



A media assessment report by IMS (International Media Support)

Reimagining the role of media in Mozambique in the era of terrorism and natural disasters

Published in March 2023

Colophon

"Reimagining the role of media in Mozambique in the era of terrorism and natural disasters" A media assessment report

Published by IMS in March 2023

Authors

Design
IMS

Print
XXXXXX

Publisher
IMS

Cover Photo
XXXXXX

ISBN
XXXXXX

© 2023 IMS

The content of this publication is copyright protected. IMS (International Media Support) is happy to share the text in the publication with you under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a summary of this license, please visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>.



Join the global work for press freedom and stay up to date on media issues worldwide

 [forfreemedia](#)
 [InternationalMediaSupport](#)

IMS is a non-profit organisation working to support local media in countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition.

www.mediasupport.org

Contents

4	Introduction
5	Closing media and civic spaces
6	Safety of journalists
6	A media fighting for survival <small>Mainstream media and digital upstarts not fairing any better...</small>
8	Public interest journalism needs support
9	Recommendations

Introduction

“There is Maputo, then the rest of Mozambique” is how Aderito Caldera, Editor in Chief of Mozambique’s online publication Verdade, describes the many shades of challenges facing this southern African country, dimming the hope that characterised the post-civil war era. Mozambique society now faces a multiplicity of challenges from terrorism in Northern Mozambique to natural disasters, with several cyclones having hit and affected millions in the past four years. Following the civil war between the government and Renamo, Mozambique entered what analysts believed to be an era of prosperity marked by investment in the energy sector, growth in tourism and political reproachment between bitter rivals, the ruling party FRELIMO and Renamo. This, however, was short-lived as the country faces terrorism in the natural resource-rich northern region and is in the eye of natural disasters, mostly cyclones, that have devastated central and Northern Mozambique. Predications are that natural disasters are the new normal for Mozambique as much as for the rest of the world, significantly altering how authorities address and prioritise developmental issues.

The response by the authorities is chequered with some levels of cooperation with regional actors in addressing the terrorism in Northern Mozambique but equally repression of media and journalists in its reportage of the situation in Mozambique. While the political leadership has to make tough decisions on responding to the crises in Northern Mozambique, as well as reconstruction after the cyclones, trust and cooperation between media and government has significantly declined, with authorities overly sensitive to criticism and media reporting they perceive as negative. This lack of trust is fueling an anti-media and anti-journalism sentiment that is reflected in new media policies that the government is considering, as well as attacks on media, including arrests and at least one case of abduction and forced disappearance of journalist Ibraimo Mbaruco, who is yet to be accounted for. Structures for protecting journalists are weak and the role of media in partnering with the government in pushing back on terrorism, yet maintaining its independent role to watch on centres of power, is being undermined. Mozambique will not emerge out of its current multiple crises with a lapdog media, and there is a need to rebuild trust based on acceptance of the principles of media freedoms and information needs of the people of Mozambique. Democratic centralism has defined the political culture, in which the party leads the government may not serve the needs of the country, and unfortunately this is the direction that authorities seem to have taken.

This assessment of the media situation in Mozambique was conducted by IMS in the period of end of October to early November 2022, and updated in March 2023. This report captures the key voices that IMS engaged and provides a set of recommendations that local, regional and international actors could consider in cooperating with the media and authorities in Mozambique in building a strong, resilient and independent media that is an effective partner in promoting the developmental and governance agenda in Mozambique.

A media that is independent is the best partner in the mitigation of both terrorism and natural disasters and implementation of developmental and governance programmes leading to a better life for all citizens.

In this regard:

- Multiple levels of cooperation, coordination and advocacy are needed by media, journalists, Media CSOs, networks and associations working with the government to reflect on the role of media in a society facing multiple challenges.
- International development partners need to see and support media more holistically and in a coordinated manner.
- The needs of the media are not only content production and sharing, but media development, trust building and protection as well as innovation, considering the growing access to technology and the varying needs of varied audiences, some of which are excluded from mainstream information loops, including rural communities, women and youth.
- Reflections and rethinking are needed on what media means to communities facing terrorism in Northern Mozambique, to a journalist chasing a public interest story in Maputo and a farmer facing droughts and floods in rural areas.
- A hyper-politicised media that focuses on issues of power and seeks to create a single narrative on how matters are handled wont serve Mozambique but exacerbate the socio-political crisis.
- Mozambique needs media and information platforms that address its deep socio-political issues on identity, deprivation, decentralisation and citizen agency and inclusion in the governance and developmental agenda.

