



Mapping Threats to the Media in Namibia

Zoom seminar synopsis

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE WEBINAR

The Namibia webinar formed part of Intelwatch's regional initiative examining the threats confronting journalists and media organisations across seven Southern African countries. The project sought not only to identify the principal challenges affecting media freedom in each country, but also to examine opportunities for advocacy, collaboration, journalist training and institutional reform. Namibia was the seventh and final country examined through the initiative, following research and seminars focused on Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini and Lesotho. The Namibia report was initially authored by journalist Frederico Links and subsequently completed by Dr Philip Santos, whose contribution focused extensively on the country's legal and institutional framework and its implications for the media.

The webinar opened by placing Namibia's media environment within this regional context. Intelwatch noted that while some threats are common across Southern Africa—including declining media revenues, technological disruption and shrinking newsroom resources—the severity and character of threats differ considerably from one country to another. In Mozambique, for example, journalists have faced killings and severe insecurity; Zimbabwe has experienced arrests, exile and other forms of repression; South Africa has seen the growing use of strategic litigation; and Botswana has faced concerns around surveillance. Namibia, by contrast, remains a comparatively open environment in which journalists have not experienced the same level of overt repression.

This distinction became one of the central themes of the webinar. Participants consistently acknowledged that Namibia performs strongly in international assessments of media freedom and continues to provide a substantially more enabling environment for journalism than many other countries on the continent. Dr Santos noted that Namibia regularly ranks among Africa's strongest performers in terms of media freedom and also performs comparatively well in relation to basic freedoms and gender equality. International assessments by organisations such as Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House have similarly recognised the country's comparatively strong democratic and media environment.

However, the report and webinar deliberately moved beyond measuring only the actual incidents of repression. The authors instead examined the legal, institutional, economic, technological and societal vulnerabilities that could undermine media freedom if left unaddressed. The central argument was that the absence of widespread arrests, violence or

censorship should not be interpreted as the absence of threats. Namibia's challenge is increasingly preventative: identifying the mechanisms that could potentially be weaponised against journalists and strengthening institutions before political or economic conditions deteriorate sufficiently for those mechanisms to be used. Zoe Titus of the NMT Media Foundation described this as a fundamentally structural problem. Namibia is not characterised by daily harassment, arbitrary arrests or routine censorship, but the accumulation of structural vulnerabilities could develop into more serious restrictions if the country's political environment were to become more authoritarian. The Intelwatch report was consequently characterised as a useful risk-mapping exercise that identifies pressure points while there remains sufficient democratic space to address them.

Panellists of the discussion included:

1. **Dr Phillip dos Santos** - Co-author of the report and senior lecturer at the Namibia University of Science and Technology
2. **Zoe Titus** - Executive Director of the Namibia Media Trust
3. **Shelleygan Petersen** - President of The Namibia Media Professionals Union
4. **Toivo Ndjebela** - Chairperson of the Editors Forum of Namibia
5. **Esther Ndahepuluka Mbathera** - Vice chair of the Editors Forum of Namibia

REPORT FINDINGS PRESENTATION

Presenting the findings, Dr Santos explained that the report was initially undertaken by journalist Frederico Lynx, who had already developed a substantial analysis of Namibia's legal and policy framework before asking Santos to assist with completing the research. This background was significant because the report contains extensive consideration of legislation and policies that may create present or future vulnerabilities for journalists and media organisations.

Dr Santos began by emphasising the importance of placing the report's findings within Namibia's comparatively positive media environment. He cautioned that a report focused specifically on threats can unintentionally understate the significant achievements Namibia has made in guaranteeing basic freedoms and enabling journalism. The country's strong international standing therefore remains important context for understanding the findings. The

report does not present Namibia as a country in which media repression is widespread, but rather asks what vulnerabilities exist beneath an otherwise comparatively free environment and what could happen if those vulnerabilities are left unattended.

The report identified approximately five major areas of concern:

1. potentially restrictive legal frameworks;
2. political and institutional threats;
3. technological change and its impact on media revenues;
4. economic sustainability and the resulting contraction of newsrooms;
5. and gender-based threats affecting women journalists.

Importantly, Dr Santos emphasised that many of these threats are potential rather than fully actualised. Their severity depends heavily on the surrounding political environment. A democratic government may possess restrictive legal instruments without choosing to use them against journalists, while a less democratic government could potentially deploy exactly the same laws to constrain journalism.

