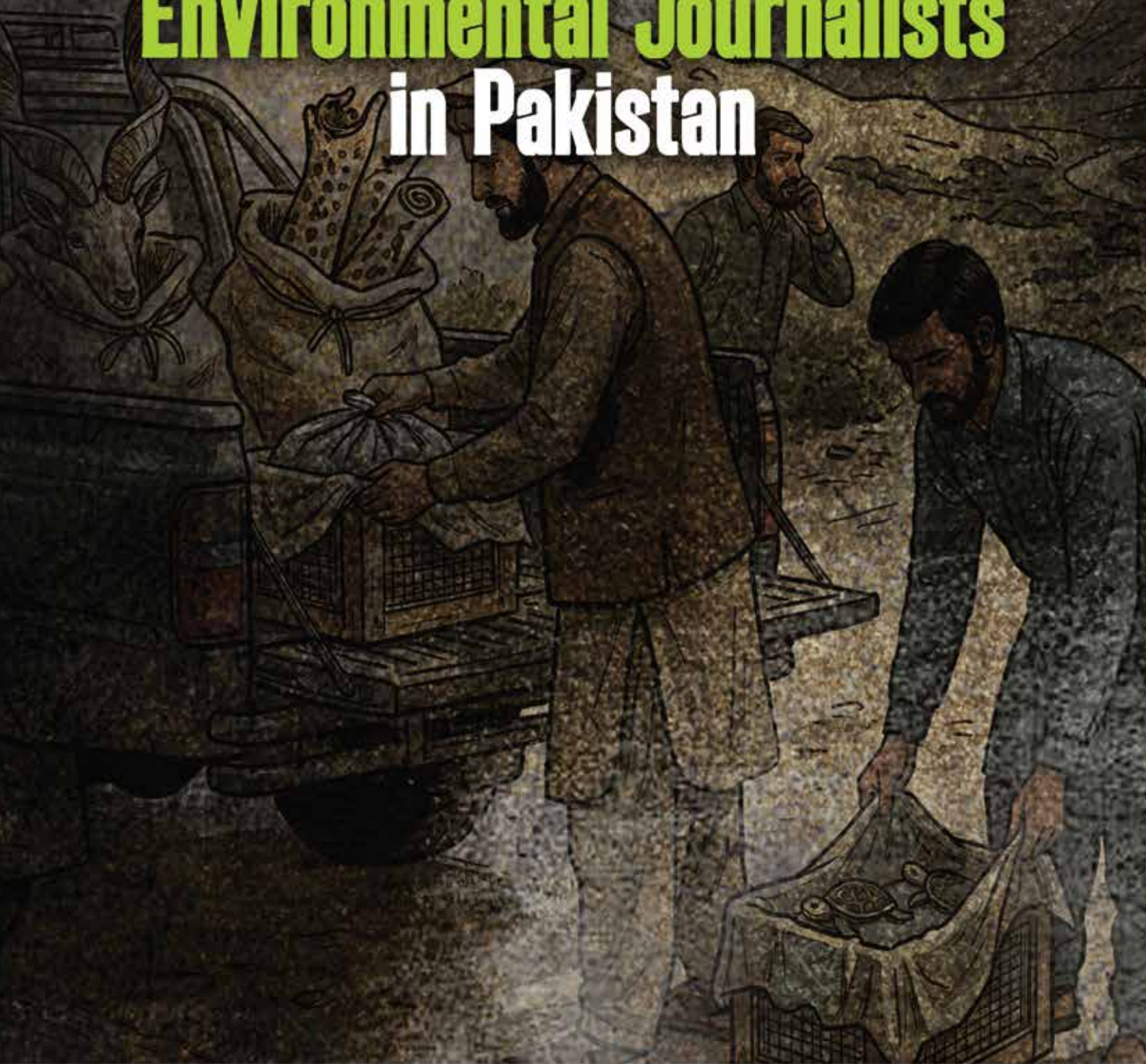


Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action

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



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# Preface

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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 fourth and final quarterly edition of the report Monitoring, Documentation, and Analysis of Threats Against Environmental Journalists in Pakistan concludes the first annual cycle of a monitoring series that has, across four editions, documented twelve verified cases of threats, intimidation, and suppression faced by journalists reporting on environmental governance, ecological degradation, wildlife crime, and natural resource management in Pakistan. As this cycle closes, the cumulative record it has produced represents the most systematic documentation of its kind undertaken in the country to date.

Supported by the UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF), this initiative has advanced GNMI's mission to safeguard press freedom and to contribute to international efforts to promote the safety of journalists. The three cases documented in this final edition extend both the geographic and thematic scope of the series, drawing from South Punjab and the coastal belt of Balochistan and introducing reporting on industrial water pollution, on wildlife casualties along a major highway, and on organised wildlife trafficking as newly documented reporting contexts in which journalists have described facing pressure. Together with the nine cases established across preceding editions, they complete a body of documentation that is analytically coherent, geographically diverse, and thematically comprehensive.

The findings of this edition are consistent with patterns observed across the series. Economic and institutional pressure, obstruction during field reporting, and other forms of intimidation continue to be described as factors that can constrain environmental reporting in Pakistan. What this edition adds is a further indication of the range of settings in which such pressure has been reported. The reporting environment described by environmental journalists in Pakistan is not associated with any single type of actor or any single region; it appears varied and distributed across contexts.

Also consistent across the four editions is the limited institutional response recorded. In the twelve documented cases, no formal complaint is recorded as having produced a protective or punitive outcome, and in several cases no complaint was filed, which affected journalists described as reflecting limited confidence in the available mechanisms. This points to gaps in the implementation of journalist safety frameworks, including the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021), that remain to be addressed.

As this annual cycle concludes, GNMI reaffirms its commitment to continuing this monitoring work beyond the current series, expanding its geographic reach, refining its verification and documentation methodology, and building on the evidence assembled across these four editions to support constructive dialogue on legal and institutional measures that strengthen the enabling environment for environmental journalism in Pakistan. The twelve cases in this series form an evidence base intended to inform such dialogue. Supporting environmental journalists contributes to the transparency, public information, and informed discourse on which environmental governance and sustainable development depend

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# Acknowledgments

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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 overall supervision and strategic direction; Afia Salam, senior environmental journalist and project consultant, for her expertise in data, facts, and contextualization of 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.

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# Acronyms

| Acronym       | Full Form                                                                       |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>GNMI</b>   | <i>Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation</i>                                |
| <b>UNESCO</b> | <i>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</i>         |
| <b>GMDF</b>   | <i>Global Media Defence Fund</i>                                                |
| <b>CPJMP</b>  | <i>The Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals</i> |
| <b>FIR</b>    | <i>First Information Report</i>                                                 |
| <b>NGO</b>    | <i>Non-Governmental Organization</i>                                            |
| <b>UDHR</b>   | <i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>                                    |
| <b>PECA</b>   | <i>Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act</i>                                      |
| <b>PJMP</b>   | <i>Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021)</i>             |
| <b>SDGs</b>   | <i>Sustainable Development Goals</i>                                            |
| <b>SLAPP</b>  | <i>Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation</i>                           |

# Table of Contents

|       |                                                                                 |
|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 04    | Preface                                                                         |
| 05    | Acknowledgments                                                                 |
| 06    | Acronyms                                                                        |
| 08    | Executive Summary                                                               |
|       | <b>Chapter 1: Background and Context</b>                                        |
|       | 1.1 State of Environmental Journalism in Pakistan                               |
|       | 1.2 Challenges and Risks Faced by Environmental Journalists                     |
|       | 1.3 Rationale for the Report                                                    |
|       | 1.4 Nature of the Publication                                                   |
| 09–11 |                                                                                 |
|       | <b>Chapter 2: Methodology</b>                                                   |
|       | 2.1 Research Approach                                                           |
|       | 2.2 Ethical Considerations and Limitations                                      |
| 12–14 |                                                                                 |
|       | <b>Chapter 3: Case Studies</b>                                                  |
|       | 3.1 Selection Criteria                                                          |
|       | 3.2 Types of Case Studies Included                                              |
|       | 3.3 Introduction to the Case Studies (Third Edition)                            |
|       | Case Study 07: Economic Coercion and Editorial Interference                     |
|       | Case Study 08: Threats and Self-Censorship in Reporting on Wildlife Trafficking |
|       | Case Study 09: Physical Threats and Field-Level Intimidation                    |
| 15–23 |                                                                                 |
|       | <b>Chapter 4: Analysis</b>                                                      |
|       | 4.1 Emerging Trends and Evolving Patterns                                       |
|       | 4.2 Geographic and Institutional Dimensions                                     |
|       | 4.3 Accountability and Legal Protections                                        |
|       | 4.4 Impact on Journalism and Public Discourse                                   |
|       | 4.5 Comparative Observations: Edition I and Edition II                          |
| 24–28 |                                                                                 |
|       | <b>Chapter 5: Conclusions &amp; Recommendations</b>                             |
|       | 5.1 Conclusions                                                                 |
|       | 5.2 Recommendations                                                             |
|       | 5.3 The Way Forward                                                             |
| 29–33 |                                                                                 |