Closing media and civic spaces

Mozambique CSOs and human rights defenders are unanimous that proposed new legislation that includes an NGO law (approved by Council of Ministers in September 2022¹ and sent to parliament for approval in October 2022) as well as a social communications law² and broadcasting law are inimical to democracy and will restrict civic, media and free expression rights. The NGO law will require NGOs to be registered by the government and allows intrusive powers by the government including interference in the work of NGO boards and demands that NGOs submit various reports, plans and budgets. Couched in anti-money laundering intentions, the NGO law will give power to government to decide on NGO operations, thereby limiting or undermining the independence of NGOs. Similarly, the social communications law seeks to create statutory media regulation and limit the presence of foreign correspondence, and the broadcasting law will restrict what the government calls foreign content. These proposed bills essentially make it difficult for both CSOs and media to operate freely and, contrary to the anti-media and CSO perception, this will deprive the government of key partners in implementing its developmental and governance programmes. Mozambique's challenges around security and economic downturn need more platforms of dialogue and fewer restrictions on how society organises itself and shares and receives information. Analysts argue that Mozambique's political and economic challenges are better addressed through national dialogue and inclusive peace efforts; unfortunately the closing of civic spaces limits the capacity of citizens to contribute and participate in these efforts. It is commendable that parliament and the Ministry of Information are willing to engage with media advocacy groups such as MISA-Mozambique on the draft policies, though the extent of the changes as based on recommendations by MISA remains unknown. What is concerning on the media policy and CSO laws is that they are coming from the top, that is from government political leaders and bureaucrats, and not informed by the sector or developmental needs. While the government seeks to promulgate new laws, other laws – which include the Access to Information (ATI) law – are not being fully implemented, with public institutions not cooperating or taking the initiative on information disclosures.

CSOs and media also expressed concerns about government plans to limit CSOs observations' of election-related work, a move that will only serve to breed suspicion. The shrinking civic and media spaces are not helped by the lack of civic coordination on advocacy, with CSOs working in silos. Advocacy on media reforms are led by a few organisations with the other groups not fully engaged. Platforms for CSO solidarity information sharing, awareness and joint actions are needed to promote a coherent messaging and a common vision on media and other rights issues in Mozambique. Related to the above, CSO leadership building is also needed to ensure the sustainability of leadership and agendas in the medium to long term. Analysts say that rather than helping the situation in Northern Mozambique, restrictions and controls on media and CSOs will worsen the situation as a result of mis- and disinformation. The Mozambique government cannot seek to end many governance and developmental issues without oversight and participation by communities and the public, and CSOs and media provide such platforms for inclusive solutions development and implementation. Shrinking civic spaces worsen the situations of community radio stations and other community-based media and journalists who already face intimidation and political control from government officials.

¹ [Preliminary Analysis of Mozambique's 2022 Draft Law on Non-Profit Organizations \(americanbar.org\)](#)

² [Preliminary Analysis of Mozambique's 2022 Draft Law on Non-Profit Organizations \(americanbar.org\)](#)