The report therefore distinguishes between the existence of powers capable of abuse and evidence that those powers are being systematically abused. This distinction was repeatedly reinforced during the panel discussion. Participants argued that Namibia's current political environment has generally limited the manifestation of many of these threats, but that this should not become a reason for ignoring the underlying legal and institutional vulnerabilities.

Legal and Regulatory Vulnerabilities

The first major category identified by the report concerned Namibia's legal framework. Dr Santos noted that a number of laws contain provisions that could potentially restrict the work of journalists or create a chilling effect even when they are not routinely enforced. One of the clearest examples is criminal defamation. Although its application has been relatively limited, its continued presence means that journalists know that critical reporting can potentially expose them to criminal consequences. The existence of such legislation may therefore influence editorial decision-making even in the absence of active prosecution.

The significance of this concern extends beyond the immediate use of a particular law. Santos argued that journalists may self-censor simply because they are aware that restrictive provisions exist and could be activated in the future. If the political environment were to deteriorate, laws that currently remain largely dormant could potentially be deployed more aggressively against

journalists, media organisations or critical voices. The report therefore treats the legal framework as a latent vulnerability rather than claiming that the laws are currently being systematically weaponised.

Particular concern was also directed towards Namibia's surveillance framework, which is distributed across several pieces of legislation. The report identified provisions within the Communications Act, Criminal Procedure Act, Police Act, Namibia Central Intelligence Service Act, Defence Act and legislation dealing with terrorism and related activities as potentially relevant to the monitoring of communications. These powers become especially significant when considering the protection of confidential journalistic sources.

The authors stressed that surveillance becomes a media freedom issue when journalists cannot be confident that communications with confidential sources are protected. Even if there is no evidence that journalists are routinely being monitored, the possibility of interception can affect the willingness of sources to communicate and the willingness of journalists to pursue sensitive investigations.

The report also discussed the proposed Cybercrime Bill, which was identified as another potential source of concern. Participants argued that legislation governing online activity can have consequences not only for journalists but also for audiences and citizens who use digital platforms. Where online communication becomes subject to broad restrictions or surveillance powers, the resulting chilling effect can extend beyond the newsroom into the broader public sphere.

Surveillance, Source Protection and the Absence of Evidence

The question of state surveillance became one of the most extensively discussed aspects of the webinar. A participant from the floor asked the question whether there were serious documented cases of state surveillance targeting Namibian journalists. Zoe Titus responded by making an important distinction: Namibia has not experienced the overt arrests or documented systematic surveillance of journalists seen in some other countries, but the legal and technological infrastructure necessary for surveillance exists.

Zoe argued that mandatory identification requirements, prolonged retention of communications data, interception powers, weak oversight and the absence of comprehensive data protection safeguards create a potentially dangerous combination. Registration itself is not evidence of surveillance. The concern arises when information that identifies individuals and their

communications exists within a system that also provides authorities with powers to access or intercept that information without sufficiently robust safeguards.

For journalists, the implications are particularly serious because of the importance of confidential sources. If sources believe their communications can be traced, they may become unwilling to approach journalists with sensitive information. Similarly, journalists may become more cautious about how they communicate with sources, potentially limiting investigative work. Zoe therefore emphasised that the problem is not simply whether surveillance is currently occurring, but whether the legal and institutional framework provides adequate protection against potential abuse.

Herbert Moyo expanded this concern by questioning whether Namibian journalists possess the technical capacity to determine whether their devices have been compromised or their communications monitored. He referred to experiences from the previous Zoom country discussions that Intelwatch has where in one of the webinars, a media advocacy professional responsible for training journalists on surveillance in their country acknowledged that he lacked the ability to determine whether he himself was being surveilled. The question was therefore whether Namibian journalists could realistically identify sophisticated surveillance if it were occurring.

The discussion concluded that most journalists do not possess sufficient technical or institutional capacity to know whether their communications are being monitored. As a result, the absence of evidence should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that surveillance is absent. Instead, uncertainty itself creates a problem for source protection. If journalists and sources know that communications data are retained and potentially accessible but do not know when surveillance takes place or what safeguards apply, trust between journalists and sources can be weakened.

Participants and panellists therefore stressed that the appropriate response is not to encourage journalists to assume that they are constantly being surveilled, but to establish stronger legal safeguards around interception, independent oversight, judicial authorisation, transparency and meaningful source protection.

Political and Institutional Threats

The second major category identified by the report concerned political and institutional influence. Dr Santos noted that political threats do not necessarily manifest through direct

threats against individual journalists. They can also arise through institutional structures that make media organisations vulnerable to political influence.

