

REPORT

SLAPPs against environmental and climate journalists in Africa: A perfect storm for harassment

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This report by the International Press Institute (IPI) outlines key trends and factors regarding the use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) against environmental and climate journalists in Africa, highlighting the threat these abusive legal cases pose.

Our findings are based on initial research into SLAPPs against journalists, with a focus on cases targeting journalists covering environmental and climate issues, in select countries in West and Central Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon), Southern Africa (Mozambique and South Africa), and East Africa (Kenya and Somalia). Our research looks at existing initiatives to defend journalists against SLAPPs, identifies legislation that is open to abuse by powerful actors, and traces key trends and patterns seen across the region, while also putting forward recommendations to address the threat SLAPPs pose.

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About IPI

The International Press Institute (IPI) is a global network of editors, media executives, and leading journalists that works to defend press freedom and support independent journalism.

The IPI Africa programme seeks to protect and advance press freedom and the safety of journalists in Africa.

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1. Introduction

Africa faces a disproportionately high burden from climate change despite being responsible for only a fraction of global greenhouse gas emissions. The World Meteorological Organization estimates that [up to 118 million people](#) living in extreme poverty on the continent will be exposed to drought, floods, and extreme heat by 2030.

Meanwhile, natural resource extraction across the continent is booming. Foreign investment has seen a wave of powerful and wealthy energy corporations sweep across Africa, contributing heavily to the destruction of the natural environment. Shadowy ties between state officials and these corporate actors only further add to their power and the impunity with which they can exploit the land.

Natural disasters and extreme weather events – which are growing ever-more common – add to the complexity of the issue. So, too, does the threat of conflict as large multinationals, governments, and paramilitary groups all compete for control over critical resources, often at the expense of Africa’s most vulnerable and marginalised communities.

Altogether, Africa today is facing a “[triple nexus](#)” challenge of interrelated crises linked to climate change, security issues, and democratic declines, amid broader geopolitical instability and competing international interests in the region. The effects of climate change have put extreme pressure on local economies and livelihoods, exacerbated food insecurity, and fueled displacement, migration, and conflicts over resources. Local communities and vulnerable groups, such as women, young people, children, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, are among those most affected. Meanwhile, these interrelated challenges, including resource limitations, have given rise to armed groups and sectarian violence – particularly in states that are too weak or too corrupt to adequately respond with necessary services – which has further fueled [conflict and political instability](#).

In this context, climate and environmental journalists in Africa are reporting on some of the most challenging and consequential issues facing the continent – all of which carry significant global political, security, economic, and social implications. These journalists report stories that expose and hold governments and multinationals to account for the environmental damage

they are causing – and the impact that damage has on global climate security and the lives and livelihoods of those living in Africa. Their vital work can drive meaningful action and policy responses in the wake of the climate and environmental crisis, while ultimately also contributing to a reduction in the violence and instability this crisis has wrought in Africa.

Yet precisely because of their key role on the front lines of the climate crisis – including exposing the corruption and corporate malfeasance that fuels environmental destruction – climate and environmental journalists often find themselves in the crosshairs of powerful individuals and entities looking to silence their critical reporting. This is true both [globally](#) and in Africa in particular.

IPI's in-depth [monitoring work in Africa](#) has documented numerous incidents of attacks and threats to climate and environmental journalists in Africa, including arbitrary arrest and detention, physical attacks, damage to equipment, verbal abuse, kidnapping, and even killings.

In addition, these journalists also face a growing threat of judicial harassment as powerful individuals aim to stifle their work through waves of vexatious and unfounded legal cases, also known as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). SLAPPs aim to shut down critical speech by intimidating critics, draining their energy and resources, and preventing engagement on matters of public interest. Typically brought by wealthy individuals or companies, SLAPPs abuse civil and criminal laws – often related to defamation or the spreading of “false news” – to tie up journalists, activists, or other critics in lengthy and costly legal battles. SLAPP claimants rarely expect or aim to win their case outright. Instead, these cases are brought in an effort to exhaust the defendants' resources, damage their reputation, or undermine morale. Very often, SLAPPs include exorbitant damage claims with the sole aim of intimidating the often-underfunded defendant into submission. In other instances, journalists are threatened with criminal charges that carry potentially lengthy prison sentences. As a result, SLAPPs can cast a strong chilling effect on their targets, with journalists compelled to exercise self-censorship out of fear of further, crippling litigation.

This report uses a definition of SLAPPs that includes any legal action that is threatened or initiated with the aim of intimidating journalists into silence through criminal or civil sanctions. This definition is aligned with

those set out in [the 2024 Council of Europe Recommendations on Countering the Use of SLAPPs](#).

The Council of Europe’s Recommendations on Countering the use of SLAPPs outlines the following list of key indicators used to identify a SLAPP:

- The claimant tries to exploit an imbalance of power, such as their financial advantage or political or societal influence, to put pressure on the defendant;
- The legal arguments put forward by the claimant are partially or fully unfounded;
- The remedies requested by the claimant are disproportionate, excessive, or unreasonable;
- The claims amount to abuse of laws or procedures;
- The claimant engages in procedural and litigation tactics designed to drive up costs for the defendant, such as delaying proceedings, selecting a forum that is unfavourable to public participation or vexatious to the defendant, provoking an onerous workload, and pursuing appeals with little or no prospect of success;
- The legal action deliberately targets individuals rather than the media outlets or organisations responsible for the challenged action;
- The legal action is accompanied by a public relations offensive designed to bully, discredit, or intimidate actors participating in public debate or aimed at diverting attention from the substantial issue at stake;
- The claimant or their representatives engage in legal intimidation, harassment, or threats, or have a history of doing so;
- The claimant or associated parties engage in multiple and coordinated or cross-border legal actions on the basis of the same set of facts or in relation to similar matters;
- The claimant systematically refuses to engage with non-judicial mechanisms to resolve the claim.

