



Mapping Threats to the Media in Mozambique

Zoom seminar synopsis

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE WEBINAR

Intelwatch convened a regional webinar to present and discuss the findings of its report, *Mapping Threats to the Media in Mozambique*. The discussion formed part of Intelwatch's broader Southern African research initiative examining the legal, political, economic, technological and physical threats confronting journalists and media institutions across the region. Building on previous seminars focusing on countries such as Botswana, Lesotho and Eswatini, the Mozambique webinar provided an opportunity to examine one of the region's most complex media environments, where restrictions on press freedom intersect with political contestation, armed conflict, economic pressures and shrinking civic space.

Opening the webinar, Intelwatch's Advocacy and Capacity Building Director, Owen Gagare, explained that the report was authored by investigative journalists Estácio Valoi and David Mazine, whose work drew on extensive research and engagement with journalists, media organisations and civil society actors in Mozambique. The report documented a range of challenges affecting journalists, including restrictive laws, impunity for attacks on the media, political intimidation, economic pressures, surveillance concerns and the deteriorating security environment in parts of the country. Gagare noted that the report formed part of a wider regional project designed not only to document threats but also to support journalists through advocacy, digital security training and collaboration with media freedom organisations and cybersecurity experts.

Intelwatch Executive Director Piers Pigou emphasised the organisation's long-standing focus on the relationship between surveillance, accountability and investigative journalism. He noted that the reports were intended to serve as practical advocacy tools capable of informing public debate and policy discussions rather than remaining purely academic exercises. Pigou stressed that the findings emerging from the Mozambique report would form part of a longer-term engagement process aimed at strengthening media freedom and encouraging dialogue among journalists, policymakers and civil society actors.

The webinar brought together a distinguished panel of journalists, researchers and media practitioners with extensive experience covering Mozambique's political and security landscape. Alongside report co-author Estácio Valoi, the discussion featured investigative journalist and academic Armando Nhantumbo, conflict analyst and journalist Tomás Queface, and representatives from civil society and women's rights organisations. Their combined

expertise enabled a wide-ranging discussion that connected historical developments, legal frameworks, conflict dynamics and contemporary threats affecting journalism in Mozambique.

Throughout the webinar, Valoi emphasised that threats to media freedom in Mozambique cannot be understood solely through individual incidents of intimidation or violence. Rather, they argued that journalism operates within a broader ecosystem characterised by historical patterns of state control, contested democratic institutions, armed conflict, economic vulnerability and expanding restrictions on civic space. Understanding these interconnected dynamics was therefore essential for developing effective responses to the challenges confronting journalists and media organisations.

Panellists of the discussion included:

1. **Estacio Valoi** – Co-author of the report and Mozambican investigative Journalist/Reporter/photographer.
2. **Nhatumbo Armando** - investigative journalist and a PhD candidate at Rhodes University
3. **Tomás Queface** - Analyst & Researcher at Zitamar News / Mozambique Conflict Monitor

REPORT FINDINGS PRESENTATION

Presenting the report, Estácio Valoi explained that the research sought to map the structural conditions shaping journalism in Mozambique rather than focusing exclusively on isolated incidents involving journalists. The report examined how legal frameworks, political practices, social attitudes, economic pressures and security dynamics collectively influence the environment in which journalists operate.

Valoi argued that many contemporary challenges confronting the media have deep historical roots. During both the colonial period and the early post-independence era, the media was largely viewed as an extension of state authority rather than as an independent institution responsible for scrutinising power. Although Mozambique has undergone significant political and constitutional changes since the introduction of multiparty democracy, Valoi noted that aspects of this political culture continue to shape relationships between the state and the media.

The report found that while Mozambique possesses constitutional guarantees protecting freedom of expression and media freedom, these rights are often undermined in practice through restrictive implementation, political hostility towards critical reporting and institutional weaknesses. Journalists continue to encounter legal uncertainty, intimidation, limited access to information and hostility from public officials, particularly when investigating corruption, governance failures or security-related issues.

Valoi further observed that public understanding of journalism remains uneven in some parts of the country. Journalists are frequently viewed with suspicion, particularly in politically sensitive environments or conflict zones. Such attitudes may be reinforced by political narratives portraying independent journalists as opponents of the state rather than as actors serving the public interest. This contributes to an environment in which journalists face both institutional and social barriers when attempting to gather information and conduct investigations.