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# Executive Summary

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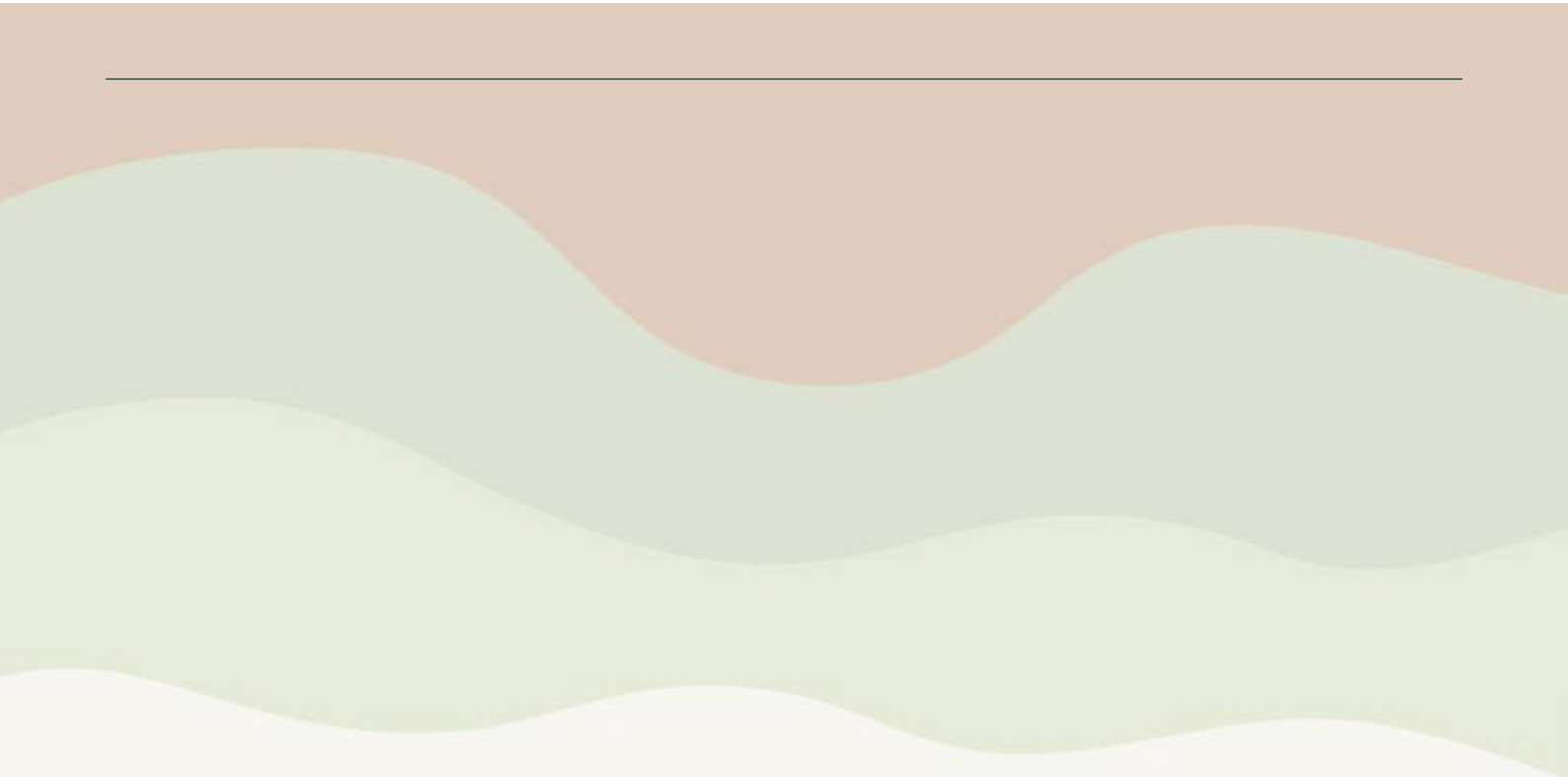
This fourth and final quarterly edition of Monitoring, Documentation, and Analysis of Threats Against Environmental Journalists in Pakistan, published by the Global Neighbourhood for Media Innovation (GNMI) under the UNESCO-supported project Empowering Environmental Journalists for Climate Action, concludes the first annual cycle of a monitoring series that has documented twelve verified cases of threats, intimidation, and pressure described by environmental journalists across Pakistan. Building on nine cases established across the first three editions, this report adds three further verified cases drawn from South Punjab, Balochistan, and Central Punjab, extending the series' geographic reach and introducing reporting contexts involving industrial water pollution, wildlife casualties along a major highway, and organised wildlife trafficking as newly documented settings within the series' evolving analytical framework.

The three cases presented in this edition each reflect distinct but related circumstances in which environmental reporting was constrained. In South Punjab, a broadcast journalist described being harassed during field reporting on the discharge of untreated industrial effluents into local waterways that drain toward a major river system, after which his employing news channel advised against filing the story, and the investigation was discontinued. In a coastal district of South Balochistan, a local print journalist described being pressured following the publication of an investigation into wildlife casualties along a major coastal highway. In Punjab, a senior journalist whose reporting documented wildlife recovery operations and an illegal taxidermy network described receiving threats attributed to organised wildlife trafficking networks. In all three cases, no formal complaint was filed and no protective response was recorded.

Read alongside the nine cases of the preceding editions, the observations of this final edition are consistent. The reporting environment described by environmental journalists in Pakistan appears structural rather than episodic, associated with conditions such as the financial dependence of some media organisations on commercial actors, gaps in the implementation of journalist protection legislation, and the reach of organised criminal networks, and these conditions are described across provinces and reporting contexts. The forms of pressure described across the series range from legal and digital pressure to economic constraints, editorial decisions, obstruction during field reporting, and threats attributed to various actors. Geography appears to be a factor in the level of risk described, with journalists in district-level, coastal, and field settings reporting fewer institutional resources than those based in major urban centres. The most consistent observation across the twelve cases is the limited institutional response recorded, including under the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021).

These observations have a wider public dimension. Where reporting on matters such as industrial effluent discharge into local waterways, wildlife casualties along a major highway, and wildlife trafficking is not published, documented information on environmental conditions may not reach the public record at a time when regulatory response, community awareness, and policy engagement are relevant. In a country facing significant climate vulnerability, the availability of environmental reporting is relevant to public information on ecological conditions, public health, and sustainable development.

The report offers recommendations for government and law enforcement, for media institutions and journalist associations, and for civil society and international partners. These focus on the operationalisation of existing journalist protection legislation, independent handling of reported threats, consideration of anti-SLAPP provisions, attention to editorial and economic pressures on media, institutional support for journalists who report facing threats, extension of support to freelance and district-level reporters, and continued international engagement. As this annual cycle concludes, GNMI intends to carry the monitoring framework and the evidence assembled into a second cycle and to use the documentation to inform constructive dialogue on legal and institutional measures.



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*Chapter 1:*

# **Background and Context**

## 1.1 State of Environmental Journalism in Pakistan

Environmental journalism in Pakistan occupies a critical space at the intersection of climate change, ecological governance, public health, and sustainable development. As the country confronts accelerating environmental pressures such as industrial water pollution, wildlife trafficking, deforestation, urban environmental degradation, and the consequences of extractive resource exploitation, the demand for accurate, independent, and investigative environmental reporting has never been greater. Pakistan's acute climate vulnerability, evidenced by recurring catastrophic floods, prolonged droughts, and rapidly deteriorating air and water quality across major population centers, has made the work of environmental journalists not merely professionally significant but a matter of direct public consequence.

Journalists covering environmental issues serve as essential intermediaries between scientific data, regulatory processes, and affected communities. Their reporting informs public discourse, supports transparency and public accountability, and documents the human and ecological costs of environmental degradation. Whether reporting on the discharge of untreated industrial effluents into river systems, on illegal wildlife trade, or on the ecological effects of unregulated land encroachment, environmental journalists contribute to transparency, regulatory accountability, and the implementation of environmental law.