Globally, while some countries have enacted anti-SLAPP legislation in an effort to curb their impact, the majority of states have yet to address the threat. At the time of publication, no country in Africa has enacted specific

anti-SLAPP laws, though efforts are being made at regional and national levels to develop measures to address the threat.

Our findings are based on initial research into SLAPPs against journalists, with a focus on cases targeting journalists covering environmental and climate issues, in select countries in West and Central Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon), Southern Africa (Mozambique and South Africa), and East Africa (Kenya and Somalia). Our research looks at existing initiatives to defend journalists against SLAPPs, identifies legislation that is open to abuse by powerful actors, and traces key trends and patterns seen across the region, while also putting forward recommendations to address the threat SLAPPs pose.

2. Key findings

Through a series of interviews with journalists in West and Central Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon), Southern Africa (Mozambique and South Africa), and East Africa (Kenya and Somalia), as well as comprehensive desk research, this report finds that SLAPPs represent a serious yet underreported threat to environmental and climate journalism in Africa.

- The financial precarity of many media outlets – especially those covering climate issues – leaves environmental journalists highly vulnerable to SLAPPs. As most claimants pursue legal action with the primary aim of silencing legitimate criticism, financial gain is rarely an expected outcome. Resource-poor environmental journalists make an easy target for powerful actors working in the resource extraction and energy sectors as they know that media outlets will likely be forced to back down in the face of expensive legal threats.
- The power imbalance between claimants and environmental journalists means the latter are often forced to reach unfavourable settlements out of court. This typically includes public apologies or removal of the news piece or investigation in question. Many reported SLAPPs end in a short timeframe as the journalists do not have the financial means to challenge the case. Conversely, other cases drag on for months or even years as wealthy claimants seek to drain the already-limited resources of critical media.
- Foreign-owned energy and resource extraction companies pose a particularly high threat to environmental journalists. This report has found multiple examples of multinationals abusing local legislation to stifle critical reporting. Our research shows that, in many of these cases, these companies not only target critical media, but also exert pressure on weak local law enforcement. In such cases, countries with severely restrictive press freedom environments are able to export their practices abroad through compliant local law enforcement. This has proven to be an effective method of shielding foreign-owned energy companies from criticism at the hands of local environmental journalists.
- Outdated and/or vaguely worded legislation is easily abused by powerful actors in order to harass climate journalists. This legislation is occasionally

rooted in the colonial era, as is the case with criminal defamation or sedition laws in several focus countries of this report. Elsewhere, new legislation has been drafted that seriously hampers rights to freedom of expression and access to information, for example, the Cybercrime Act in Nigeria or national security and anti-terrorism laws in Cameroon, Ghana, and Mozambique. In these cases, legislation is left far too open to interpretation, allowing claimants to accuse environmental journalists of unfounded breaches of law due to their investigations into alleged malpractice.

- Options for legal support from NGOs or media foundations for journalists facing legal action are severely limited. Journalists interviewed by IPI lamented the lack of financial assistance or pro-bono legal support to aid them in their judicial battles. Most media outlets do not have their own in-house legal teams and those who do may still require further financial assistance to challenge legal harassment. Some journalists reported the need for financial support so “just one” SLAPP could be fought to the end in court. The impact of successfully challenging a single SLAPP would have the potential to demonstrate the baselessness of these cases and to help achieve recognition of a SLAPPs defence in court.
- There is a serious lack of systematic data on the use of SLAPPs across the region, although this varies from country to country. Reasons for this gap in data include fear of retaliation, the absence of any centralised database, and lack of awareness of the issue from journalists. In addition, threats to journalists’ physical safety, often carried out with impunity, mean that those looking to silence journalists may not need to resort to judicial harassment. Further, journalists in the region have admitted to backing down in the face of unofficial threats of legal action prior to publication of an investigation. As a result, the true threat of SLAPPs is not always accurately reflected in the number of cases reported.
- Awareness of SLAPPs or how to deal with them from both media organisations and the judiciary is not particularly high. This, in turn, makes the judiciary less sympathetic towards any sort of public-interest defence in support of journalists fighting SLAPPs.

3. Initiatives to counter SLAPPs in Africa

While there are no existing anti-SLAPP laws in place in any African country at the time of publication, collaborative initiatives, including those from media and civil society organisations, have led to important first steps taken in efforts to combat SLAPPs at national and regional levels.

In March 2026, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) adopted a [landmark resolution](#) calling on African states to uphold access to climate and environmental information. The [Resolution on Access to Information and the Right to a Healthy Environment](#) states that access to environmental information is indispensable for the realisation of the rights to health, natural resources, and a satisfactory environment.

As part of this resolution, the Commission calls upon states to implement measures to deter the use of abusive litigation to restrict public participation in environmental matters. In this regard, the resolution offers a [much-needed, African Union-level recognition of the judicial harassment](#) facing environmental journalists in Africa and the need to enact legislation to prevent the use of SLAPPs. In addition, the resolution calls on states to implement measures to prevent, investigate, and remedy acts of harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrest or detention, and other forms of reprisals against journalists.

