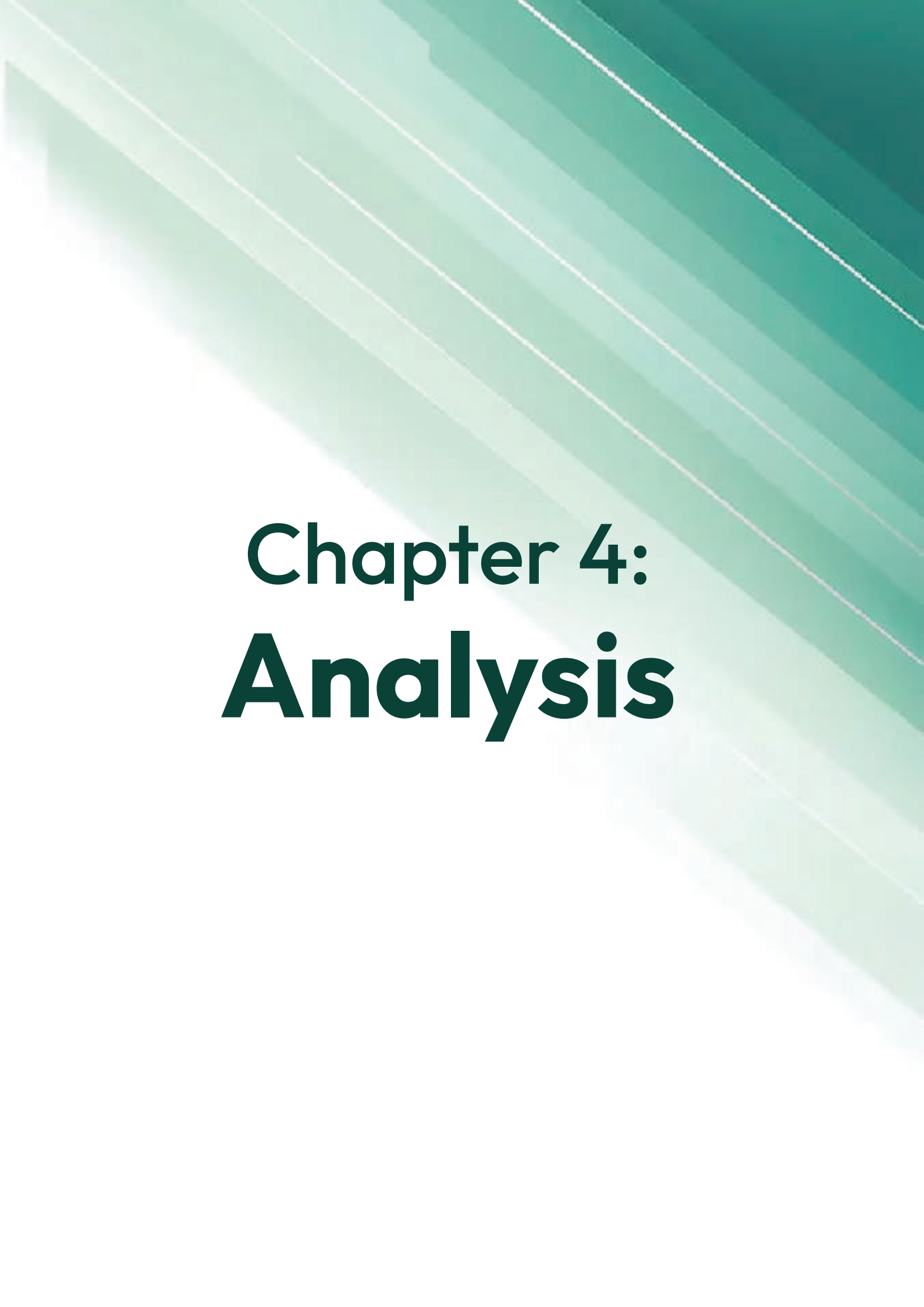
Narrative

In December 2022, Journalist C, an environmental journalist known for investigating climate-related and governance issues, published a report linking high-level public figures to alleged irregularities associated with a prominent real-estate developer. Previously, several other investigative reports by independent journalists had also documented environmental harm, including allegations of unlawful land acquisitions, extensive tree cutting, and degradation of local ecosystems associated with the developer's large-scale housing projects in Karachi and Lahore.