This concern was particularly pronounced in relation to state-owned media. Namibia's three major state media institutions—NBC, NAMPA and *New Era*—play a significant role in the country's public communication environment. Their state ownership and dependence upon public funding create potential vulnerabilities because the same institutions responsible for providing public information may also be subject to political influence.

Santos distinguished between media that genuinely operate as public institutions and those that effectively function as state media. Where state media become overly responsive to government priorities, they risk serving the interests of the state rather than the public. This becomes particularly problematic if political power becomes concentrated in a small number of actors who can influence editorial priorities or use state media as instruments of political messaging.

The report did not argue that this has reached its most extreme form in Namibia. Rather, it identified state ownership as a structural vulnerability that could become considerably more serious if political conditions changed.

The report also considered Namibia's media regulatory institutions. The Communications Regulatory Authority of Namibia (CRAN) was recognised as comparatively independent, transparent and professional. The Media Ombudsman was likewise identified as an important self-regulatory mechanism through which complaints concerning media content can be resolved between news organisations and individuals or institutions that believe they have been unfairly represented. However, Dr Santos noted that the Ombudsman's effectiveness is constrained by limited resources and funding.

The weakness of under-resourced self-regulation is significant because media organisations and journalists may otherwise become more vulnerable to external litigation and intimidation. Santos raised the possibility of strategic litigation being used to exhaust the financial resources of media organisations through prolonged court proceedings. Even if a media house ultimately succeeds in court, the financial burden of defending repeated litigation can weaken its capacity to undertake investigative journalism.

Political Influence, State Media and Access to Public Officials

The panel discussion provided further evidence of the practical ways in which political and institutional pressures can influence journalism. Shelleygan Petersen expressed concern about frequent meetings between government ministers and state media organisations. According to her, such meetings were occurring approximately quarterly and involved not only board members but also editors responsible for day-to-day newsroom decisions. Although these meetings were characterised as "courtesy visits", Petersen questioned the implications of their frequency and the participation of editorial staff.

The concern was not necessarily that every meeting between government officials and editors constitutes interference. Rather, the repeated interaction creates a potential avenue for political influence, particularly where state media depend upon government funding. Participants argued that editorial independence requires clear boundaries between government officials and newsroom decision-making.

Ester Mbathera provided further examples of changing relationships between government officials and independent journalists. She described a growing tendency among public officials to avoid direct interviews and instead require journalists to submit questions through email or WhatsApp. While written responses can be useful, the practice limits journalists' ability to ask follow-up questions and challenge responses in real time.

Ester also described instances where ministers publicly refused to communicate with specific media organisations following critical reporting. One deputy minister reportedly stated publicly that he would not speak to *The Namibian* until the newspaper apologised for a story. According to Ester, the minister did not first challenge the factual claims in the story but instead withdrew access to himself as a source.

Panellists and participants warned that such practices can have consequences extending beyond the media organisation itself. When a government official responsible for education, for example, refuses to respond to a particular newspaper, journalists may struggle to obtain information necessary for reporting on education policy and public services. The refusal to engage therefore potentially affects the public's access to information about government performance. It was added that such behaviour can create a form of institutional impunity. If one official begins refusing to speak to journalists, others may follow, potentially developing into a broader pattern in which government selectively determines which journalists are permitted access to public officials.

Ester further described increasing difficulties in accessing senior political leaders. She noted that leaders increasingly prefer to communicate through prepared speeches, email or messaging applications rather than face-to-face interviews. She referred to an incident in which journalist Jemima Beukes was reportedly removed from State House while attempting to obtain answers from the President. She also noted that the President had not held a media conference since taking office, leaving journalists dependent upon written questions for access to the presidency.

These developments were discussed as examples of soft restrictions on media access. They do not constitute formal censorship, but they can nevertheless limit journalists' ability to scrutinise public officials and hold them accountable.

Economic Sustainability and the Transformation of Journalism

Economic sustainability emerged as arguably the most immediate threat identified by participants. Unlike some of the legal threats discussed in the report, economic pressures are already significantly affecting the day-to-day operation of Namibian newsrooms.

Dr Santos explained that technological change has transformed the traditional media business model. Audiences have increasingly moved from newspapers and other traditional platforms to online spaces, while advertising revenue has followed them. This has undermined the financial foundations of traditional journalism and made it increasingly difficult for media organisations to retain experienced journalists.