The 2026 resolution builds on previous ACHPR declarations calling on African Union states to uphold their obligations under the African Charter related to the right to freedom of expression and access to information. While not explicitly referencing SLAPPs, the 2020 [Resolution on the Safety of Journalists and Media Practitioners in Africa](#) underscores the role of media in ensuring rights to access information and calls for urgent repeals of criminal defamation laws and other legislation that may hamper freedom of expression or prevent journalists from reporting freely and without fear.

The [2019 Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa](#) reaffirms and strengthens safeguards for freedom of expression and access to information as set out in Article 9 of the African Charter. The 2019 declaration also calls for the protection of journalists from

undue legal restrictions and for prevention of, and adequate investigation into, all forms of attacks or illegitimate restrictions against media workers. In addition, the special rapporteur on freedom of expression and access to information in Africa monitors press freedom violations across the African Union and [regularly issues statements and public appeals to states](#) when violations are reported.

Representing a key moment in African civil society's concerted efforts to counter SLAPPs, in 2023 the Southern Africa Resource Watch (SARW) and the Bench Marks Foundation launched the [Coalition Against SLAPPs in Africa \(CASA\)](#). Composed of 30 organisations from across the continent, CASA was convened to allow activists to collectively advocate against SLAPPs, express solidarity with defendants, to raise awareness of the issue, and to secure legal and financial support. Later in 2023, CASA expanded, launching its [West Africa chapter](#) in Accra, Ghana.

In 2024, the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs) and the Right2Protest Project (R2P) published a [Model Anti-SLAPP Law for South Africa](#). Drawing inspiration from existing anti-SLAPP legislation in North America, Australia, and the European Union, the Model Law provides a reference point from which official legislation could be drafted in South Africa. The initiative built on momentum gained in the fight against abusive litigation following the South African Constitutional Court's 2022 recognition of SLAPPs as an abuse of court process.

While the above-listed initiatives raise much-needed awareness of the judicial threats facing environmental journalists in Africa, and offer foundations from which future anti-SLAPP legislation can be built, further collaborative efforts are required to systematically address the threat.

4. Country snapshots

South Africa

In comparison to the other countries discussed in this report, South Africa has taken several more progressive steps towards challenging the prevalence of SLAPPs. In recent years, multiple high-profile lawsuits against environmental journalists and activists have set a strong precedent for the use of SLAPP defences in future cases.

2022 marked a major turning point in efforts to introduce safeguards against SLAPPs in South Africa. Australian mining company Minerals Commodities Limited and its South African subsidiary, Mineral Sands Resources, filed [defamation claims](#) against a number of environmental activists who had publicly criticised the company's operations. The activists submitted a defence claiming that the lawsuit constituted a SLAPP given the alleged ulterior motives of the claimants. In a landmark judgement, following a five-year-long court battle, the Constitutional Court recognised that the lawsuit could represent an abuse of court processes initiated to stifle public participation. In doing so, the Court also accepted that a SLAPP defence is accommodated in the common law doctrine of abuse of court process. Mineral Sands Resources was ordered to pay 60% of the activists' costs. Although still a somewhat isolated case and involving activists rather than journalists, the judgement has paved the way for potential future SLAPP defences more broadly.

In 2023, prominent journalist Karyn Maughan applied to the High Court of South Africa, arguing that a case brought against her by former President Jacob Zuma should be dismissed due to a lack of adequate evidence. Zuma had argued that Maughan had published documents related to his corruption trial before they had been tabled in court. By June of 2023, the High Court had thrown out the case and banned Zuma from pursuing it further. The court also acknowledged that the case had been taken with the aim to harass Maughan and to “prevent her from doing her duty as a journalist”.

Further, the Court [recognised the case as a SLAPP](#) and affirmed that criminal prosecutions can still constitute a SLAPP. This opened the door for future use of anti-SLAPP defences in criminal cases against journalists in South Africa. More recently, ARTsolar, a manufacturer of solar panels, withdrew its

[defamation-related gagging order](#) against a group of environmental journalists and whistleblowers who revealed in 2025 that the company was importing, rather than manufacturing, its solar panels. ARTsolar agreed to pay the defendants' costs.

While these cases clearly illustrate the legal threats facing environmental and investigative journalists who attempt to hold the powerful to account, they have also led to the establishment of important precedents for future defence against unfounded, vexatious, and abusive litigation in South Africa. Crucially, the knowledge that courts are more likely to toss out SLAPPs reduces the likelihood of self-censorship on the part of journalists and news media, who can be more confident that they will prevail without the risk of financial ruin.

According to local experts, these cases have also contributed to better awareness among judges, lawyers, and journalists on the use of SLAPPs, how to identify them, and what to do when faced with one.

Indeed, as a result of these high-profile cases, awareness of the issue is relatively high among civil society and the judiciary. In turn, anti-SLAPP advocacy has been stronger and more coordinated than in other African countries. Another key moment in South Africa's fight against SLAPPs emerged in 2024 as the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) and the Right2Protest Project (R2P) published the aforementioned [Model Anti-SLAPP Law for South Africa](#). The Model Law provides a solid reference point for future coordinated anti-SLAPP advocacy from media organisations and civil society.