Safety of journalists

Safety of journalists (SoJ) in Mozambique is mostly epitomised by the instability in Northern Mozambique, where community radio journalist Ibraimo Mbaruco disappeared in April 2020 and remains unaccounted for. Mbaruco's case reflects impunity and speaks to the growing threats that journalists face reporting on the conflict in Northern Mozambique. Apart from this, a growing mistrust between the government and media leads to an environment of fear and self-censorship within media. This in turn limits the diversity, depth and quality of content that media produces and shares with the public. Analysts say the Mozambique government follows media reporting very closely, often commenting and reprimanding journalists. The conflict Northern Mozambique has compounded an existing challenge of SoJ, and rather than bring closer cooperation in ending this challenge, media and government see this matter differently, this despite public pronouncements by government officials in support of SoJ. Mozambique media cannot cover some regions freely, especially Northern Mozambique, as they face arrest by the police, harassment by the military and the threats of attacks and physical harm by terrorists. Some journalists have received threatening calls from government and security officials, and journalists are rebuked publicly by party spokespersons. The story of Northern Mozambique is covered more informatively from South Africa and Portugal, thereby limiting awareness inside the country. Reporting on the conflict can lead to charges of espionage and/or supporting terrorism. While there are some genuine concerns on how media reports conflict – more so terrorism – the solution is to support media capacity and not to restrict its operations, which often leads to misinformation and disinformation. A threat to the operations of journalists does not lead to improved reporting but worsens mis- and disinformation.

Apart from physical threats, journalists, CSOs and human rights defenders now face digital, or internet-based (online) threats, yet lack the capacity to address this emerging challenge. A regional assessment on online gender-based threats to women journalists by the regional office of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) records that Fatima Mimbire, a researcher and human rights defender, received death threats via Facebook over her role in the Centre for Public Integrity campaign against corruption.³ The report recommends that a comprehensive approach be developed to counter threats that women journalists face. Journalists working on investigative journalism (IJ) stories equally face threats, with some being called by authorities to “explain” their stories and some mainstream TV stations self-censoring on reporting sensitive stories, leading IJ platforms such as Media Lab to use online platforms in reporting IJ stories. Mitigation efforts on SoJ should include support mechanisms that include legal, psycho-social and advocacy support. Efforts by MISA-Mozambique to train media lawyers, judicial officers and journalists at a national and provincial level on media law and SoJ issues are important and need bolstering as Mozambique prepares for local government elections in 2023 and a general election in 2024. Systems and tools of media violations monitoring also need updating to document online rights violations.

A media fighting for survival

There is a growing concern that Mozambique's media is on a decline, with community radio stations (CRS) under the umbrella body of the Forum for Community Radio Stations in Mozambique (FORCOM) and others outside this network struggling to maintain operations with notable challenges in replacing and upgrading equipment. This is a general challenge cutting across most community radio stations – whose members are equally burdened by poverty – to support the stations financially or materially. There is a notable brain drain with trained volunteers and other professional staff leaving, negatively affecting the quality production of content. FORCOM has noticed a slide in membership from 2012, with four CRS having shut down, and one in Manica province having been temporarily shut down as a result of a chemical disaster that was later resolved. Five CRS were destroyed by cyclones in the past few years and resilience building should be part of support to local media, more so to vulnerable community media. This recognises that CRS are key to promoting media diversity and public interest journalism (PIJ), more so in the era of conflict and natural disasters, where context driven solutions are key to communities facing challenges. A reliance on state information channels only during times of disaster is not sufficient, and the government must support sector efforts to sustain CRS, many of which operate with antiquated equipment.

Networks such as FORCOM need support to think of innovative and sustainable ways to support their members. In the absence of sustainable CRS, existing stations become open game for political actors, with reports of intimidation of some stations being documented. Working with FORCOM, the Mozambican government positively reviewed the licence period of CRS to 10 years and, using the same approach of dialogue the government is in a position to cushion, at a policy level, political interference in the operations of CRS and enabling CRS to report on governance issues such as elections as well as conflict issues more professionally. Sustainability of CRS has to be looked at from both a policy and business model perspective and, so far, CRS in Northern Mozambique self-censor reporting on the conflict as much as they struggle with financial sustainability. CRS need to be looked at as partners and platforms that allow free expression of views, voices, dialogue and watching on government actions. In the era of growing conflict, emerging challenges such as climate change and a need for inclusive governance and development, community-focused and community-present media such as CRS have the potential to play an increased role as they use local languages and have a better understanding of community needs and issues. Including marginalised groups such as women and youths cannot happen from the centre, i.e., state owned national media, but are better enhanced by local media. Even so, CRS and other community media need awareness and capacity to sharpen news gathering capacity, apply principles of impartiality, adhere to codes and understand positive representation of issues such as conflict, natural disasters and related emergency and humanitarian communication. IMS and others have contributed to the recovery of stations in cyclone-affected regions in the past two-to-three years, but the needs are far greater, more so resilience building and sharpening content production on issues mentioned above. This calls for more support and investment in community media, fewer restrictions on media operations and cooperation between the sector and authorities.