Yet environmental reporting in Pakistan consistently intersects with entrenched political, commercial, and criminal interests. Coverage of water governance, industrial pollution, wildlife protection, and natural resource management frequently implicates actors — municipal authorities, industrial operators, trafficking syndicates, and politically connected commercial interests — with considerable capacity and demonstrated willingness to resist public scrutiny. In this context, accountability reporting is routinely perceived as adversarial, and journalists are exposed to pressures that extend well beyond the ordinary professional risks of the craft.

Building on the findings of the first three editions of this report, it is unambiguously apparent that environmental journalism in Pakistan continues to face structural vulnerabilities: weak institutional protections, inconsistent enforcement of journalist safety provisions, editorial capture by commercial interests, and a broader pattern of shrinking civic space for accountability reporting. These conditions form the established backdrop against which the cases in this fourth and final edition of the annual cycle must be understood.

## 1.2 Challenges and Risks Faced by Environmental Journalists

Environmental journalists in Pakistan are exposed to the full range of risks documented across the broader media community; these include legal harassment, physical intimidation, surveillance, reputational attacks, and economic pressure. Their work, however, carries additional and compounding dimensions of risk, given the scale of financial, political, and criminal interests frequently at stake in environmental governance, resource extraction, and wildlife trade.

The cases documented across this series describe a range of situations in which environmental reporting has been constrained. This fourth edition adds three further contexts: the reported harassment of a broadcast journalist during field reporting on industrial effluent discharge into local waterways in South Punjab, and the subsequent decision of his news channel not to run the investigation; the reported intimidation of a journalist in a coastal district of Balochistan following the publication of a report on wildlife casualties along a major coastal highway; and threats reportedly received by a senior journalist in Punjab, attributed to organised wildlife trafficking networks, following investigative reporting on wildlife recovery operations and an illegal taxidermy network.

Taken together with the nine cases established in preceding editions, these observations point to several recurring themes. The parties described in connection with reported pressure vary across cases, and existing journalist protection frameworks are not always well suited to the range of situations described. Editorial decisions within employing media organisations, in some cases described as taken under external pressure, feature as one recurring factor. The geographic spread of the documented cases extends across several provinces, indicating that the reporting environment described is not confined to any single region.

The limited recourse to formal complaints across the twelve documented cases is described by affected journalists as reflecting limited confidence that the available mechanisms would offer protection, rather than an absence of concern. This pattern of limited institutional response is among the more consistent observations of the series.

## 1.3 Rationale for the Report

A structured and sustained monitoring mechanism is essential to identifying patterns of intimidation, establishing evidentiary records of impunity, and generating the analytical foundation required for systemic advocacy and legal reform. Isolated incidents of threats against journalists rarely produce sustained institutional response. Documented collectively and analysed over time, however, they reveal structural weaknesses that cannot be addressed through individual resilience or case-by-case intervention alone.

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, thematic areas, and categories of perpetrator, this series has contributed to a growing evidentiary base capable of informing legal reform, institutional strengthening, and coordinated advocacy at both national and international levels. As this annual cycle concludes, that evidentiary base twelve verified cases across four editions constitutes a documented argument for systemic change that GNMI intends to carry forward into the next phase of this monitoring initiative.

## 1.4 Nature of the Publication

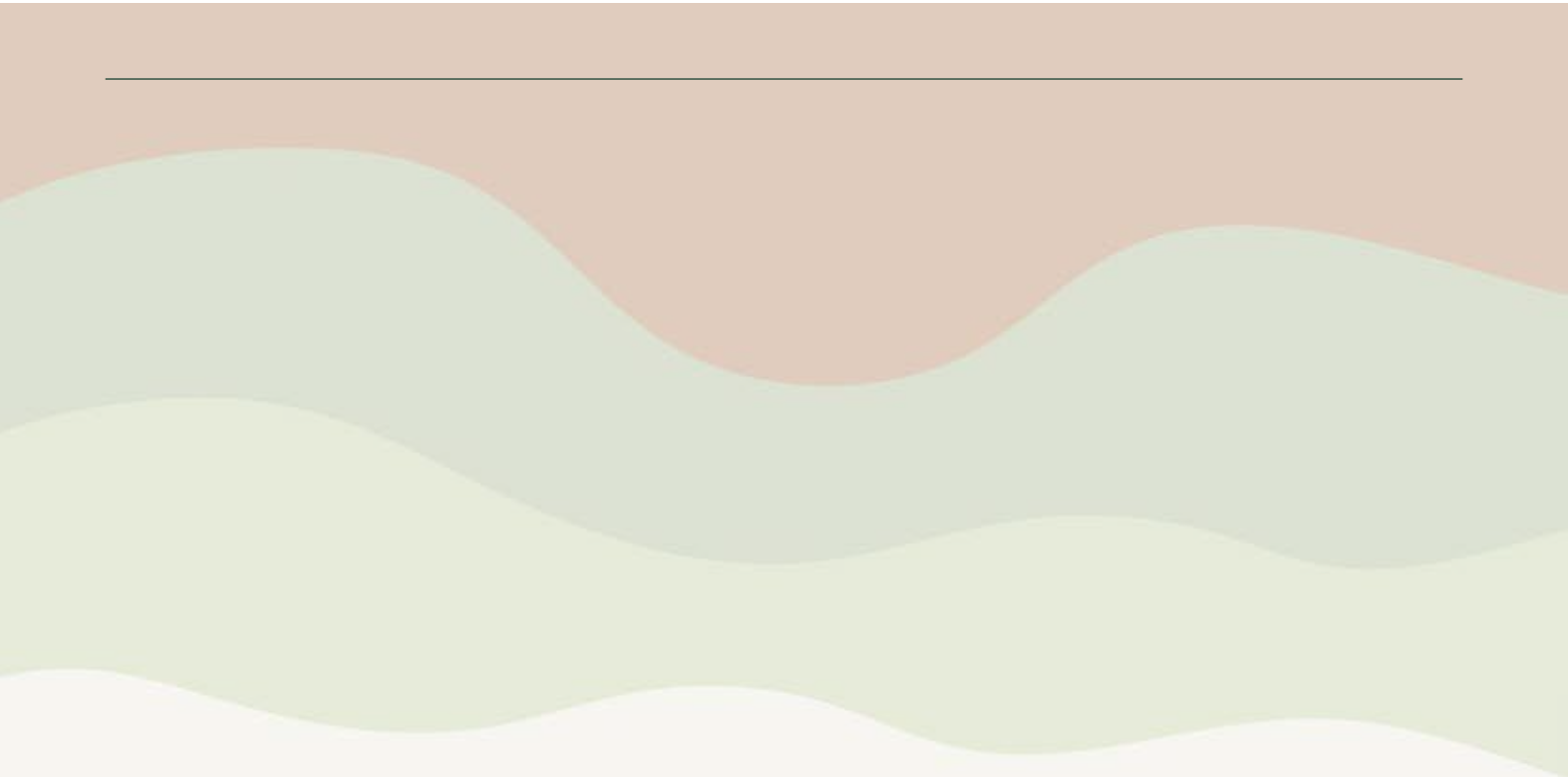
This report represents the fourth and final quarterly edition of the first annual cycle of Monitoring, Documentation, and Analysis of Threats Against Environmental Journalists in Pakistan. Each edition has documented verified cases of threats or intimidation faced by environmental journalists and situated them within a broader analytical framework oriented toward pattern identification, accountability advocacy, and policy engagement.

This edition presents three case studies spanning physical harassment and editorial suppression in South Punjab, reported intimidation in Balochistan, and criminal syndicate threats in Punjab. These cases extend the series' cumulative documentation to twelve verified incidents across four editions, representing a geographic spread that now encompasses Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, South Punjab, and Balochistan, and a thematic range that covers legal harassment, digital intimidation, economic coercion, editorial capture, criminal network threats, reported intimidation, and field-level physical obstruction.

To protect the safety and privacy of those involved where necessary, personal identifiers are withheld in cases where disclosure would pose a risk to the journalist concerned. Each case study focuses on the nature of the incident, its broader implications for environmental accountability journalism, and the institutional response — or consistent absence thereof — that followed.

As this annual cycle concludes, GNMI will carry the monitoring framework, the analytical methodology, and the evidentiary record of this series into continued and expanded work in the subsequent cycle. The documentation assembled across these four editions is not an endpoint but it is the foundation for the sustained advocacy and systemic reform that the evidence demands.