While still far from an example of best practice, the positive developments in South Africa represent a step in the right direction with regards to combating the use of SLAPPs. Climate journalists are still vulnerable to judicial harassment as they continue to investigate powerful multinationals while their own financial situations remain precarious. However, the level of awareness of SLAPPs – among both civil society and the judiciary, including the establishment of public-interest defences in court – illustrates an example that can be replicated in other countries in order to achieve progress.

Mozambique

Legal harassment, including SLAPPs, exerts a strong chilling effect on the press in Mozambique. The potential damages wrought by abusive lawsuits are so significant that rarely do legal threats against journalists even reach the courts. While the Media Institute for Southern Africa in Mozambique (MISA Mozambique) has documented several instances of environmental journalists facing SLAPPs as a result of their work, they also noted that journalists and editors regularly receive informal threats of litigation on their private mobile phones prior to any formal action being taken. Understanding the major financial implications of fighting costly legal battles against powerful corporate and state actors, most journalists in these situations choose to self-censor and cease their investigations into the topic rather than risk a debilitating legal battle. For this reason, there are few documented cases of SLAPPs in the country, although there is an implicit and widespread understanding of the ability for court processes to be abused to silence critics. This in itself has led to widespread self-censorship among otherwise critical, independent media.

Conversely, there is a significant lack of awareness of SLAPPs as a concept across Mozambique. Despite MISA offering one of the more comprehensive support mechanisms for journalists facing legal battles in Africa, they still note that most journalists do not know enough about the legal threat they face as a result of their work. Interviewees noted that understanding of SLAPPs among the judiciary is also low in Mozambique. In turn, judges are not adequately trained in how to recognise or deal with SLAPPs, meaning journalists face a major challenge if they choose to ignore the informal threats and confront their legal battles head on.

For environmental journalists in Mozambique, there are several pieces of legislation that invite legal harassment. In particular, defamation and anti-terrorism accusations are regularly levelled at journalists in order to hamper their ability to report freely. National security laws make it particularly difficult for environmental journalists to report on the liquified natural gas extraction taking place in the Cabo Delgado region, which has been the site of a jihadist insurgency with links to the Islamic State group. Mozambique has attempted to crush the insurgency through the deployment of national and international military personnel as well as mercenaries such as Russia's Wagner Group. The violence has caused some – but not all – of the region's natural gas projects to temporarily cease operations. Accessing the

area causes major safety concerns and legal risks as national security laws enable defence forces and extraction company security to foster a restrictive environment for reporting. Covering the military operations is fraught with risk as breaches of the 2022 Anti-Terrorism Law, through the sharing of “false information” about terrorism, can carry prison sentences of up to eight years. This is particularly chilling for environmental journalists looking to cover extraction operations and their damage to the natural environment in the conflict-torn region.

The case of Mozz24H journalist Estácio Valoi is emblematic of the judicial harassment facing environmental journalists in Mozambique. In 2025, Valoi published an investigation into the illegal exporting of timber from Mozambique to China. In December 2025, the journalist – and the national and international media with whom he collaborates – [received a wave of threats over email](#), demanding that he delete the content or face legal action. The intention of the coordinated barrage of legal threats was clear: to intimidate Valoi into removing and abandoning his investigation. Valoi – despite the risks that journalists in Mozambique face in such situations – refused to delete the content. The case is ongoing.

In another instance, a Mozz24H journalist alleged that the HR department of Renco – an American holding company that provides consulting services and technical personnel to the energy and gas sectors – [attempted to bribe them](#) in an effort to stop the publication of an investigation. The piece alleged that Renco was responsible for the pollution of a school in Cabo Delgado. Renco admitted to the pollution but denied the attempted bribery and has since submitted a legal complaint to the Public Prosecutor’s Office regarding the allegation.

Overall, the situation for environmental journalists in Mozambique is bleak. As well as facing serious physical threats – exemplified by the [attempted murder of climate reporter Carlitos Cadangue](#) in early 2026 – the risk of SLAPPs also looms large as media outlets covering these sensitive topics struggle to find economic sustainability. Knowing that a legal battle could signal financial collapse, the simple threat of a SLAPP is enough to foster a climate of intimidation and harsh self-censorship among the country’s environmental journalists.

Ghana

The high level of mining activity taking place in Ghana, often in illegal or unregulated mines, has invited significant investigations from local environmental journalists. As one of Africa's largest salt mines is located in Ghana, powerful multinationals are naturally drawn to the area. While journalists noted that these corporations typically operate legally, there are also slews of illegal mining operations across the region.

In contrast to many other countries highlighted in this report, journalists noted that awareness of SLAPPs in Ghana is more developed. This has had a somewhat antithetical effect as knowledge of the issue has contributed to a climate of fear and censorship among journalists – unfortunately often justified. The case of journalist Noah Dameh encapsulates the atmosphere of intimidation and judicial abuse facing the country's environmental journalists. Following his reporting on Electrochem Ghana Limited – which was contentiously awarded a major salt mining license – Dameh was sued by the company for alleged defamation of its CEO. In 2022, Dameh's case was dismissed citing a lack of jurisdiction. He was later re-arrested, held in jail, and subsequently spent several months on trial in the Tema Magistrate Court. In one of his final court dates, the judge absurdly accused Dameh of [impersonating himself](#) as he had grown unrecognisable due to weight loss and ill-health. Dameh [passed away in September 2023](#) before the conclusion of his years-long SLAPP battle. The protracted nature of the lawsuit, the high level of damages claimed, and the bizarre accusations of self-impersonation, all exemplify the judicial hostility faced by environmental reporters in Ghana.