Shelleygan Petersen expanded on this point by arguing that the industry failed to establish effective boundaries around the distribution of journalism on digital platforms. When social media became widespread, media organisations began providing news content freely online, undermining the traditional relationship in which audiences paid for newspapers and advertisers financed journalism. She argued that the media industry now needs to rethink its relationship with major technology companies, particularly platforms that use journalistic content to attract audiences and generate revenue without adequately compensating the organisations that produce that content. The problem is therefore not simply declining newspaper sales but a structural redistribution of value within the digital information ecosystem.

Shelleygan further noted that declining revenue has affected journalists' salaries and working conditions while increasing demands on reporters to become multimedia journalists. Although

digital and multimedia skills are increasingly necessary, she cautioned that technological adaptation should not come at the expense of professional standards.

Poor remuneration also creates ethical vulnerabilities. Shelleygan argued that journalists experiencing severe financial pressure may become more susceptible to compromising professional principles simply to meet basic needs. This creates risks not only for individual journalists but for the credibility and independence of the media sector as a whole.

The economic pressures have also accelerated the loss of experienced journalists. Reporters with eight, ten or fifteen years of experience may leave journalism for better-paid professions, academia or other sectors. Their departure represents a significant loss of institutional knowledge because experienced journalists possess historical knowledge, professional relationships and contextual understanding that cannot easily be replaced by new recruits.

Dr Santos referred to this process as the juniorisation of newsrooms. As experienced journalists become too expensive for struggling media houses to retain, newsrooms increasingly depend upon students and interns. While this gives young journalists valuable practical experience, it can also reduce the depth and quality of journalism because inexperienced reporters lack the accumulated knowledge required for complex investigative work.

Ester confirmed that investigative journalism is already suffering from this process. Experienced journalists have moved into academia and other professions, leaving younger journalists who may be more comfortable covering community events, education and other routine issues than undertaking complex investigations. She argued that there is increasingly little appetite among young journalists for investigations involving politically or economically powerful individuals.

This has serious implications for the watchdog role of the media. Investigative journalism requires courage, experience, institutional knowledge, time and financial resources. As these elements disappear from newsrooms, the media may increasingly produce routine reporting and public relations material rather than sustained investigations into governance, corruption and political power.

Government Advertising and the Threat to Editorial Independence

The discussion of economic sustainability led directly to the issue of government advertising. Toivo Ndjebela explained that government remains one of the largest advertisers and one of the most important sources of information in Namibia because ministries and public institutions generate a substantial amount of news.

This creates a structural dependence. If independent media organisations rely heavily upon government advertising to remain financially viable, the withdrawal or threatened withdrawal of advertising can become an indirect mechanism for influencing editorial behaviour. Toivo stressed that state advertising should never become a reward for favourable coverage.

According to Toivo, there have been instances where state actors have made subtle suggestions that advertising could be withdrawn following critical reporting. Such threats are rarely formal or explicitly stated, but the implication can nevertheless be understood by media owners and editors. The result may be a gradual reduction in the willingness of private media organisations to publish critical stories about government institutions.

Panellists and participants argued that advertising allocation should therefore be transparent and based upon legitimate criteria such as audience reach and the ability to reach particular communities. It should not depend upon whether a media organisation has previously published favourable or unfavourable stories about the government.

Zoe Titus reinforced this argument by noting that a newsroom does not need to be formally censored for its editorial independence to be compromised. Poor salaries, shrinking staff numbers, loss of experienced journalists and dependence upon a narrow advertising market can all influence which stories are pursued and how strongly editors are able to defend them.

The issue is particularly significant because Namibia has a relatively small media market and government-funded media constitute a major component of that market. Titus noted that advertising revenues had reportedly declined by approximately 34 percent year-on-year, placing additional pressure on already vulnerable media organisations.

Participants consequently argued that economic sustainability should be treated as a media freedom issue, rather than merely a business concern. A media organisation that cannot afford experienced journalists, legal representation or investigative reporting is structurally less capable of acting independently.

Investigative Journalism and the Loss of Institutional Knowledge

The decline of investigative journalism emerged as a cross-cutting concern linking economic sustainability, newsroom juniorisation, access to information and journalist safety.

Santos emphasised that investigative reporting requires substantial resources. Journalists may need to travel extensively, obtain documents, cultivate sources and pursue stories over long periods before publication. Local Namibian news organisations frequently lack the resources to sustain such investigations.