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*Chapter 2:*

# **Methodology**

## 2.1 Overview of the Monitoring Framework

The methodology underpinning this monitoring series has been developed and refined across four quarterly editions, guided by GNMI's commitment to evidentiary rigour, journalistic verification, and ethical documentation practice. The framework is designed to produce case studies that are verifiable, analytically grounded, and sufficiently detailed to support both public advocacy and policy engagement, while ensuring the safety and privacy of journalists who participate in the documentation process.

The monitoring framework operates through a combination of direct outreach to journalists, engagement with regional correspondents and GNMI's network of media professionals, and ongoing monitoring of press freedom developments across Pakistan's provinces. Cases are identified through multiple channels, including direct referrals from affected journalists, reports shared by journalist associations and civil society partners, and GNMI's own monitoring of media freedom incidents at the national and provincial level.

## 2.1 Case Identification and Selection

Cases considered for inclusion in each edition are assessed against a consistent set of criteria applied uniformly across the series. A case is eligible for documentation if the journalist was engaged in environmental, civic, governance, or public-interest reporting linked to environmental issues at the time of the incident; if the incident involved a credible allegation of threat, harassment, intimidation, physical attack, legal pressure, economic coercion, or editorial suppression; if the case could be verified through direct engagement with the journalist or corroborated through secondary evidence; and if the incident reflects or illuminates broader patterns of risk relevant to environmental journalism in Pakistan.

Cases are selected with attention to thematic and geographic diversity, ensuring that the series does not over-represent any single region, category of threat, or type of perpetrator. Across four editions, this approach has produced documentation spanning Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, South Punjab, and Balochistan, and covering threat categories ranging from legal harassment and digital intimidation to physical assault, reported pressure, criminal syndicate threats, and editorial capture.

## 2.2 Secondary Data Collection

Each case documented in this series has undergone a structured verification process before inclusion. The primary verification method is direct engagement with the journalist concerned, conducted through in-person interviews, telephone interviews, or secure digital communication, depending on the safety context of the individual case. Where the journalist's account is the primary source, efforts are made to corroborate the incident through at least one of the following: documentary evidence provided by the journalist, including screenshots, messages, or correspondence; accounts from colleagues, editors, or witnesses with direct knowledge of the incident; reporting by local or international press freedom organisations; or publicly available records, including court documents, FIRs, or media coverage of the incident.

In cases where full corroboration is not possible, particularly where the journalist has chosen not to file a formal complaint and where the incident occurred without witnesses, the case is documented on the basis of the journalist's verified account, with the limitations of the evidentiary record explicitly noted. The decision to include such cases reflects the recognition that the absence of formal documentation is itself a product of the threat environment this series seeks to illuminate, and that excluding unverifiable cases entirely would systematically under-represent the experiences of journalists in the most vulnerable reporting contexts.

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## 2.4 Ethical Considerations and Safety Protocols

The safety and privacy of participating journalists are treated as the primary ethical obligations of this monitoring process. In cases where disclosure of a journalist's identity could expose them to further risk, pseudonyms are used and identifying details are withheld or generalised. The decision to use a pseudonym or to disclose a journalist's name is made in direct consultation with the journalist concerned, whose informed consent is a prerequisite for inclusion in the report.

Journalists are informed of the purpose and scope of the documentation, the anticipated use of their case in advocacy and policy contexts, and the measures taken to protect their identity where necessary. No case is published without the explicit agreement of the journalist involved. In cases involving ongoing legal proceedings or active threats, additional care is taken to ensure that the publication of the case study does not inadvertently increase the journalist's exposure to risk.

## 2.5 Scope and Limitations

This monitoring series does not claim to be a comprehensive census of all threats faced by environmental journalists in Pakistan during the period covered. The cases documented represent verified incidents that came to GNMI's attention through its monitoring network and outreach processes. It is reasonable to assume that the actual incidence of threats and intimidation is considerably higher than the documented record reflects, given the well-established tendency of affected journalists to under-report incidents due to fear of retaliation, distrust of formal complaint mechanisms, professional precarity, and the absence of adequate institutional support.

The series is also subject to geographic limitations inherent in any network-based monitoring approach. Regions with stronger GNMI network presence and more active journalist communities are likely to generate more referrals than those where the network is less established. Efforts have been made across four editions to extend outreach to under-represented regions, reflected in the progressive geographic expansion of documented cases from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in earlier editions to South Punjab and Balochistan in this final edition.

These limitations do not diminish the analytical value of the documented cases. Each verified incident contributes to an evidentiary record that, read cumulatively, reveals structural patterns of suppression that are consistent, cross-cutting, and amenable to systemic policy response. The value of this series lies not in the exhaustiveness of its documentation but in the rigour, consistency, and analytical depth with which each case is examined and contextualised within the broader threat environment facing environmental journalists in Pakistan.

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*Chapter 3:*  
**Case Studies**

### 3.1 Selection Criteria

The cases included in this fourth and final quarterly edition were selected through GNMI's established monitoring and verification mechanism, applied consistently across all four editions of this annual cycle. Each case meets the following criteria:

- ✒ The journalist was engaged in environmental, civic, governance, or public-interest reporting linked to environmental issues at the time of the incident;
- ✒ The incident involved a credible allegation of threat, harassment, physical attack, reported intimidation, criminal network pressure, or editorial suppression;
- ✒ 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 consistent with the series' cumulative approach. The three case studies are drawn from South Punjab, Balochistan, and Punjab, and illustrate distinct but related circumstances in which environmental reporting was constrained: reported harassment during field reporting, and a subsequent editorial decision, following reporting on industrial effluent discharge into local waterways; reported intimidation following publication of an investigation into wildlife casualties along a major highway; and threats attributed to organised wildlife trafficking networks, following investigative reporting on wildlife trade across Punjab

### 3.2 Types of Case Studies Included

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

**Physical Attacks and Harassment**

**Legal Harassment and Intimidation**

**Online Threats and Digital Harassment**

**Workplace and Institutional Pressures**

**Cases from Conflict or Sensitive Zones**

## 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

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.



## Cases from Conflict or Sensitive Zones

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.



### 3.3 Introduction to the Case Studies (Third Edition)

The following case studies represent verified incidents of threats, harassment, and intimidation encountered by environmental journalists during the current reporting period. Each case was documented through direct engagement with the journalist concerned and corroborated, where available, through independent verification and publicly accessible reporting. Across the first three editions of this series, nine case studies were documented; this fourth and final edition adds three (03) further verified cases, bringing the cumulative total for the annual cycle to twelve (12). These cases, read individually and collectively, illustrate the complex, varied, and structurally entrenched risks confronting environmental journalists across Pakistan, and the consistent failure of institutional mechanisms to provide meaningful protection or accountability in response.

#### *Case Study 10: Physical Attack, Harassment, and Editorial Suppression Following Reporting on Industrial Effluent Discharge*

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Name/Pseudonym:</b>                      | <i>“Journalist J”</i><br>Broadcast Journalist, Regional News Channel                                                                                  |
| <b>Date and Location:</b>                   | February 2026, South Punjab, Pakistan                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Nature of Attack/Threat:</b>             | Reported harassment and warnings during field reporting; the employing news channel subsequently advised against filing the story                     |
| <b>Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:</b> | Local municipal authorities, and management and staff of an industrial facility in the area                                                           |
| <b>Immediate Impact:</b>                    | Forced abandonment of active investigation; story withheld from broadcast under duress; journalist placed under sustained professional pressure       |
| <b>Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:</b>            | No formal complaint filed; no protective or investigative response from relevant authorities                                                          |
| <b>Current Status/Outcome:</b>              | Journalist discontinued the investigation; news channel advised against filing the story for publication; reporting on the subject remains suppressed |



## Narrative

In February 2026, Journalist “J” (pseudonym), a broadcast journalist based in South Punjab, was reporting on the discharge of untreated industrial effluents and municipal waste into local canals and waterways in the area. His reporting described how discharge from a local industrial zone, together with limited treatment of waste before release, was affecting local water channels that drain toward the Chenab River and the wider Indus Basin, one of the most ecologically and agriculturally significant river systems in the region. The downstream implications, including water pollution and risks to aquatic ecosystems and agricultural water supplies, formed the basis of a developing public-interest investigation.

The case unfolds across two distinct but interconnected dimensions of suppression, field-level intimidation and institutional editorial pressure, both of which ultimately converged to foreclose the investigation entirely.

During field reporting, the journalist described being warned by individuals connected with local bodies and with the industrial facility concerned to cease coverage of the discharge. He described these warnings as placing him under considerable personal pressure.

A second factor operated at the institutional level. Rather than proceeding with the investigation, the news channel advised the journalist against filing the story for broadcast. The precise nature of the pressure on the channel is not documented; the outcome recorded is that the story was not filed and the investigation was discontinued.