Within 24 hours of publication, the journalist received a threatening phone call from a representative of the developer, warning of unspecified measures if the story and related social media posts were not removed. Shortly thereafter, the developer's legal team signalled its intent to pursue substantial damages claims, which observers viewed as potentially discouraging further reporting.

The rapid escalation from publication to direct threats exemplified a growing pattern in Pakistan where powerful private and political actors have been observed applying pressure on environmental and investigative journalism through intimidation, legal harassment, and defamation suits. International press-freedom organizations swiftly condemned the threats and urged Pakistani authorities to ensure the journalist's safety, emphasizing that corporate or political influence should not undermine principles of transparency, accountability, and free expression.

Both the journalist and his media outlet stood by their reporting and issued a public rejoinder, while the developer released an official denial. The incident drew attention from international and local rights groups, which issued joint communications calling for non-interference in journalistic work and appropriate review of intimidation claims. While advocacy interventions helped raise awareness and pressure authorities to act, the episode underscores persistent gaps in journalist protection mechanisms in Pakistan, particularly for those reporting on governance and environmental harm. It also reflects the broader chilling effect of legal frameworks and economic leverage used to deter coverage of issues at the intersection of environment, governance, and public interest.

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Chapter 4:

Analysis

The cases documented in this first edition of the Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action report provide crucial insights into the current risk landscape faced by environmental journalists in Pakistan. The analysis below identifies emerging patterns, gaps in accountability mechanisms and the broader implications for journalism, governance, and public discourse.

Trends Over Time

4.1. Patterns in Types of Threats

Across the cases studied, a consistent pattern emerges: environmental journalism in Pakistan is increasingly met with multi-layered threats, spanning legal, physical, digital, and institutional forms of harassment.

- Legal harassment is a prominent trend, particularly through the use of cybercrime laws in ways that restrict journalistic activity such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), as seen in Case Study 2, where investigative reporting on illegal logging was met with legal action perceived as retaliatory.
- Direct threats and intimidation remain common, as observed in Case Study 1 and Case Study 3, where journalists reporting on socially or politically sensitive issues such as child marriage and high-level corruption, were subjected to personal threats, online abuse, and pressure.
- The digital dimension of these threats, including surveillance, cyberbullying, and online defamation, continues to grow as social media becomes an extension of journalistic work, often leaving reporters more exposed to harassment.

These overlapping forms of intimidation illustrate that threats to environmental journalists are rarely isolated incidents, they are part of a broader ecosystem of impunity, where various actors, including local power brokers, corporate entities, and state officials, converge to deter environmental scrutiny.

4.2. Geographic Hotspots

The incidents documented span Sindh, South Punjab, and Islamabad, reflecting both urban and rural contexts.

- In Sindh, threats are often tied to social and cultural sensitivities in post-disaster communities, where journalists exposing gender-based or rights-related issues face severe backlash from traditional power structures.
- In South Punjab, pressure has taken increasingly formal and institutional dimensions, with administrative authorities applying legal instruments in ways that restrict reporting.
- In Islamabad and other federal territories, journalists probing high-level corruption or alleged elite influence over natural resource use encounter well-organized campaigns of intimidation and defamation, reflecting the nexus between political influence and environmental exploitation.

4.3. Gender-Based Differences in Threats and Responses

The data reaffirms that women journalists face unique, intersecting vulnerabilities. In Case Study 1, the targeted intimidation of a female journalist reporting on post-flood child marriages demonstrates how gender intensifies risk exposure, through both social shaming and gendered digital harassment. In contrast, male journalists (Cases 2 and 3) primarily encountered institutional and legal forms of retaliation, including court summonses and public defamation. The distinction highlights pressing need for gender-sensitive protection frameworks, including psychosocial support, gender-aware law enforcement training, and solidarity networks for women journalists who operate in hostile environments.