The Fishrot investigation was used as an example of the resource disparity facing local media. Although *The Namibian* had already undertaken significant reporting on the scandal, Al Jazeera was able to pursue the story on a much larger international scale because of its resources and ability to trace the investigation across Africa, Europe and Asia. This illustrated the growing difficulty local media face in undertaking investigations that require international travel and cross-border research.

Ester argued that the problem is not simply financial. The departure of experienced investigative journalists means that fewer people possess the skills and institutional knowledge necessary to pursue complex stories. Younger journalists entering newsrooms may understandably prefer reporting areas where they can produce stories more quickly, while investigations require patience and resilience.

Dr Santos noted that the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) is attempting to respond through the introduction of investigative journalism as a standalone course within its honours programme. The initiative is intended to provide students with foundational skills that can later be strengthened through newsroom mentorship. However, participants agreed that academic training cannot substitute for newsroom resources. Media organisations must also have the financial capacity to fund investigative work once journalists have been trained.

Gendered Threats and the Experiences of Women Journalists

The report identified misogyny and gender-based discrimination as another important category of threats. Santos explained that these operate at multiple levels, including society, interactions between journalists and sources, and within newsrooms themselves.

Women journalists are often subjected to greater criticism than their male counterparts when they express opinions publicly, particularly on social media. Their professional reporting may

also provoke gendered responses from news sources. Research supervised by Santos into the experiences of female journalists in Namibian newsrooms found instances where newsmakers threatened women journalists or demanded inappropriate favours when their reporting challenged existing privileges or interests.

The newsroom itself can also function as a gendered environment in which women face structural limitations affecting their ability to work and advance professionally. Participants nevertheless acknowledged that Namibia has made significant progress in women's representation within media leadership. Women now occupy senior positions including newsroom management and leadership of state media institutions.

However, increased representation in leadership does not automatically resolve societal misogyny. Santos argued that misogyny is a broader social problem influenced by the proliferation of misogynistic content online. Men and boys exposed to such material may carry these attitudes into their interactions with women journalists, both as audiences and as sources.

Shelleygan Petersen described practical efforts by the Namibia Media Professionals Union to support journalists, including women journalists. The union has introduced mentorship initiatives linking experienced journalists with younger colleagues and is developing "check-in Fridays" where journalists can discuss their experiences, debrief and receive support around mental health and coping mechanisms.

Shelleygan also linked journalist wellbeing to the wider problem of talent leaving the profession. She noted that Namibia has lost journalists to other professions and that there is insufficient research examining why experienced journalists leave journalism. She argued that mental health, working conditions, remuneration and professional insecurity all require greater attention if the sector is to retain its skilled workforce.

The union is also pursuing training in areas including artificial intelligence, mental health and labour migration, while seeking to strengthen connections within the media industry.

PANEL DISCUSSION KEY TAKEAWAYS

Following the report presentation, the discussion broadened from the report's findings to the practical realities confronting Namibian journalists. A recurring theme was that Namibia's comparatively favourable media environment should not produce complacency.

Zoe Titus argued that the Intelwatch report and the Africa Media Barometer Namibia 2026 report reached broadly similar baseline conclusions: Namibia remains relatively free, but its principal media challenges are structural. She proposed grouping the major threats into three interconnected areas: legal and institutional vulnerability, including surveillance and weak source protection; economic sustainability, including declining advertising, poor remuneration, newsroom contraction and ownership concentration; and institutional independence, particularly within state-owned media. The important issue, she argued, is how these pressures interact. A journalist may not be arrested, but may still be unable to protect a source. A media organisation may not be censored, but may lose experienced journalists because it cannot pay competitive salaries. An editor may not receive an explicit instruction to suppress a story, but may hesitate to pursue it because the subject is an important advertiser.

Access to Information as a Democratic Right

The Access to Information Act became one of the most significant issues discussed during the webinar. Santos explained that Namibia had already possessed a relatively open information environment, but that the new legislation had the potential to strengthen it considerably by creating a statutory basis for accessing public information. However, the implementation process remained incomplete.

Regulations required to operationalise the legislation had not yet been finalised, while the recruitment of the Information Commissioner had been placed on hold without a clear explanation. This development was described as a major concern within the media fraternity because the effectiveness of the legislation ultimately depends upon the institutional structures responsible for implementing it.

Paheja Siririka explained why the issue is particularly important for journalists. In the absence of an effective access-to-information system, journalists and civil society organisations have historically depended upon leaked documents, informal relationships and the "goodwill" of public officials. While these relationships can provide valuable information, they do not constitute a reliable or equitable system of public access.