This case is consistent with observations elsewhere in the series, in which editorial decisions within a newsroom can also limit the publication of accountability reporting. Where a journalist facing pressure in the field receives an editorial direction to stand down, avenues for publication may narrow. The outcome recorded here is that a developing account of environmental conditions did not reach the public record at a time when it may have been relevant to regulatory and policy engagement.

The absence of a formal complaint or protective response in this case is consistent with the limited institutional response recorded across the series. It points to gaps in the support available to journalists who describe facing pressure during field reporting, and in the editorial support available within some media organisations.

## Case Study 11: Intimidation by Government Officials Following Reporting on Highway-Linked Wildlife Casualties

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Name/Pseudonym:</b>                      | <i>“Journalist K”<br/>Local Print Journalist, Balochistan</i>                                                                                                    |
| <b>Date and Location:</b>                   | January 2025, South Balochistan                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Nature of Attack/Threat:</b>             | Reported intimidation and telephonic warnings following publication of an environmental investigation; described as discouraging future reporting on the subject |
| <b>Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:</b> | Individuals described as associated with relevant government departments                                                                                         |
| <b>Immediate Impact:</b>                    | Professional intimidation; reported pressure to limit future environmental reporting                                                                             |
| <b>Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:</b>            | No formal complaint filed; no institutional protection sought or provided                                                                                        |
| <b>Current Status/Outcome:</b>              | Journalist continues working but describes pressure to limit reporting on the subject                                                                            |

## Narrative

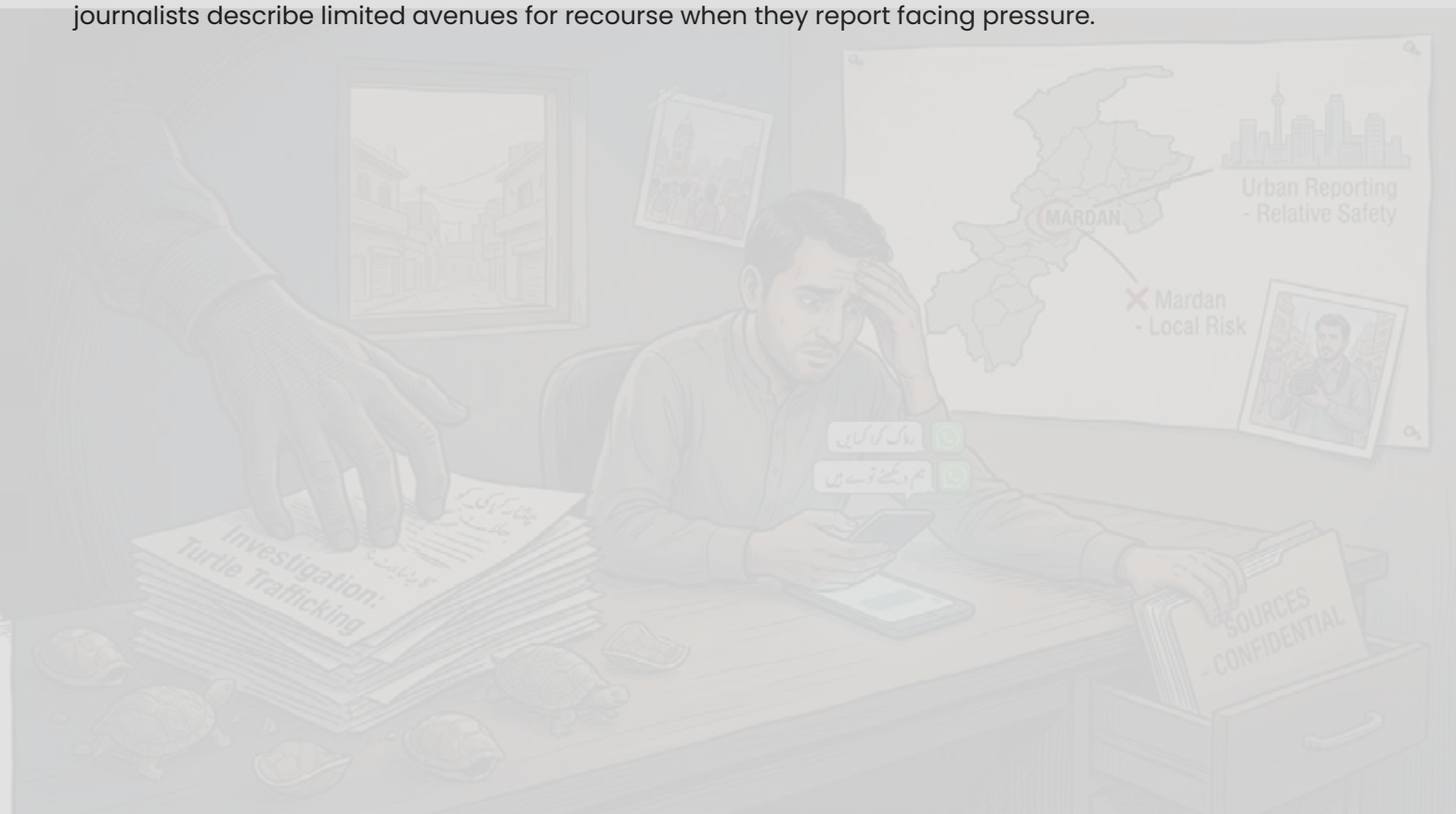
Following the publication of an investigation into wildlife casualties along a major coastal highway, which described a significant number of animal deaths annually and limited protective measures, Journalist “K” described being approached and warned by individuals described as associated with relevant government departments against publishing further reporting on the subject, with reference to unspecified consequences.

The reporting described how wild animals, including leopards, jackals, wild cats, deer, and mountain goats, were being killed by vehicles along the highway, which passes through areas of ecological importance. The reporting recommended standard conservation measures such as roadside fencing, wildlife crossings, and speed restrictions. The journalist associated the pressure he described with the publication of these findings.

This case is relevant for a number of reasons. The pressure described was attributed to individuals connected with departments relevant to the subject being reported rather than to private or criminal actors, which illustrates the range of settings in which journalists have described facing pressure. It also indicates how such pressure can affect the category of accountability reporting that documents environmental conditions.

The geographic context is also relevant. In a coastal district of Balochistan, where institutional support for journalists is more limited and access to legal assistance can be constrained, warnings of this kind may carry considerable weight and can contribute to self-censorship without any formal legal action.

The absence of a formal complaint in this case is consistent with observations across the series and is described as reflecting limited confidence in available recourse in settings with limited institutional backing. The case reinforces a central observation of the series: that in district-level and field reporting environments, journalists describe limited avenues for recourse when they report facing pressure.



## Case Study 12: Threats from Wildlife Trafficking Syndicate Following Investigative Reporting on Illegal Possession and Taxidermy Networks

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Name/Pseudonym:</b>                      | <i>“Journalist L”<br/>Senior Print Journalist, a national newspaper</i>                                                                                                       |
| <b>Date and Location:</b>                   | December 2025 to May 2026, Punjab                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Nature of Attack/Threat:</b>             | Reported threats attributed to organised wildlife trafficking networks in response to investigative reporting on protected species                                            |
| <b>Perpetrator(s) or Suspected Parties:</b> | Poachers, wildlife smugglers, and criminal syndicates involved in the illegal possession, trade, and taxidermy of protected animals operating across Punjab                   |
| <b>Immediate Impact:</b>                    | Personal safety compromised; sustained intimidation intended to deter continued coverage of wildlife crime and illegal trade networks                                         |
| <b>Legal/Advocacy Follow-Up:</b>            | No formal complaint filed; no institutional protection extended                                                                                                               |
| <b>Current Status/Outcome:</b>              | Journalist continues reporting but operates under persistent threat from organised criminal networks with significant financial stakes in suppressing accountability coverage |

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## Narrative

“Journalist L” is a senior journalist with a sustained record of reporting on wildlife protection, ecological governance, and environmental law enforcement across Punjab. His reporting has covered the recovery of illegally held protected animals, the operations of the provincial wildlife authorities, and the criminal networks that profit from the illegal possession, trade, and preservation of wildlife. Two investigations are directly relevant to this case.