Dameh's case is not an isolated one. Seth Bokpe, associate editor of The Fourth Estate, the public interest and accountability investigative journalism project of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), noted an ongoing trend of SLAPP claimants demanding unreasonably high damages from defendants, typically of around 10 million Ghanaian cedi (about \$900,000).

It is clear that powerful individuals and corporations can take advantage of the economic instability of Ghana's media landscape to prevent critical coverage. Much like the other focus countries of this report, the lack of financial sustainability for media outlets, especially investigative newsrooms and those covering well-resourced resource extraction corporations, leave journalists vulnerable to SLAPPs and likely to self-censor for their own self-preservation.

Despite this, there have been some minor legal victories for environmental journalists in Ghana, including in broader cases not related to SLAPPs. In 2025, the Asankragwa Magistrate Court in Ghana’s western region [ordered illegal miners to pay compensation](#) to a group of journalists whose equipment was damaged while they reported on the environmental destruction caused by the mine. The court also issued a bench warrant for four additional suspects. Although this remains an isolated incident – and the fact that the mine was operating illegally may have left the court with no choice – it still represents a rare legal win for environmental journalists in Ghana and an acknowledgement of the validity of their work.

More broadly, Ghanaian legislation includes several laws that have been abused to target or detain journalists for their critical reporting. These include the Electronic Communications Act, which criminalises the spreading of (vaguely defined) “false news”, as well as the Criminal Offences Act, which provides [prison time of up to three years](#) for sharing information “which is likely to cause fear and alarm to the public”. Effectively shielding environmental and climate journalists in Ghana from retaliation via SLAPPs requires urgently addressing the threat posed by vaguely defined laws that can be instrumentalised by powerful actors.

Nigeria

Despite having a vibrant media environment with a large number of independent publications and broadcasters, Nigeria remains an incredibly dangerous country for journalists. Compared to other countries discussed in this report, SLAPPs are relatively well-documented in Nigeria. Although there is no comprehensive database documenting all existing or historic cases, several high-profile legal battles against journalists in recent years have shone a light on the judicial threats facing media in the country.

Alongside arbitrary detention, physical assault, verbal harassment, and censorship, environmental journalists in Nigeria also face a very real threat of SLAPPs. This threat is compounded by weak rule of law and broadly worded legislation prone to abuse.

Criminal defamation laws as well as the newer [Cybercrime Act](#) are easily abused by those looking to stifle journalists' critical reporting. This rings especially true for environmental and climate journalists as investigations into powerful multinationals and complicit government officials invite high-level backlash and legal retaliation.

One of the most well-known cases of a SLAPP against an environmental journalist in Nigeria involved WikkiTimes editor Yakubu Mohammed. Following a 2023 investigation into the alleged bribing of a local terrorist group by Chinese-allied miners, Mohammed and his wife received threatening phone calls from members of the police force. Mohammed alleged that law enforcement had illegally traced his calls in order to find his friends' and colleagues' phone numbers. Later, a Chinese mining company, Ming Xin Mineral Separation Nigeria Limited, [filed a lawsuit against Mohammed and WikkiTimes](#) alleging defamation against their reputation, despite the company never being accused of wrongdoing in the report. The plaintiffs demanded an astronomically high payment of N10 billion (about \$7.5 million) and for the investigation to be retracted alongside a public apology. In December 2025, the Bauchi State High Court [ordered WikkiTimes to pay](#) N105 million (\$78,000) in damages for defaming Ming Xin and two individuals in the investigation, which the court described as "false, malicious, and defamatory". In addition, WikkiTimes was ordered to retract its investigation and publish an apology. WikkiTimes has since [filed an appeal](#) against the judgement.

The Ming Xin case exemplifies the power with which foreign-owned companies operate in Nigeria. Multinationals benefit from easily manipulated legislation and pliant local law enforcement. In 2025, a group of environmental activists and journalists in Cross River State [were arrested for exposing land right violations](#) related to the Chinese-linked logging industry. Activists have alleged that the arrest illustrates the willingness of law enforcement to silence dissenting voices when vested business interests are at stake. In this regard, the commonly used SLAPP analogy of David vs Goliath falls short in Nigeria. As environmental journalists find themselves facing the simultaneous power of local and national government representatives as well as multinational corporations, the situation can more accurately be described as one David vs several Goliaths.

Speaking to IPI, human rights lawyer Gloria Ballason noted that weak application of the rule of law in Nigeria only further adds to the destructive

potential of SLAPPs against environmental journalists. In particular, pre-trial detention and subsequent denial of bail – as occurred in the case of [Olurotimi Olawale](#), who was charged with violating the Cybercrimes Act in 2024 – further intimidate environmental journalists into silence.

As is commonplace across all countries discussed in this report, the limited finances of media outlets in Nigeria make it near-impossible for journalists to defend themselves against the threat of SLAPPs. Instead, it is not uncommon for defendants to reach unfavourable out-of-court settlements with claimants to avoid lengthy and costly legal battles or even imprisonment. Those who choose not to settle, or who are not given the opportunity to do so, are likely to face protracted legal battles. In one such case, [Agba Jalingo](#), publisher of Cross River Watch, endured a 30-month trial on charges of treason, cybercrime, and terrorism before being acquitted in 2022.