The report also highlighted the difficulties researchers encountered when compiling information about attacks against journalists and restrictions on media freedom. Access to sources, official information and reliable data remained challenging, illustrating broader problems regarding transparency and accountability. Nevertheless, through collaboration with journalists, media organisations and civil society actors, the report was able to document a detailed picture of the evolving threat landscape facing journalism in Mozambique.

Historical Legacies and Political Culture

A major theme emerging from both the report and the panel discussion was the importance of historical context in understanding contemporary threats to media freedom. Valoi argued that many current challenges cannot be fully understood without examining the role of the media during the colonial period and the early years following independence.

Under Portuguese colonial rule, information was tightly controlled and independent journalism was severely restricted. Following independence in 1975, the newly established state inherited many centralised approaches to information management. During the single-party era, the media was largely expected to support state objectives and contribute to national development rather than function as an independent watchdog institution.

Valoi observed that although Mozambique subsequently adopted multiparty democracy and expanded constitutional protections for freedom of expression, elements of this political culture

have persisted. Journalists who critically investigate state institutions, political elites or powerful economic actors are still sometimes perceived as adversaries rather than as legitimate Valoi in democratic accountability processes.

Armando Nhantumbo argued that this historical legacy helps explain why journalists, civil society organisations and activists frequently encounter similar forms of pressure. Restrictions on media freedom should therefore be understood within the broader context of shrinking civic space and efforts to manage or suppress dissent. He noted that attacks against journalists are not isolated incidents but form part of wider patterns affecting individuals and organisations that challenge dominant political narratives or expose governance failures.

Valoi repeatedly stressed that Mozambique possesses many of the formal characteristics associated with democratic governance, including constitutional protections, legislation and institutions. However, they argued that practical implementation often falls short of these ideals. As a result, there remains a significant gap between formal democratic guarantees and the lived experiences of journalists working on politically sensitive issues.

Legal and Regulatory Challenges

The webinar also explored Mozambique's evolving legal framework governing the media. Valoi acknowledged that reforms to media legislation had become necessary given the rapid transformation of the information environment over recent decades. Existing laws dating from the early 1990s had been developed before the emergence of social media, digital journalism and contemporary communication technologies.

Tomás Queface noted that updating the legal framework was therefore not inherently problematic. However, Valoi emphasised that the impact of new legislation depends significantly on how laws are interpreted and implemented in practice. Even where legal reforms contain positive provisions, concerns remain regarding selective enforcement, political interference and the use of administrative or legal processes to constrain critical reporting.

Several participants argued that the principal challenge in Mozambique is not necessarily the absence of legal protections but rather inconsistent implementation and the persistence of authoritarian attitudes among some institutions and public officials. This disconnect between formal legal guarantees and practical realities creates uncertainty for journalists and may encourage self-censorship, particularly when reporting on politically sensitive issues.

Valoi also highlighted broader concerns regarding access to information, transparency and accountability. Delays in obtaining official information, limited responsiveness from public institutions and restrictions on reporting in sensitive areas continue to undermine the ability of journalists to conduct thorough investigations.

Conflict, Security and Journalism in Cabo Delgado

One of the most significant themes discussed during the webinar was the impact of the conflict in Cabo Delgado on media freedom and journalist safety. Valoi emphasised that Mozambique's security environment differs from that of many neighbouring countries because journalists operate within the context of an ongoing armed conflict involving insurgent violence, military operations and complex humanitarian challenges.

Armando Nhantumbo noted that journalists covering Cabo Delgado have faced arrests, intimidation, harassment and restrictions on access to information. Report co-author Estácio Valoi was himself among journalists detained while reporting on developments in the region, illustrating the risks associated with independent coverage of conflict-related issues.

Valoi argued that the conflict has created conditions in which state authorities increasingly justify restrictions on journalism using security arguments. While recognising the legitimate need to address security threats, speakers cautioned that excessive restrictions on reporting undermine transparency and limit public understanding of developments in the region.

The discussion further highlighted concerns regarding impunity for attacks against journalists. Cases involving intimidation, assault, detention and other abuses are seldom followed by effective investigations or accountability measures. This contributes to a climate of fear in which journalists may avoid reporting on conflict-related issues due to concerns about personal safety.

Speakers emphasised that conflict reporting plays a crucial public interest role by documenting humanitarian conditions, governance challenges and the experiences of affected communities. Restricting journalistic access therefore not only affects reporters but also limits broader public understanding of one of Mozambique's most significant contemporary crises.