An operational Access to Information Act would give journalists and citizens a legal basis for demanding information from public bodies, particularly where the information concerns matters of public interest. Siririka therefore questioned why Namibia, a country associated with the Windhoek Declaration and the origins of World Press Freedom Day, continues to face delays in fully operationalising its access-to-information framework.

Titus responded that the adoption or gazetting of legislation should not be treated as the end of an advocacy process. The implementation stage is equally important. She argued that the Access to Information Act requires a broader civic movement rather than advocacy by the media sector alone because the right belongs to citizens generally.

She also noted that the law is particularly valuable for long-term investigative journalism rather than routine daily reporting. Investigative journalists must often withstand repeated refusals or delays in accessing information, meaning that effective implementation will require journalists and civil society organisations to have the resources and persistence necessary to use the legislation strategically.

Zoe further raised concerns about whether adequate access-to-information infrastructure exists outside major urban centres. While information officers have reportedly been installed across ministries, she questioned whether rural communities possess the institutional infrastructure necessary to exercise their right to information effectively. This raised the need for a locally appropriate model that ensures the right is accessible beyond Windhoek.

State Media, Historical Legacies and Political Access

A significant portion of the panel discussion also examined the historical development of Namibia's state media and how this history continues to influence contemporary journalism.

Responding to a question comparing Namibia with South Africa, Ester explained that Namibia's post-independence media environment was shaped partly by an understanding among liberation leaders of the power of information. After independence, the transformation of the former SWABC into the NBC, alongside the establishment of *New Era* and NAMP, reflected recognition of the importance of information institutions.

However, Ester argued that over time, political interference within these institutions became more apparent. She referred to the removal of community call-in programmes such as "Open Line" and the discontinuation of investigative television programming. Although attempts have subsequently been made to revive community-oriented formats, she argued that they have not returned in the same form.

Ester further argued that NAMP and NBC have increasingly become more closely aligned with government messaging. She pointed to instances where independent media outlets covering the same event as state media produce significantly different accounts of what

occurred. Such differences, she suggested, raise questions about how information is selected, framed and distributed through state-owned institutions.

The discussion also returned to the issue of access to political leaders. Batera noted that Namibia's political leaders have become increasingly difficult for journalists to access directly, with questions frequently submitted through email or WhatsApp and limited opportunities for face-to-face interviews. She argued that political communication has increasingly become event-driven and focused on prepared statements rather than genuine engagement with journalists.

Panellists and participants considered these developments particularly significant because journalism requires the ability to question public officials directly. Where politicians can selectively determine which journalists they speak to and which questions they answer, public accountability becomes weakened even without formal censorship.

Regional Journalism and News Deserts

Another significant theme was the position of journalists operating outside Namibia's main urban centres. Ester argued that regional journalists are frequently overlooked because they work in isolation and have fewer opportunities to participate in professional training and networks.

She welcomed the work already undertaken by the NMT Media Foundation to include regional journalists in training programmes but called for more direct engagement with journalists in the regions. Rather than expecting regional journalists to travel to Windhoek, media-support organisations should travel to the regions to understand the particular challenges journalists encounter in their communities.

Ester also encouraged universities to send journalism students to regional newsrooms for internships. She argued that internships in busy Windhoek newsrooms may provide limited exposure because journalists and editors are often overwhelmed with daily demands. Regional placements could provide students with greater responsibility while simultaneously strengthening local news capacity.

The issue of regional journalism was linked to the broader concept of news deserts raised by Titus. Economic pressures can make reporting from remote communities prohibitively expensive, meaning that entire communities gradually disappear from national news agendas.

This does not necessarily result from deliberate censorship; instead, it can occur because media organisations lack the resources to maintain reporters and coverage across the country.

Participants consequently argued that media sustainability must be considered geographically as well as institutionally. A media environment may appear pluralistic at the national level while communities in rural or marginalised areas receive little independent reporting.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR REFORM

The webinar produced a broad set of recommendations focused on consolidating Namibia's existing media freedoms and addressing structural vulnerabilities before they become more severe.

Strengthening Legal and Institutional Safeguards

Participants called for continued review of laws containing provisions that could potentially restrict journalism, particularly legislation governing surveillance, interception, cybercrime and criminal defamation. The objective should not necessarily be the wholesale repeal of every law identified in the report, but rather the introduction of stronger safeguards preventing legitimate legal powers from being misused against journalists.