Adding to this, there is a lack of NGOs and media foundations operating in Nigeria that are willing or able to offer financial assistance or pro-bono legal support to journalists targeted by SLAPPs. While some organisations offer support to cover defendants' legal costs, this cannot match the expenses of all journalists facing judicial harassment in Nigeria. With limited financial support only exacerbating an already dire situation, environmental journalists in Nigeria face a steep uphill battle in efforts to continue holding a powerful and exploitative extraction industry to account.

Cameroon

Cameroon is one of the most dangerous countries in Africa for journalists, typified by the kidnapping and violent [murder of prominent reporter Martinez Zogo](#) in 2023. Despite freedom of the press being enshrined in the constitution and supported by the 1990 press freedom laws, press offences are still criminalised and criminal defamation is routinely used to silence critical journalists.

Mass deforestation and a poorly regulated fishing industry represent key focus areas for the country's investigative environmental journalists. However, the power of both industries has brought with it self-censorship from some journalists seeking to avoid retaliation for their work. Financial constraints have further dampened environmental journalists' ability to cover these issues, in particular illegal fishing practices. Should these journalists –

especially the many working on a freelance basis – face a SLAPP as a result of their work, their ability to defend themselves would be close to non-existent.

As highlighted by IPI in its 2024 report “[Climate and Environmental Journalism Under Fire](#)”, journalists reporting on climate issues in Cameroon routinely have to deal with threats to their physical safety, insecurity, and a lack of access to regions in which environmental damage is most acute. While data on the use of SLAPPs against environmental and climate journalists in Cameroon remains low, the prevalence of restrictive legislation and ease with which press freedom safeguards can be circumvented, combined with the presence of powerful multinational corporations and the limited finances of most media outlets, means climate journalists in Cameroon are highly vulnerable to legal attacks.

Speaking to IPI in 2024, environmental journalist Madeleine Ngeunga stressed that reporters cannot rely on the judiciary or law enforcement for protection while carrying out vital reporting on environmental degradation. With no safety net and few media foundations or NGOs offering financial or legal support, environmental journalists in Cameroon are often alone on the legal battlefield.

Between 2016 and 2021, climate journalist Nestor Nga Etoga made over 100 appearances in court. After reporting on alleged forestry offences and human rights abuses by FIPCAM, an Italian-owned logging company, the journalist faced a wave of defamation and false news lawsuits. Many of the court appearances were cut short and postponed, meaning Etoga would once again be forced to travel 270km between his home and the city in which the trial was taking place. Including travel costs and legal defence, Etoga reportedly spent around 30,000 EUR in order to fight the lawsuits. London-based [Media Defence provided support](#) to the journalist in his legal battle. Despite this, due to lack of resources to continue his investigative work and the subsequent loss of potential earnings, Etoga was forced to shut down his weekly investigative magazine, Le Renard.

In another infamous case, renowned journalist Samuel Bondjock was forced to appear in court nearly [50 times in three years](#) following a criminal defamation charge brought by the managing director of the state-run Cameroon Real Estate Company (SIC). The case – which has been repeatedly postponed – remains ongoing.

Etoga and Bondjock’s lawsuits exemplify the sort of major legal threats that feed a climate of self-censorship among Cameroon’s environmental journalists. Efforts to hold major multinationals to account bring with them heightened risks of legal action, especially in a country that routinely detains journalists with the use of draconian cybercrime, defamation, and anti-terrorism laws.

Kenya

SLAPPs targeting Kenyan journalists often take the form of defamation, false news, and professional misconduct allegations – employing civil, criminal, and administrative avenues to attack journalists. Despite the robustness of Kenyan media and civil society, critical journalists regularly face consequences for their efforts to uncover corruption, abuse of office, or human rights violations. The true extent and impact of SLAPPs is concealed by limited awareness about the issue and underreporting of legal threats and judicial harassment, particularly concerning climate and environmental journalists. Some highly publicised SLAPP incidents are, however, invigorating SLAPP discourse and action in Kenya’s media and legal spaces.

While not related to environmental or climate issues, in December 2024, Safaricom Ltd, Kenya’s largest telecommunications provider, [threatened](#) Nation Media Group (NMG) and some of its journalists with legal action following an [exposé](#) on Safaricom’s complicity in state-perpetrated abductions, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings through the unlawful sharing of user communication and location data with law enforcement and failure to release evidence to the court. Shortly after, Safaricom instituted [administrative action](#) against NMG through the Media Council of Kenya, alleging unethical reporting. Following this, journalist Robert Wanjala Kituyi was [sued](#) by Safaricom in February 2025 for submitting an access to information request on the company’s user data disclosure practices.

In 2024, Africa Uncensored (AUC), a public-interest investigative media company, was sued by a powerful and politically-connected businessperson after the release of their [documentary](#) Fertile Deception. The documentary exposed a fraudulent fertiliser deal orchestrated by SBL Innovate Manufacturers Limited, which had secured a government contract for the

supply of organic fertilisers. However, SBL Innovate allegedly repackaged sand and sold it to unsuspecting farmers, resulting in massive agricultural losses. The CEO of SBL Innovate, Joe Kariuki, strategically sought a preemptive injunction two days before the Sunday premiering of the documentary. Unable to respond over the weekend, AUC proceeded with the documentary's release, relying on the public-interest nature of the documentary and their due compliance with the media code of conduct, including seeking a right of reply. The petitioner then sought to hold AUC in contempt. The court, however, dismissed the suit as frivolous after two weeks.