Surveillance, Digital Technologies and Emerging Threats

The webinar devoted considerable attention to the growing influence of digital technologies on journalism and the increasingly complex relationship between technological advancement,

surveillance and media freedom. Valoi observed that although digital platforms have expanded opportunities for journalists to publish independently, communicate rapidly with audiences and collaborate across borders, they have simultaneously created new vulnerabilities that many journalists remain ill-equipped to manage.

Several speakers emphasised that surveillance should no longer be understood solely in terms of traditional state monitoring or physical observation. Modern surveillance increasingly occurs through digital communication networks, mobile devices, online platforms and sophisticated technological tools capable of accessing journalists' communications, movements and confidential information. These developments have significant implications for investigative reporting, particularly where journalists depend upon confidential sources to expose corruption, organised crime or abuses of power.

Valoi noted that many journalists continue to rely on commercially available messaging applications and digital communication platforms without fully appreciating the associated security risks. While encrypted communication has become increasingly common, journalists often require greater training in digital security, secure document storage, password management and source protection. Valoi therefore argued that digital security should become an integral component of journalism training rather than being treated as a specialised area relevant only to investigative reporters.

The discussion also highlighted the psychological impact of surveillance. Even where journalists cannot confirm that their communications are being monitored, uncertainty itself can produce a chilling effect. Reporters may avoid contacting sensitive sources, pursuing controversial investigations or travelling to politically sensitive areas because they fear that their activities are being observed. Valoi argued that this atmosphere of uncertainty contributes to self-censorship and weakens investigative journalism without requiring direct state intervention.

Several panellists welcomed Intelwatch's broader regional work on surveillance awareness and cybersecurity, noting that strengthening digital resilience has become essential for journalists operating in increasingly complex technological environments. Capacity-building initiatives, practical training and collaboration with cybersecurity specialists were identified as important components of protecting journalists and preserving investigative reporting in the digital age.

Economic Pressures and the Sustainability of Independent Media

Alongside legal and security concerns, the panel identified economic vulnerability as one of the most significant structural threats confronting journalism in Mozambique. Valoi observed that independent media organisations continue to operate under severe financial constraints, limiting their ability to undertake long-term investigative reporting, invest in journalist safety or expand coverage beyond major urban centres.

The discussion highlighted the broader transformation of the media industry as advertising revenue continues to decline while audiences increasingly consume news through digital platforms and social media. These developments have placed considerable pressure on traditional news organisations, many of which struggle to maintain experienced reporting teams or finance resource-intensive investigative journalism.

Valoi argued that economic insecurity directly affects editorial independence. Media organisations facing financial instability may become increasingly dependent upon politically connected advertisers, donor funding or external financial support, each of which presents its own challenges for maintaining editorial autonomy. Although financial pressures are not unique to Mozambique, speakers noted that they become particularly significant within political environments where independent journalism already encounters legal and institutional obstacles.

The report further highlighted the difficulties confronting journalists working outside major media organisations. Freelance reporters and community journalists frequently operate with limited institutional support while simultaneously facing many of the same security and legal risks encountered by journalists employed by larger news organisations. This combination of financial insecurity and professional vulnerability increases the challenges associated with reporting on politically sensitive subjects or conflict-affected regions.

Valoi therefore argued that strengthening media freedom requires recognising the economic sustainability of journalism as a democratic concern rather than merely a commercial issue. Independent journalism cannot fulfil its public watchdog function without sufficient institutional resources, professional support and financial resilience.

Shrinking Civic Space and the Relationship Between Journalism and Civil Society

Another important theme emerging from the panel discussion concerned the broader relationship between media freedom and civic space in Mozambique. Speakers consistently

argued that journalists are not the only actors experiencing growing pressure. Civil society organisations, human rights defenders, community activists and researchers often encounter similar forms of intimidation when addressing politically sensitive issues.

Valoi observed that these pressures frequently overlap. Journalists investigating corruption, governance failures or security developments regularly depend upon information provided by civil society organisations, local communities and independent researchers. Consequently, restrictions affecting one sector inevitably affect the others. Shrinking civic space therefore has direct implications for investigative journalism by reducing access to information, discouraging whistleblowers and limiting opportunities for collaborative advocacy.

Several speakers emphasised that attacks against journalists should not be interpreted solely as attempts to silence individual reporters. Rather, they represent broader challenges to public accountability and democratic participation. When journalists are prevented from reporting freely, citizens lose access to reliable information concerning governance, conflict, corruption and public policy.

The discussion therefore called for stronger collaboration between journalists, academic institutions, legal practitioners and civil society organisations. Valoi argued that defending media freedom requires collective responses capable of addressing both immediate threats against journalists and the broader institutional conditions that permit such threats to persist.