Mainstream media and digital startups are not fairing any better...

The Mozambique media market is depressed, with newspaper and related products sales going down as well as advertising revenues. This has resulted in some media stopping hard copy printing while others have significantly cut print runs. There is a dilemma on the future of media business models in Mozambique, with some media continuing to publish hard copies – albeit at prohibitive costs – while others are migrating to digital platforms. The dilemma also speaks to the demographics of Mozambique, in which the majority of its people live in rural areas where issues of access to technology, distribution infrastructure and costs of access remain a challenge, hence the reality of digital exclusion and information poverty. Some leading publications print in Nelspruit, South Africa, and distribution processes take a long time and are not cost effective. Mozambique has no effective printing industry for the media and leading media houses still find printing in South Africa a better option, though fraught with distribution challenges. For a country as geographically vast as Mozambique, leading private media houses print anything from 15,000 to 20,000 copies per week, which are limited numbers for audiences. State supported newspaper, Notícias, leads in print runs at about 50,000 copies distributed for free.⁴ Covid-19 disruptions hastened some level of digital media migration by media houses, yet what is clear is that Mozambique media houses are struggling to develop effective and coherent digital media strategies. Digital media adoption is still in its initial stages, with some newspapers distributing PDF copies and others allowing paywall access to online content. Discussions on media sustainability and approaches to adoption of technology need more direction in Mozambique, including capacity building. While some training in digital journalism, among others, is taking place, the mainstream media may benefit from a more focused newsroom- and sector-oriented digital media capacity building that not only focuses on individual newsroom needs but also sector needs and sector strategies. Digital media startups like Verdade are attempting to keep afloat publishing online and reporting on stories from other regions, but sustainability remains a key challenge. Online subscriptions to news remain a new phenomenon in Mozambique. As stated above, interventions supporting media sustainability in strategic planning, thinking and training are needed. There is a need to look at the potential that the online space offers in terms of increasing audiences and markets. By 2022, Mozambique's population stood at 33 million with the majority (61.8 percent) living in rural areas.⁵ The digital media market is projected to reach \$36.95m in 2022,⁶ but to benefit from this, Mozambique's media's digital strategies need reworking and development.

³ *MISA and UNESCO, 2022. A study of online gender-based violence targeting female journalists in Southern Africa.*

⁴ *Informant Interview*

⁵ [Digital 2022: Mozambique — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights](#)

⁶ [Digital Media - Mozambique | Statista Market Forecast](#)

Public interest journalism needs support

Evidence shows that public interest journalism (PIJ) – be it specialised investigative journalism (IJ) focused stories on issues of corruption, public policy and public service or in-depth reporting on the same issues – raises awareness on key socio-economic and political issues that need attention. Online publication Verdade says its widespread and in-depth reportage on the Covid-19 pandemic in Mozambique received attention from senior public officials who recognised that the publication paid close attention to the Covid-19 policy responses and mitigation efforts. Similarly, community radio stations use of local language and hyper-localised content raises awareness of issues affecting communities and solutions thereof. FORCOM says its focus has been on building CRS capacity to report on public interest and service stories on health and natural disaster mitigation but, as noted earlier, the high staff and volunteer turnover and old equipment are holding back CRS. FORCOM's capacity-building approach, which includes consultations with CRS, serves to ensure that training and support for PIJ are more meaningful and responsive to the needs of given communities.⁷ Media platforms interviewed for this report agree that PIJ is a key watchdog on centres of power, especially issues of corruption, accountability and democratic electoral processes. “Is there transparency and accountability of the security and military budget,” asked one interviewee, pointing to how threats to media reporting on the conflict in Northern Mozambique fuel corruption.