Instigators of SLAPPs often supplement legal actions with other nefarious tactics, including disinformation and smear campaigns, harassment, and financial reprisals to wreak further reputational, psychological, and financial harm on victims. Ultimately, these actions spread fear across the media and engender self-censorship.

Following the release of *Fertile Deception*, Africa Uncensored and its CEO, John Allan Namu, were the [subject](#) of coordinated online smear campaigns seeking to portray them as compromised and corrupt. And in the case of Safaricom and NMG, the telecommunications company [withdrew advertising](#) from the media outlet. At a time when media houses are struggling to remain financially stable, such actions illustrate the intolerance towards critical coverage and the far-reaching consequences of journalists' work in Kenya.

The Constitution of Kenya, with its strong human-rights guarantees for freedom of expression, media freedom, and public participation, espouses the strongest line of defence against SLAPPs in the absence of specific anti-SLAPP legislation. In some cases, public-interest litigation has successfully prompted courts to strike down legal provisions harmful to free speech, arguing that these provisions are incompatible with constitutional protections. Examples include provisions on criminal defamation in Section 194 of the Penal Code and false news in Sections 22 and 23 of the Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act. However, other laws, including the Defamation Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating of Terrorism Financing Laws (Amendment) Act, and the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act, can still serve as anchor points for SLAPPs.

Although SLAPP case law is underdeveloped in Kenya, the concept has been cursorily mentioned in some [cases](#) as a consideration when courts are

awarding costs following the withdrawal of a suit. Defendants can also rely on the doctrine of abuse of court to prompt early dismissal in civil cases. Targeted advocacy at judicial actors is required to build awareness about SLAPPs, their human-rights implications, and the protective role of the judiciary. SLAPPs are an important topic for inclusion in continuous education curricula of lawyers and judges. Civil society has been at the forefront of advocacy for anti-SLAPP protections through research, training, and stakeholder engagements, a movement that requires further support if Kenya is to establish concrete and robust protections against SLAPPs and their impact on press freedom and public participation.

Somalia

IPI recorded five attacks against environmental and climate journalists in Somalia from [March to September 2025](#), the second-highest number among all African countries included in its monitoring work during that period. Somali journalists covering land injustices and forced evictions are especially vulnerable to threats, arrests, detentions, and judicial harassment. In June 2025, two journalists, Mohamed Abdul Aziz of Radio Galkayo and Ahmed Abdiqani Yusuf, were detained in Puntland while covering a local protest for improved sewage and sanitation systems following flood damage to roads. In a similar case in August 2025, SMS Somali TV's Osman Abdullahi Mohamed, Hussein Isse Mohamed, and freelancer Mahad Mohamed Abdirahman were detained for covering a forced eviction from public land in Mogadishu, which had allegedly been sold to a powerful businessperson.

These experiences of Somali climate and environmental journalists reflect the country's broader [media freedom context](#), which has been hampered by prolonged conflict, widespread insecurity, endemic corruption, and pervasive impunity for press freedom violations, amid the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Criminal provisions in the country's media law and defamation and false news sanctions in its criminal code are systematically used to crack down on public-interest reporting. Defamation through the press is punishable by fine or imprisonment of up to three years under Article 452 of the [Penal Code](#). The vaguely framed offence of publishing "false, exaggerated, or tendentious news so as to disturb public order" carries a maximum sentence of six months and a fine under Article 328. Insult offences against a public officer may

attract imprisonment of up to two years, and three years if involving a legislative, administrative, or judicial body under Articles 268 and 269, respectively. The continued existence of these provisions in Somali laws flies in the face of calls by the African Commission for states to repeal criminalisation of sedition, insult, and publication of false news under the [2019 Declaration](#). The prospect of losing their liberty hangs over Somali environmental journalists who may face abusive and malicious charges under these provisions for stories that threaten the political and economic interests of powerful individuals.

Somali journalists have also faced cross-border SLAPP threats while in exile. Abdalle Mumin, the Secretary General of the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), was [threatened](#) with a costly defamation suit served by Taylor Hampton, a UK-based law firm, for social media posts criticising the practices of Premier Bank Limited Somalia in early 2025. The letter demanded a takedown and public apology. Mumin had published the posts after the [suspension](#) of SJS's bank accounts in connection to their reporting on press freedom violations and advocacy in Somalia. The SLAPP nature of the threats attracted widespread condemnation from local and international civil society. Mumin was based in the UK at the time following persistent persecution by the government, including arrest, detention, attempted assassination, and torture.

Addressing Somalia media's vulnerability to SLAPPs will require broad political, legal, and institutional reform with intervention from national, regional, and international actors.

5. Conclusions

The press freedom situation as it relates to SLAPPs against environmental journalists in Africa varies from country to country. While some states, such as South Africa, have taken positive steps towards challenging the threat of abusive litigation, others are lagging behind. Regardless, several common threads can be drawn across the region.