Journalist Safety and Impunity

The issue of journalist safety featured prominently throughout the webinar, particularly in relation to reporting on conflict, organised crime and corruption. Valoi observed that Mozambique has witnessed numerous incidents involving intimidation, arbitrary detention, assault and harassment directed at journalists over recent years.

While recognising that physical attacks receive significant public attention, speakers stressed that the broader problem lies in persistent impunity. Investigations into attacks against journalists frequently fail to produce accountability, allowing perpetrators to act with little fear of legal consequences. This absence of accountability contributes to an environment in which intimidation becomes normalised and journalists increasingly question whether institutions are willing or able to protect them.

Valoi argued that improving journalist safety requires more than reactive responses after attacks occur. Preventative measures - including legal reform, institutional accountability, professional

safety training and improved digital security - must form part of a broader strategy aimed at reducing risks before incidents take place.

The panel also acknowledged the considerable psychological burden carried by journalists working under conditions of prolonged insecurity. Reporters covering conflict, political unrest and human rights violations often experience sustained stress while operating with limited institutional support. Valoi suggested that journalist safety initiatives should therefore incorporate not only physical and digital security but also greater attention to mental health and professional wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR REFORM

As the discussion drew to a close, Valoi reflected on practical measures capable of strengthening media freedom and improving the working environment for journalists in Mozambique. Although recognising the complexity of the country's political and security landscape, speakers agreed that meaningful progress remains possible through sustained legal reform, institutional strengthening and collaboration between journalists, civil society organisations and public institutions.

A central recommendation concerned the effective implementation of constitutional protections for freedom of expression and media freedom. Valoi argued that existing legal guarantees must be consistently respected in practice, particularly regarding access to information, protection of journalists and respect for editorial independence. Legislative reforms should be accompanied by institutional commitment to ensuring that journalists can perform their professional duties without intimidation or unnecessary restriction.

The discussion also highlighted the urgent need to combat impunity for attacks against journalists. Valoi called for prompt, impartial and transparent investigations into incidents involving harassment, assault, arbitrary detention and other abuses affecting media practitioners. Holding perpetrators accountable, they argued, would send an important signal regarding the state's commitment to protecting freedom of expression and discouraging future attacks.

Digital security emerged as another priority. Valoi recommended expanding training programmes focused on cybersecurity, surveillance awareness, encrypted communications and source protection. As journalism becomes increasingly dependent upon digital technologies,

strengthening technological resilience will be essential for protecting both journalists and the individuals who provide information in the public interest.

Economic sustainability was likewise identified as a key area requiring continued attention. Valoi encouraged greater investment in independent journalism, support for investigative reporting and initiatives designed to strengthen the long-term viability of media organisations operating under difficult financial conditions. Sustainable media institutions, they argued, are better positioned to resist political pressure while maintaining editorial independence.

Finally, the webinar emphasised the importance of strengthening regional cooperation among journalists and media freedom organisations throughout Southern Africa. Valoi welcomed Intelwatch's comparative research project as an important platform for sharing experiences, identifying common challenges and developing collaborative responses to emerging threats affecting journalists across the region.

BROADER SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REPORT

Throughout the webinar, Valoi repeatedly stressed that the challenges documented in the *Mapping Threats to the Media in Mozambique* report extend well beyond the journalism profession. While the research focused specifically on the experiences of journalists and media organisations, speakers argued that restrictions on media freedom ultimately affect the quality of democratic governance, public accountability and citizens' ability to participate meaningfully in public life. Independent journalism, they maintained, serves as an essential mechanism through which governments, public institutions and private actors are held accountable, making the protection of journalists inseparable from the protection of democratic society itself.

One of the report's principal contributions was its emphasis on understanding threats to the media as interconnected rather than isolated. Valoi observed that journalists rarely experience legal, political, economic or technological pressures independently. Instead, these challenges reinforce one another. Restrictive legislation creates legal uncertainty; political hostility discourages critical reporting; economic vulnerability weakens newsroom independence; surveillance technologies compromise source protection; and insecurity, particularly in conflict-affected areas, increases the personal risks associated with investigative journalism. Collectively, these factors produce an environment in which journalists may increasingly engage in self-censorship, limiting public access to information even in the absence of direct government censorship.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of recognising the diversity of Mozambique's media landscape. Valoi noted that journalists operating in urban centres often face different challenges from those working in rural communities or conflict-affected regions such as Cabo Delgado. Community journalists, freelance reporters and local correspondents frequently operate with fewer institutional protections while covering issues that place them in direct contact with political actors, security forces and vulnerable communities. The report therefore argues that efforts to strengthen media freedom must acknowledge these differing realities rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Another significant finding emerging from the webinar was the need to view journalism within the broader context of civic space. Valoi repeatedly observed that many of the pressures affecting journalists also affect civil society organisations, researchers, human rights defenders and community activists. Shrinking civic space therefore has cumulative consequences for democratic accountability, reducing opportunities for collaboration between different sectors while limiting the public's access to diverse and independent sources of information.