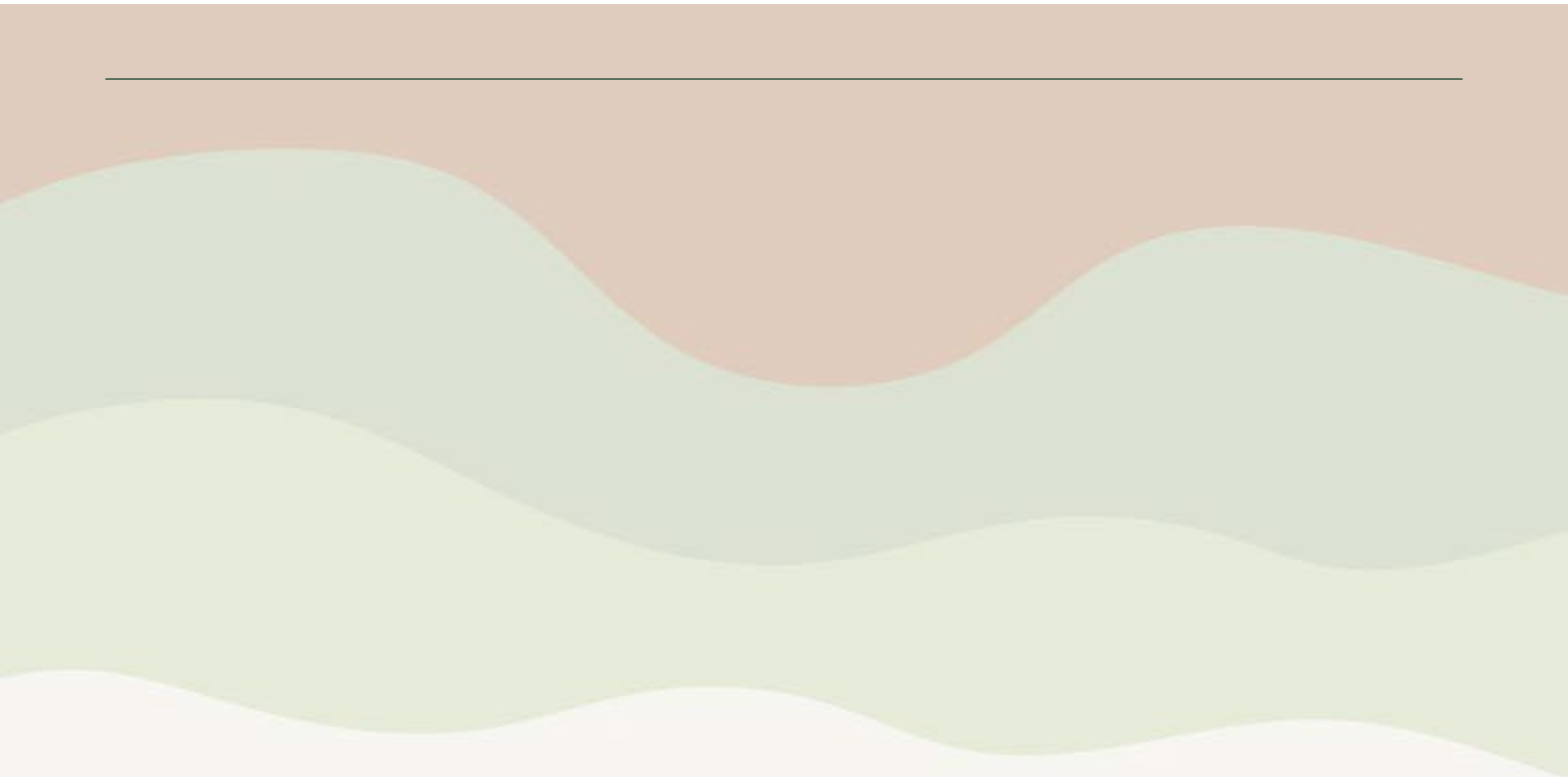
The first documented the provincial wildlife authorities' recovery of three black bears within a single week across central and south-east districts of Punjab, as part of a province-wide crackdown conducted under the directives of the provincial government. The operation resulted in the arrest of at least one suspect and the registration of FIRs against three others. The crackdown, led by provincial wildlife authorities, brought the total number of black bears recovered across Punjab to twenty-five, a figure that itself speaks to the scale of illegal wildlife possession in the province. The second investigation covered the busting of an illegal taxidermy centre in the an area in Punjab, where a syndicate of at least three families was found to be engaged in the unlicensed skinning, preservation, and stuffing of wild animals and birds. The operation was triggered by a social media video showing a dead African lion being skinned, a stark illustration of how openly and confidently these networks operate. The prime suspect was arrested, though others fled during the raid. Seized materials included stuffed animals and hunting trophies, with authorities confirming that the practice constitutes a criminal offence under the the applicable wildlife protection law and its subsequent amendments.

While both investigations documented enforcement action, they also described the scale and organisation of the criminal networks concerned, which are described as having financial interests in avoiding public exposure. The threats described by Journalist “L” are attributed to individuals connected with these networks, who reportedly warned him against continuing to report on their operations. The pressure described was associated not with reporting on institutional failure but with reporting that contributed to public awareness of criminal activity.

This distinction is analytically important. The case illustrates that environmental journalists face threats not only when they report critically on state institutions but also when their reporting, however factual and even favourable to government enforcement efforts, threatens the operational interests of criminal networks. Accurate documentation of wildlife crime, arrest figures, and syndicate activity is itself sufficient to provoke retaliation from those whose livelihood depends on the continuation of that crime in the shadows.

The case also highlights the particular vulnerability of journalists covering organised wildlife crime in Punjab, where trafficking networks are embedded across multiple districts, operate with significant financial resources, and have demonstrated the capacity and willingness to intimidate those who document their activities. In the absence of any formal witness protection mechanism, dedicated journalist safety provision, or institutional support from employing media organisations, journalists bear the full personal cost of reporting in this space. That he continues to do so reflects individual professional commitment, but individual commitment is not a substitute for the structural protections that this and every edition of this series has found to be absent.

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## *Chapter 4:* **Analysis**

## 4.1 Emerging Trends and Evolving Patterns

The three cases documented in this fourth and final edition, read alongside the nine cases established in preceding editions, bring the series' cumulative picture into clearer view. Across twelve verified incidents spanning four quarterly editions, a consistent account has emerged of a set of conditions that can constrain environmental reporting in Pakistan, better understood as structural than as isolated or episodic.

This edition adds three reporting contexts that extend the series' analytical framework. The account of Journalist "J" in South Punjab adds industrial water pollution to the range of subjects associated with reported pressure and indicates that the combination of field-level pressure and editorial decisions, described in earlier editions, recurs across cases.

The account of Journalist "K" in a coastal district of Balochistan describes reported pressure attributed to individuals connected with relevant departments following environmental reporting, and the account of Journalist "L" in Punjab describes threats attributed to organised wildlife trafficking networks following investigative reporting. Together with the case from South Punjab, these accounts indicate a range of settings in which journalists have described facing pressure.

These accounts complete a taxonomy that now encompasses legal pressure, digital intimidation, economic constraints, editorial decisions, obstruction during field reporting, threats attributed to criminal networks, and reported pressure attributed to various actors. The breadth of this taxonomy indicates that the situations in which environmental reporting is constrained are varied rather than associated with any single type of actor

## 4.2 Geographic and Institutional Dimensions

The reporting environment described by environmental journalists in Pakistan appears structural rather than episodic. The pressure described is attributed to a range of parties across different contexts and provinces.

The cases in this edition introduce two geographic contexts not previously centred in the series. South Punjab, represented by the case of documented journalist in the area, is an industrially active region where the proximity of manufacturing facilities to major river systems creates both significant environmental risk and significant incentive for those responsible to suppress its documentation. Balochistan, represented by the case of Journalist K in a coastal district of Balochistan, is a province where journalist safety infrastructure is among the weakest in the country, state power is least checked by independent institutional counterweights, and the personal consequences of official displeasure are most difficult to contest. Punjab, represented by the case of Journalist L, illustrates that even the most institutionally developed province is not exempt from the threat environment this series has mapped — organised criminal networks operating across Punjab districts have demonstrated both the capacity and the willingness to intimidate journalists whose reporting threatens their operations.

The institutional dimension of this edition's observations is relevant. In some of the cases documented here, the pressure described was attributed to individuals connected with departments relevant to the subject being reported. Where this occurs, it can affect the availability of environmental information. The documented cases record limited institutional response in such situations.

## 4.3 Accountability and Legal Protections

The record across the twelve documented cases is consistent. In no documented case is a formal complaint recorded as having produced a protective or punitive outcome, and in several cases, including all three in this edition, no formal complaint was filed. Across the series, the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021) is not recorded as having been applied to produce a documented protective outcome in these cases. This points to a gap between the legislative framework and its implementation, which is among the central observations of the series.