PIJ does not need to be viewed as story production alone, but as analysis and data journalism, including such proposals by MediaLab to create an online Election Barometer to measure accountability and transparency on electoral issues.⁸ Investment in PIJ has to look at how digital platforms are enhanced, both at skills and platforms levels, to ensure more access to information and, more importantly, dialogue and audience feedback and contribution to PIJ. PIJ must push for accountability, monitoring the implementation of socio-economic policy in the extractive industries, among others. Digital media startups like MediaLab that are training and capacitating young journalists on PIJ need support to spread beyond Maputo and to strengthen content-sharing platforms. A more cohesive strategy on support to PIJ that looks at the diversity of media and their interests – including digital media startups, community radio and mainstream media – is needed so that support for PIJ is more comprehensive, inclusive and cognizant of the social demographic dynamics in Mozambique, including issues of language and access, among others.

⁷ Informant interview

⁸ Informant interview

Recommendations

- **Setting a common vision and focusing on measurable and systematic change**
Mozambique media and human rights CSOs work in silos. The threat of new media and CSO policies necessitate a closing of ranks, solidarity and cooperation in advocacy actions. There is a need for media sector dialogues on what type of a media ecosystem could serve Mozambique in its developmental and governance agendas. Media reforms must speak to that vision. In this regard, platforms for media partners coordination, sharing of information and, above all, joint actions are needed. Mozambique needs a comprehensive approach to media development and not a focus on one issue or area of media. Coordination is needed at both CSO and donor levels so that attention is paid to priority areas, avoiding duplications and enhancing synergies.
- **Sector-driven strategies on media policy reform, media sustainability**
Mainstream, community and digital media startups are struggling with viability issues. There is a need for support on developing new and/or revamping business models to enhance media sustainability. Unviable media is prone to political capture. In this regard, dialogues, training and tool development are needed to assist the media remodel and be sustainable. Media sustainability is partly linked to the ongoing media policy reforms, as undemocratic policy raises the level of political risk of investing in media. Coordinated advocacy actions are needed, linking Mozambique media advocates with like-minded groups in the region and internationally.
- **Safety of journalists (digital threats)**
MISA-Mozambique has put in place various approaches on safety that are benefiting members, including legal support, training and advocacy. However, what is needed is expanded training programmes and the development of a sector-wide safety of journalists advocacy action plan that involves key actors including journalists, community media, digital and mainstream media, regulatory agents and relevant government ministries. This stakeholder approach will slowly build towards a national SoJ mechanism in which key actors that have a responsibility towards the safety of journalists have identified roles. Attention and more research are needed on emerging threats against journalists online, especially women journalists who face online violence. It is also important that training on SoJ is context-informed as issues that CRS face are different from what mainstream media face. Specialised conflict reporting and reporting in conflict environments is needed for journalists operating in the north. While some training is taking place, this needs coordination at local partner and international partner levels.
- **Content production capacity building**
Public interest journalism is key to keeping various issues facing Mozambique on the public agenda. This includes governance issues such as elections, corruption, public service delivery and others such as climate change, humanitarian assistance and conflict. PIJ capacity is not only about content generation and sharing but also platforms and how such platforms are accessible to the public. There is a need for assessments and research/analysis on various approaches to PIJ, including investment in data and IJ capacity. PIJ must also enable citizen agency in terms of citizen's, the public's and/or community's capacity to share their own stories and provide feedback and participate in media dialogues.
- **Trust building and dialogue towards democratic media and civic space policy**
Media, CSOs and government relations are increasingly fractious, as is seen in proposed legislation to control media and CSOs. While some space for engagement remains, including ongoing dialogues on media policy reforms, attacks on media and negative rhetoric against media and CSOs necessitate that media and CSOs work with the government on trust building, including openness on mutual concerns and fears. Stakeholder platforms in which dialogue could take place at both media and CSO levels are needed. There is a need for both media and CSOs to build more awareness within public institutions and political leadership on their role to dispel misconceptions that often lead to suspicion. There is a need for public authorities to be aware of their local and international obligations to protect media and civic rights.

For more than 20 years, IMS has focused our work in countries experiencing armed conflict, humanitarian crisis or authoritarian rule to support independent media and defend press freedom.

mediasupport.org

- f** IMSInternationalMediaSupport
- t** IMSforfreedia
- @** IMSforfreedia
- in** ims-international-media-support