The panel also reflected on the rapid transformation of journalism in the digital era. Technological innovation has created unprecedented opportunities for reporting, collaboration and public engagement, but it has simultaneously introduced new vulnerabilities that existing legal frameworks and institutional practices have struggled to address. Digital surveillance, cyber threats, online harassment and the spread of disinformation have fundamentally altered the conditions under which journalism is practised. Valoi therefore argued that protecting media freedom in the twenty-first century requires not only legal reform but also significant investment in digital literacy, cybersecurity awareness and technological resilience across the journalism profession.

Throughout the discussion, speakers welcomed the regional nature of Intelwatch's research initiative. By comparing developments across Southern Africa, the project illustrates that many challenges confronting Mozambican journalists - including surveillance, shrinking civic space, economic pressures and legal uncertainty - are increasingly shared throughout the region. Comparative analysis enables journalists, researchers and policymakers to exchange experiences, identify best practices and develop coordinated responses to common threats while recognising the unique political and historical contexts of individual countries.

Ultimately, the report presents Mozambique as a country in which media freedom continues to face serious and evolving challenges despite important constitutional protections and a vibrant

community of independent journalists committed to public-interest reporting. Valoi argued that the resilience demonstrated by journalists working under difficult circumstances reflects both the importance of independent media and the continuing need for institutional reforms capable of strengthening protections for freedom of expression.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

The webinar concluded with a shared recognition that safeguarding media freedom in Mozambique requires sustained commitment from journalists, media organisations, civil society, policymakers and international partners alike. Valoi agreed that while the country's legal and institutional framework contains important protections for freedom of expression, these guarantees must be translated into consistent practice through effective implementation, institutional accountability and respect for the role of independent journalism within a democratic society.

Speakers reiterated that the challenges confronting journalists cannot be addressed through isolated reforms alone. Strengthening media freedom requires a comprehensive approach encompassing legislative reform, improved access to information, stronger protections for journalists covering conflict and corruption, greater accountability for attacks against media practitioners, enhanced digital security and measures to improve the financial sustainability of independent news organisations. Each of these areas reinforces the others, making collaboration across institutions and sectors essential for meaningful progress.

The discussion also emphasised the importance of combating impunity. Valoi argued that the failure to investigate and prosecute attacks against journalists undermines public confidence in democratic institutions while encouraging further intimidation. Ensuring accountability for violations against journalists was therefore identified as one of the most significant steps towards creating a safer and more enabling environment for independent reporting.

Another recurring message concerned the importance of solidarity within the journalism profession. Valoi encouraged stronger collaboration between national and regional media organisations, journalism associations, academic institutions and civil society groups. Such partnerships, they argued, can strengthen advocacy efforts, expand access to safety and digital security training, provide legal and professional support for journalists facing intimidation and promote the exchange of knowledge across Southern Africa.

The webinar concluded by reaffirming Intelwatch's commitment to supporting journalists through continued research, advocacy and capacity-building initiatives. Valoi welcomed the organisation's efforts to combine rigorous research with practical interventions addressing digital surveillance, journalist safety and media resilience. By documenting the realities facing journalists while creating platforms for dialogue and collaboration, the regional seminar series seeks not only to identify problems but also to contribute meaningfully to long-term solutions.

The *Mapping Threats to the Media in Mozambique* report therefore serves as both a comprehensive assessment of the country's evolving media environment and a call for sustained action to protect freedom of expression. It demonstrates that while Mozambique's journalists continue to face significant legal, political, economic, technological and security-related challenges, they also remain central to promoting transparency, accountability and democratic participation. The webinar concluded that strengthening media freedom ultimately requires protecting the institutions, legal frameworks and civic space upon which independent journalism depends. Through continued collaboration between journalists, researchers, policymakers and civil society, Valoi expressed cautious optimism that meaningful reforms can be achieved to ensure that the media remains able to fulfil its essential democratic role.