Accountability and Response

A. Status of Investigations and Prosecutions

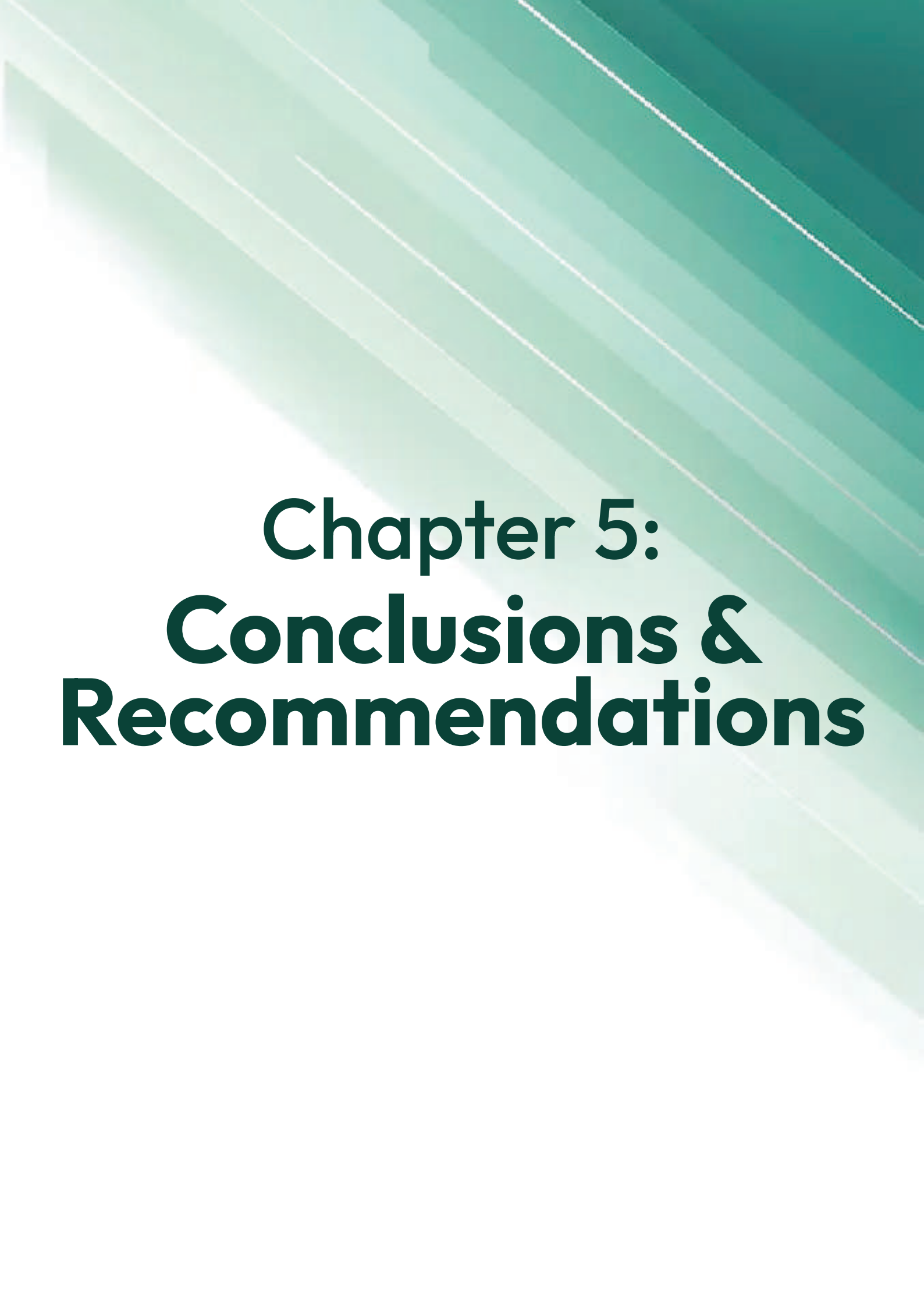
None of the cases reviewed for this report resulted in formal prosecution or state-led protection measures for the affected journalists. Law enforcement did not consistently register credible complaints or pursue investigations with due diligence. In Case 2, although the court discharged the journalist, no accountability mechanisms were activated in response to concerns about the use of legal measures in this case. Similarly, in Case 1, despite public solidarity from media organizations, local authorities did not intervene to prevent ongoing intimidation. The absence of legal recourse and institutional response contributes to a perception of impunity, where perpetrators, whether powerful individuals, institutions, or corporate actors, continue to act without consequence.