The reasons for this gap appear structural. Effective implementation depends on institutional arrangements that, in some cases documented in this series, are proximate to the subject of the reporting. Where the pressure described is attributed to individuals connected with departments relevant to the subject being reported, journalists describe fewer practical avenues for recourse. This points to the importance of independent and transparent handling of reported threats.

The cases in this edition also point to a specific gap in the existing framework: the limited coverage of editorial decisions as a factor affecting the publication of reporting. Where a news organisation, in some cases described as operating under external pressure, decides not to proceed with an investigation, existing provisions may not apply. Addressing this would involve attention to media ownership, editorial independence, and the financial relationships that can affect news organisations.

The non-application of PECA provisions in this edition's cases, a departure from earlier editions where cybercrime legislation featured as a tool of legal harassment, does not diminish concern about their continued availability as instruments of pressure. The threat of criminal proceedings under PECA continues to function as a background deterrent for journalists covering sensitive environmental subjects, even where no formal charges are initiated.

## 4.4 Impact on Journalism and Public Discourse

The cumulative picture across twelve documented cases extends beyond the individual journalists concerned and the specific stories affected. Across four editions, the series describes a narrowing of the space available for environmental accountability reporting in Pakistan, with implications for public information, regulatory engagement, and governance.

The subjects suppressed across this series' case studies are not peripheral or marginal environmental concerns. They include industrial effluent discharge into the Indus Basin, one of Asia's most critical river systems; mass wildlife casualties on a major national highway passing through a protected national park; organised criminal networks trafficking protected species across Punjab; air pollution causing respiratory disease in residential communities; illegal riverbank encroachments exacerbating flood vulnerability in Swat; and wildlife trafficking in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In each case, the suppression of the reporting did not merely deprive the public of a news story — it removed from the public record a documented account of ongoing environmental harm at the moment when that documentation was most needed to inform regulatory response, community awareness, and policy intervention.

The self-censorship described across several cases in this series, including the accounts of Journalist G and Journalist K, represents a longer-term consideration. Where a journalist limits the scope of their own reporting in response to pressure they describe, the resulting gap in information can be ongoing and cumulative, and is difficult to observe in any single edition.

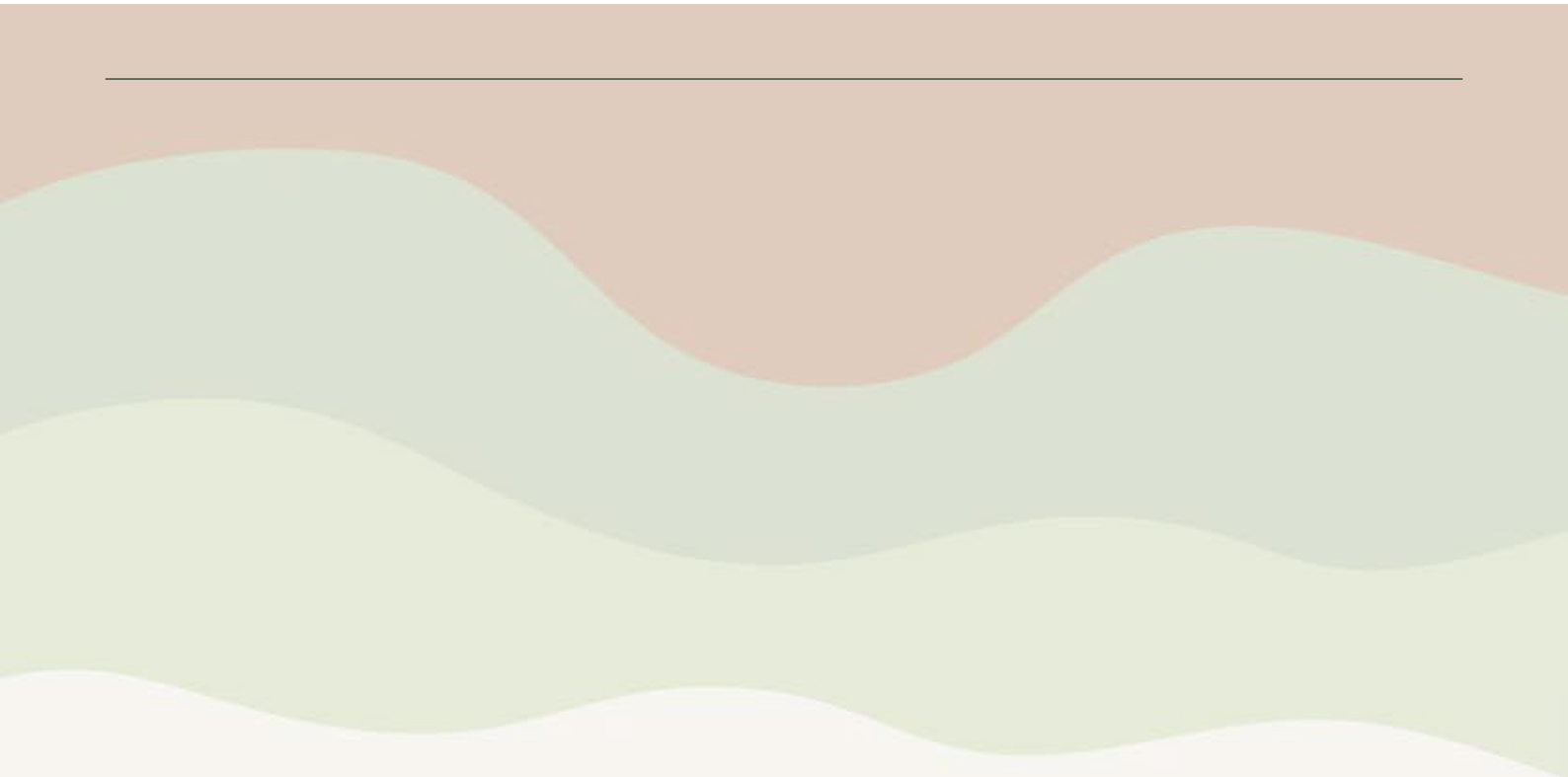
The generational dimension of this impact also warrants attention as this series concludes. In an environment where investigative environmental reporting is demonstrably costly — professionally, financially, and physically — and where institutional protection is consistently absent, the career calculations of emerging journalists are shaped accordingly. The cumulative effect of a threat environment that goes unaddressed is not merely the silencing of current voices but the progressive erosion of the professional culture, institutional capacity, and individual willingness to pursue environmental accountability journalism in the next generation of Pakistan's media workforce.

## 4.5 Comparative Observations Across All Four Editions

Read as a complete annual cycle, the twelve cases documented across four editions of this series support the following observations.

- ◆ The reporting environment described by environmental journalists in Pakistan appears structural rather than episodic. The pressure described is attributed to a range of parties across different contexts and provinces.
- ◆ No single category of actor, region, or environmental subject area has proven exempt from the pattern of suppression this series has documented.
- ◆ The repertoire of suppression tactics has diversified across the series. Where early editions centred legal harassment and digital intimidation, later editions have added economic coercion, editorial capture, reported intimidation, and organised criminal threats.
- ◆ This diversification reflects the adaptability of those who seek to suppress environmental reporting and the inadequacy of protection frameworks oriented primarily toward the most visible and legally legible forms of threat.
- ◆ The most consistent observation across the series is the limited institutional response recorded. In the documented cases, no formal complaint is recorded as having produced a protective or punitive outcome, and the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021) is not recorded as having produced a documented protective outcome in these cases.
- ◆ This points to gaps in implementation that merit attention.
- ◆ In the documented cases, reported threats are not recorded as having been examined through a formal process. This points to the importance of independent and transparent handling of reported threats.
- ◆ Geography remains a determinant of risk. Journalists operating in district-level, coastal, and field environments — away from the institutional resources, legal support networks, and public visibility of major urban centres — face qualitatively greater vulnerability.

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- ◆ The progressive geographic expansion of this series' documentation has confirmed that this vulnerability is distributed across Pakistan's provinces and is not reducible to any single regional context.
  - ◆ Finally, the cumulative record of this series constitutes an evidence-based argument for systemic reform that individual resilience, professional commitment, and case-by-case advocacy cannot substitute for. The twelve cases documented here are the foundation of that argument.
  - ◆ The work of translating them into legal reform, institutional accountability, and a strengthened enabling environment for environmental journalism in Pakistan is the task to which this series' findings now point.