Greater oversight of surveillance powers was identified as particularly important. Participants called for independent oversight, judicial authorisation and stronger transparency around interception and data access. Source protection should be treated as a central component of any surveillance and data-protection framework.

Implementing the Access to Information Act

The implementation of the Access to Information Act was identified as an immediate priority. Participants argued that regulations must be finalised, the Information Commissioner process must be completed and public institutions must be adequately equipped to respond to requests.

They also stressed that implementation should extend beyond ministries in Windhoek. Rural communities require practical mechanisms through which they can exercise their right to access information. Civil society and journalists should therefore build broader public demand for the law rather than treating access to information as an issue exclusively belonging to the media sector.

Strengthening Media Sustainability

Economic sustainability was repeatedly identified as a central media freedom issue. Participants called for greater collaboration between media executives, editors, journalists and marketing departments to develop sustainable models capable of adapting to technological disruption.

Government advertising should be allocated transparently according to objective criteria rather than editorial favourability. Media organisations should not be forced to choose between commercial survival and critical reporting.

Participants also highlighted the importance of regional and international advocacy around the role of large technology companies. Since many digital platforms profit from distributing journalistic content, the media industry requires stronger collective approaches to ensuring that value generated from journalism does not accrue almost exclusively to technology companies.

Retaining Experienced Journalists

The sector must also address the loss of experienced journalists. Mentorship programmes linking senior journalists with younger reporters were identified as an important intervention. Petersen described the Namibia Media Professionals Union's mentorship initiative as an effort to transfer professional knowledge and strengthen the quality of journalism across generations.

Improving salaries and working conditions was likewise considered essential. Without such measures, the continued migration of experienced journalists into academia, public relations and other professions will further weaken investigative capacity.

Strengthening Investigative Journalism

Participants recommended greater investment in investigative journalism training and resources. NUST's introduction of investigative journalism as a standalone honours-level course was welcomed as an important foundation, but participants stressed that training institutions and newsrooms must work together.

Training must be accompanied by newsroom resources capable of financing investigations involving travel, documentation, source development and extended reporting periods. Without such resources, trained journalists may be unable to apply their skills effectively.

Supporting Women Journalists

Gender-sensitive interventions were also identified as necessary. The Namibia Media Professionals Union's mentorship and mental-health initiatives were highlighted as promising approaches. The "check-in Fridays" programme provides journalists with a space to discuss professional pressures, debrief and develop coping strategies while also creating opportunities for conversations with media owners around journalist wellbeing.

Participants further encouraged young women entering journalism to affiliate with the union, which provides a platform for professional support and advocacy around women's experiences within newsrooms.

Supporting Regional Journalists

Future training and safety initiatives should deliberately include journalists outside Windhoek. Participants called for organisations such as Intelwatch to conduct training directly in regional communities and to develop a better understanding of the safety, digital-security and professional challenges facing journalists working in isolated environments.

Universities were also encouraged to expand regional internships so that students can gain practical experience while contributing to local newsroom capacity.

Building an Ecosystem-Wide Approach

Zoe Titus emphasised that strengthening individual journalists alone will not be sufficient. Training needs to be connected to advocacy and institutional reform. Media houses require stronger systems, editors need support, and journalists need organisational structures capable of responding to legal, technological and economic threats.

Her proposed priorities for future collaboration included digital safety and source protection; advocacy around surveillance and data protection; legal and policy advocacy; implementation of access-to-information legislation; institutional independence; newsroom resilience; gendered online harassment; journalist safety; and media sustainability.

This approach reflects the central conclusion of the webinar: media freedom depends upon an ecosystem of functioning institutions rather than the resilience of individual journalists alone.

BROADER SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REPORT

The *Mapping Threats to the Media in Namibia* report ultimately presents Namibia's media environment as one that has achieved substantial democratic gains but remains vulnerable to gradual erosion. Its significance lies precisely in identifying potential threats before they develop into the more severe forms of repression evident elsewhere in the region.

Participants repeatedly stressed that Namibia should not wait until journalists are imprisoned, media organisations are closed or widespread censorship becomes visible before acting. The existence of legal provisions capable of surveillance, the financial vulnerability of news organisations, the dependence on government advertising, declining access to officials and gendered harassment already represent forms of pressure that can weaken journalism over time.