B. Effectiveness of Legal Protections

Pakistan's existing legal and policy frameworks, including the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021), remain under-implemented. Mechanisms for swift response, witness protection, and judicial redress are either inactive or inaccessible to journalists working in rural or informal media sectors. Moreover, application of laws such as PECA in cases involving journalists has compounded the problem, raising concerns that protective instrument are being used in ways that restrict journalism. This inversion of legal intent calls for urgent reform and oversight to ensure that laws align with international press freedom standards, including Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UNESCO's Windhoek+30 Declaration principles.

Impact on Journalism and Public Discourse

The cumulative impact of these threats is significantly harmful to the media landscape. Journalists report increasing self-censorship, particularly on stories involving powerful actors, corporate interests, or entrenched social taboos. Many environmental reporters have shifted their focus away from investigative fieldwork toward less contentious topics, reducing the overall visibility of environmental and climate governance issues in the national conversation. This chilling effect not only limits individual expression it also undermines public accountability and environmental justice. When reporters are silenced, communities lose access to vital information about environmental degradation, displacement, and the misuse of natural resources. Consequently, the safety of journalists is inseparable from the safety of the public's right to know.

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Chapter 5:

Conclusions &

Recommendations

Conclusions

This first edition of the report underscores a critical truth: environmental journalism in Pakistan operates under persistent risk and systemic gaps in protection. Journalists working to expose environmental degradation, corruption, and climate injustice are met with pressure that spans physical, digital, and legal domains. Despite Pakistan's formal commitments to press freedom and human rights, implementation gaps remain significant, and protection mechanisms lack both enforcement and gender responsiveness. The resilience of journalists documented here is a testament to professional courage, but courage alone cannot substitute for institutional protection. As climate change intensifies and environmental governance becomes ever more crucial, safeguarding the journalists who tell these stories is not only a matter of press freedom, it is a matter of environmental survival and democratic accountability.

Recommendations

For Government and Law Enforcement

- Implement and operationalize the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021) with gender-sensitive protocols and rapid response mechanisms.
- Review and reform applications of PECA that may restrict legitimate journalistic work.
- Ensure independent investigations into cases of threats, harassment, or legal intimidation against journalists, with transparent reporting on progress and outcomes.
- Integrate journalist safety into national disaster, climate, and environmental policies, recognizing their role as essential partners in sustainable development.

For Media Institutions and Journalist Associations

- Establish safety protocols and emergency support systems, including legal aid and digital security resources for reporters working in high-risk environments.
- Strengthen editorial independence and maintain editorial independence in the face of political, corporate, or commercial pressure that compromise coverage of environmental issues.
- Promote gender equity in newsroom leadership and ensure that women journalists have access to support networks, mentorship, and psychosocial care when threatened.

For Civil Society and International Partners

- Support collaborative monitoring mechanisms, such as GNMI's database, to systematically document and verify incidents affecting environmental journalists.
- Facilitate capacity-building and advocacy training on safety, legal literacy, and digital protection for journalists across Pakistan.
- Encourage international solidarity and reporting, ensuring that violations against Pakistani journalists are visible in global human rights and press freedom indices.
- Partner with UNESCO and other international bodies to advance national implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

The Way Forward

As we continue this quarterly series, the next editions will deepen the analysis of emerging trends and expand the scope of documented cases across Pakistan. The database developed through this project will evolve into a sustained national observatory on incidents affecting environmental journalists, aligning with global frameworks such as the UNESCO-led UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

Future editions will also build on verified data to highlight patterns of systemic risk, advocate for policy reform, and strengthen international collaboration on press freedom and environmental justice. Each report will record incidents and trace progress or regression in institutional responses, providing an evidence base for national and global advocacy.

This publication thus represents both a foundation and a promise toward collective action, sustained vigilance, and enduring protection for those who work at the intersection of public interest journalism, environmental concerns, and human rights.

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