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*Chapter 5:*

# **Conclusions & Recommendations**

## 5.1 Conclusions

This fourth and final 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, concludes the first annual cycle of a monitoring series that has documented twelve verified cases of threats, intimidation, and pressure described by environmental journalists across Pakistan. Building on nine cases established across the first three editions, this report adds three further verified cases drawn from South Punjab, Balochistan, and Central Punjab, extending the series' geographic reach and introducing reporting contexts involving industrial water pollution, wildlife casualties along a major highway, and organised wildlife trafficking as newly documented settings within the series' evolving analytical framework.

The first observation of this series is that the conditions described by environmental journalists in Pakistan appear structural. They are associated with a consistent set of conditions, including the financial dependence of some smaller media organisations on commercial actors; gaps in the implementation of journalist protection legislation; and the reach of organised criminal networks whose interests may be affected by public interest reporting. These conditions are described across provinces, across urban and rural reporting environments, and across the range of environmental subjects the series has documented.

The second observation concerns the range of situations documented. Across four editions, this series has documented forms of pressure spanning legal pressure under cybercrime legislation, digital intimidation, economic constraints, editorial decisions, obstruction during field reporting, threats attributed to criminal networks, and reported pressure attributed to various actors. Each edition has added dimensions to this taxonomy, reflecting a varied environment in which reporting can be constrained. This indicates that protection frameworks oriented toward any single category of threat, whether physical safety, legal pressure, or digital security, may be insufficient on their own, and that a comprehensive approach would address the full range of factors that can constrain environmental reporting.

This points to gaps in implementation that merit attention.

The fourth conclusion concerns geography. The progressive expansion of this series' documentation from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to South Punjab and Balochistan has confirmed that the threat environment is nationwide in its distribution. Journalists operating in district-level, coastal, and field environments consistently face greater vulnerability than those in major urban centres, with fewer institutional resources, weaker professional support networks, and more pronounced power asymmetries relative to the actors they cover. Closing this geographic gap in protection is as important as strengthening protection frameworks in the aggregate.

The fifth observation concerns the public dimension. The availability of environmental reporting documented in this series is relevant beyond press freedom. Where reporting on matters such as industrial effluent discharge, wildlife trafficking, wildlife casualties along a highway, land encroachment, and air pollution is not published, the communities most exposed to these conditions may lose access to documented information relevant to any response. The value of a supportive environment for environmental journalists is therefore relevant to public health, ecological information, and the capacity of communities to understand the environmental conditions that affect them.

## 5.2 Recommendations

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

### 5.2.1 – For Government and Law Enforcement

- **Operationalise the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021).** Legislative commitment must translate into operational practice. Relevant authorities should establish clear, publicly accessible protocols for receiving, investigating, and responding to complaints filed by journalists facing threats, with defined timelines, designated responsible officers, and mechanisms for accountability when protective obligations are not discharged.
  - Ensure independent and transparent handling of reported threats against journalists. Reported threats against journalists, including any attributed to public officials, should be examined through independent and transparent processes, with appropriate follow-up where warranted.
  - Review the application of cybercrime legislation to journalistic expression. The use of PECA provisions in relation to public interest reporting, noted in earlier editions of this series, merits legislative and judicial attention. Clear safeguards would help distinguish legitimate legal claims from applications of criminal law that may restrict legitimate environmental reporting.
- **Introduce anti-SLAPP provisions into civil procedure.** Strategic litigation deployed against journalists and media organisations as a mechanism of intimidation rather than genuine legal remedy must be curtailed. Procedural reforms enabling early dismissal of vexatious suits, cost awards against abusive claimants, and expedited resolution of defamation proceedings would substantially reduce the deterrent effect of prolonged litigation on investigative environmental reporting.
- **Extend protection frameworks to address editorial suppression and economic coercion.** The Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act does not currently reach the suppression of reporting through financial pressure on media organisations or through editorial directives issued under external commercial influence. Regulatory frameworks governing media ownership, advertising relationships, and editorial independence should be strengthened to address this structural gap.
- **Strengthen environmental law enforcement to reduce the conditions that produce journalist intimidation.** In several cases documented in this series, the intimidation of journalists was a direct response to the failure of regulatory authorities to enforce environmental law. Effective enforcement of environmental regulations — on industrial effluent discharge, wildlife protection, land encroachment, and highway safety — would reduce both the scale of environmental harm being reported and the intensity of the interest that powerful actors have in suppressing its documentation.

### 5.2.2 – For Media Institutions and Journalist Associations

- **Establish and enforce editorial independence policies.** Media organisations, particularly those operating in smaller markets, must develop and enforce clear internal policies that protect editorial decisions from commercial and political pressure. Owners and managers who suppress reporting under external financial inducement should be subject to professional accountability through journalist associations and relevant regulatory bodies.
- **Provide institutional support to journalists facing threats.** Affected journalists must not bear the consequences of intimidation alone. Media institutions and journalist associations should develop accessible support mechanisms — legal assistance, psychological support, security provisions, and professional solidarity — as standard institutional obligations rather than exceptional responses.

■ **Extend safety training and security support to field and district-level journalists.** Safety training, digital security awareness, and threat assessment capacity must be systematically extended to journalists operating outside major urban centres, where risks are highest, institutional support is most limited, and the personal consequences of intimidation are most acute.

■ **Strengthen protections for freelance and regional journalists.** Freelance and regional reporters, who feature across multiple case studies in this series, lack the institutional backing available to staff journalists at major outlets. Journalist associations should extend membership benefits, legal support, and advocacy coverage explicitly to this category of journalist, whose vulnerability is disproportionate to their professional representation within existing support structures.

■ **Publicly document and report threats against journalists.** Journalist associations should maintain and publish records of threats against their members, contributing to the cumulative evidentiary base needed for effective advocacy and legal reform. The normalisation of silence about threats — whether among individual journalists or within their professional associations — reinforces the impunity of perpetrators and undermines the collective case for systemic change.

### 5.2.3 – For Civil Society and International Partners

■ **Sustain and expand monitoring and documentation.** The evidentiary foundation generated by systematic monitoring is essential for advocacy, policy engagement, and accountability. Civil society organisations and international partners should support the continuation and expansion of structured monitoring to additional regions, thematic areas, and categories of journalist across Pakistan, building on the framework established by this series.

■ **Support legal aid and litigation assistance for affected journalists.** Civil society organisations 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 environmental reporting.

■ **Engage international accountability mechanisms.** Cases of journalist intimidation in Pakistan should be brought consistently to the attention of relevant international bodies, including the UNESCO Director-General's condemnation procedure, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and the Universal Periodic Review process. International engagement supplements domestic advocacy and contributes to the accountability pressure within which reform becomes more achievable.

■ **Support the economic sustainability of independent media.** The vulnerability of media organisations to commercial pressure — a recurring structural finding of this series — is in significant part a function of economic precarity. International development partners and civil society funders should incorporate media economic sustainability, including diversified revenue models and editorial independence support, as an integral component of journalist safety programming rather than a separate or secondary concern.

■ **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 regional response to the suppression of environmental reporting and contribute to the development of shared standards and frameworks for journalist protection.

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## 5.3 The Way Forward

This series was conceived on the premise that isolated documentation of threats against journalists is insufficient — that what the evidence base for systemic advocacy requires is cumulative, comparative, and analytically rigorous monitoring capable of revealing structural patterns and sustaining the case for reform over time. Four editions and twelve verified cases later, that premise has been fully borne out.

It is a structured, evidence-based account of the conditions that can constrain environmental reporting across Pakistan's provinces, and of the limited institutional response recorded. It describes the structural conditions involved and the public dimension of gaps in the protection environment.

As this annual cycle concludes, GNMI's commitment is threefold. First, to carry the monitoring framework, the analytical methodology, and the evidentiary record of this series into a second annual cycle, expanding its geographic reach, deepening its thematic scope, and refining its verification and documentation processes in response to the lessons of the first year. Second, to translate the twelve cases and the structural conclusions they support into direct inputs for legal reform, institutional accountability, and policy dialogue — engaging government, legislative bodies, journalist associations, and international partners with the specific, evidence-based recommendations this series has generated. Third, to ensure that the journalists whose experiences are documented in these pages, and the many more whose experiences go undocumented, are not merely the subjects of a monitoring report but the beneficiaries of the systemic change that this evidence demands.

Environmental journalism addresses significant environmental and public-interest issues affecting the country's population, its ecological systems, and its long-term sustainable development. Supporting the journalists who do this work is relevant to the transparency, public information, and informed discourse on which environmental governance and democratic life depend. GNMI remains committed to this objective and to the sustained, evidence-based work required to advance it.



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