Titus argued that the key question is therefore not simply whether Namibian journalists remain free to report today. The more important question is whether Namibia is building a media system in which independent journalism remains sustainable. Media freedom is weakened when journalists cannot protect sources, when editors self-censor, when experienced journalists leave because the profession is financially unsustainable, and when public media institutions cannot operate independently.

This broader conception of media freedom was reinforced by Toivo. He argued that Namibia's threats often appear in subtle forms rather than conventional manifestations such as imprisonment or the closure of media houses. If sources become afraid to communicate because of surveillance laws, that is a threat. If editors avoid stories because they involve important advertisers, that is a threat. If government information is selectively provided to particular media organisations, that is a threat. If women journalists withdraw from online spaces because of harassment, that too represents a threat to media freedom.

The report therefore contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of media repression - one in which democratic erosion can occur incrementally through economic, institutional and technological pressures without the dramatic events normally associated with press restrictions.

The regional perspective of the Intelwatch project further strengthens this argument. Namibia's comparatively favourable position demonstrates that media freedom exists on a spectrum and that the same categories of threat can manifest at different levels of severity. The fact that Namibia has not experienced the levels of repression seen elsewhere should not be interpreted

as evidence that the country has no vulnerabilities. Instead, its comparatively open environment provides an opportunity to address those vulnerabilities before they become entrenched.

The webinar also highlighted the importance of Namibia's civil society. Santos identified organisations including NMT Media Foundation and training institutions such as DW Akademie as important actors in monitoring proposed legislation, identifying potential threats and strengthening journalists' capacities. He argued that these organisations require greater financial and technical support to continue their work, particularly given broader reductions in international funding available to civil society organisations.

He further proposed engagement with parliamentarians themselves. Workshops and capacity-building initiatives could help lawmakers better understand how legislation affects democratic institutions and media freedom. Although political will can be difficult to influence, Santos argued that democratic environments provide opportunities for advocacy to translate into concrete policy outcomes.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

The webinar concluded with a strong recognition that Namibia occupies a comparatively favourable position within the Southern African media landscape, but that this achievement should be understood as something that must be continuously protected and renewed.

Dr Santos argued that democracy is not a destination that can ultimately be reached and then permanently secured. It requires continuous renewal and constant efforts to identify and respond to emerging threats. The media is a key institution within this process because independent journalism enables citizens to scrutinise political authority, exposes abuses and contributes to maintaining the democratic environment.

For Dr Santos, the objective should therefore be to prevent deterioration in the political environment before it reaches a point where restrictive laws and institutional weaknesses can be weaponised. He argued that the report represents only the beginning of a broader process through which Namibia's democratic institutions can be strengthened.

Titus similarly argued that Namibia still possesses significant democratic space and that this space should be used now, while it remains available, to strengthen institutions, source protections and sustainable journalism. Waiting until threats become fully manifested would make reform considerably more difficult.

Toivo's closing intervention reinforced this preventative message. He stressed that Namibia's relatively free environment should not create complacency because threats to media freedom can take subtle forms. Editors therefore need to become more aware of these less conventional threats and identify institutional weaknesses before they become serious problems.

The webinar also reaffirmed the importance of continued collaboration with Intelwatch. Participants identified digital safety, surveillance awareness, source protection, journalist safety, investigative journalism, access to information, gendered harassment, newsroom resilience and media sustainability as areas in which further training and advocacy could be developed. Intelwatch had already conducted cybersecurity training involving Namibian journalists, and participants expressed a desire for this engagement to continue rather than remain a once-off intervention.

The Namibia seminar therefore concluded differently from several of the other country seminars in the regional series. Rather than documenting a media environment already characterised by widespread violence, imprisonment or overt censorship, it highlighted a country where significant democratic and media freedoms remain intact but where structural vulnerabilities require attention. This makes Namibia an important case within the regional project: it demonstrates that protecting media freedom is not simply about responding to repression once it occurs, but about identifying and addressing the conditions that could enable repression to emerge.

Ultimately, the *Mapping Threats to the Media in Namibia* report serves as an early-warning and preventative framework. It recognises Namibia's considerable achievements while drawing attention to the legal, political, economic, technological and gender-related pressures that could gradually undermine those gains. The central message of the webinar was therefore one of consolidation: Namibia should use the democratic space it currently possesses to strengthen legal safeguards, ensure access to information, protect confidential sources, sustain independent newsrooms, support investigative journalism, address gendered harassment and reinforce the independence of media institutions. By doing so, the country can preserve and deepen the media freedoms that have distinguished it within Southern Africa while ensuring that independent journalism remains viable for future generations.