One major factor contributing to the proliferation of SLAPPs across Africa is the major financial instability facing media outlets covering environmental issues in the region. Interviewees from each focus country stressed that, unless the economic situation improves for independent journalism, it is unlikely that the threat and effects of SLAPPs against climate and environmental reporters will be mitigated. This situation is compounded by a lack of legal assistance provided to environmental journalists in Africa. The role of journalists exposing wrongdoing and destruction of the natural environment is paramount to the fight against climate change, yet financial support for those facing serious consequences as a result of that work is lacking. Although organisations and foundations such as Media Defence, the Media Foundation for West Africa, and Media Institute for Southern Africa – among others – all offer different forms of legal support to combat SLAPPs, this represents only a drop in the ocean.

The fear of SLAPPs among environmental journalists only grows stronger as these cases gain a reputation of being financially unwinnable. Interviewed journalists expressed a desire for “just one” SLAPP to be fought to the end, helping them to illustrate their baselessness, to give a degree of hope to other colleagues caught in the crosshairs, and to set a precedent in court. That cannot happen without legal support or a major improvement of media outlets’ financial sustainability.

Numerous journalists also noted a tendency to self-censor from an early stage to avoid the prospect of facing a SLAPP. This, somewhat contradictorily, may contribute to a lack of reported cases of SLAPPs, creating the illusion that they pose less of a threat than is actually true. At times, this self-censorship occurs unprompted as environmental journalists, aware of the power imbalance between them and the subjects of their reports, choose not to pursue their investigations further for fear of

impossibly costly legal battles. At other times, self-censorship comes as a direct response to unofficial legal threats from (often anonymous) individuals.

Journalists across the region spoke of foreign-owned energy and resource extraction companies and the power imbalance between them and critical environmental journalists. These international corporate actors abuse local legislation to silence journalists investigating breaches of climate regulations or destruction of the natural environment. As well as benefitting from the major resource imbalance, they can also quell critical investigations thanks to weak enforcement of local environmental regulations, complicity of powerful government officials, and the willingness of police and security forces to harass local journalists on their behalf. While many such cases arise from Chinese-owned or Chinese-linked mining and logging operations, interviewees highlighted cases from American, Australian, Italian, Serbian, and Singaporean companies during the course of this research.

As the impacts of climate change continue to be felt across Africa, the work of environmental journalists grows ever-more vital. With that comes waves of increasingly sophisticated attempts from powerful corporate and political actors to silence critical voices. Overall, SLAPPs represent a vastly underreported and underchallenged threat to environmental journalism in Africa. Major policy reform, coordinated advocacy efforts, reforming and training of the judiciary and law enforcement, and financial support for media outlets are all critically needed in order to address this threat.

6. Recommendations

- For African states

1. Repeal criminal defamation and other restrictive civil and criminal legislation that impedes press freedom and freedom of expression, in line with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' [Resolution on the Safety of Journalists and Media Practitioners in Africa](#), Principles 22(3) and (4) of the [Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa](#), and the [2013 African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights ruling](#) which held that imprisonment for defamation violates the right to freedom of expression.

2. Urgently enact anti-SLAPP legislation to protect journalists, activists, and human rights defenders from these types of vexatious lawsuits in line with guarantees of access to justice and free trial under Article 7, freedom of expression and right to information under Article 9, freedom of association under Article 10, freedom of assembly under Article 11, and right to participation under Article 13 of the African Charter, and with regards to the [2026 Resolution on Access to Information and the Right to a Healthy Environment](#), which highlights the abuse of courts to silence critics through the use of SLAPPs. In addition to enacting national-level legislation, states should provide full cooperation and support to the potential drafting and adoption of a model anti-SLAPP law at the African Union level.

3. Strengthen judicial independence to guarantee access to justice, the right to fair trial, and protection against undue influence from political and corporate actors over the judiciary.

4. Conduct thorough and independent investigations into allegations of abusive litigation against journalists and hold perpetrators to account.

5. Establish SLAPPs focal points. Mirroring an initiative of the [European Union](#), African states should work to establish focal points tasked with addressing SLAPPs at a national level. These focal points should be

responsible for gathering data on the use of SLAPPs, providing support for victims, and training the judiciary on how best to identify and address SLAPPs.

6. Provide access to legal assistance services for victims of SLAPPs to protect their rights to free trial and access to justice as outlined by the [Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa](#).

Any proposed anti-SLAPP legislation should, at a minimum guarantee:

- A clear set of criteria for identifying and defining SLAPPs, adhering to international standards set through the establishment of anti-SLAPP legislation in other regions;
- The shifting of the burden of proof to the plaintiff, requiring claimants to prove the likelihood of a case being successful prior to its commencement;
- An early dismissal mechanism providing opportunities for judges to throw out cases which can clearly be identified as and proven to be a SLAPP;
- A mandate for unsuccessful plaintiffs to cover the defendant's legal costs when a case is proven to be a SLAPP; and
- Damages to be paid to the defendant in case of a SLAPP being determined (including, for example, compensation for reputational damage, travel costs, and/or emotional and medical toll).

- For national, regional, and international civil society

1. **Monitor and report the use of SLAPPs.** Gather data on SLAPP cases to help establish a more comprehensive understanding of the pervasiveness of the threat. Upon the establishment of SLAPPs focal points, share data and collaborate to help create a complete picture of SLAPPs at a national level.

2. **Coordinate and information share.** Collaborate nationally, regionally, and internationally to share data and information, including by hosting awareness-raising sessions on the use of SLAPPs against environmental journalists. Share best practices on how to identify, avoid, and respond to SLAPPs.
3. **Advocate for comprehensive anti-SLAPP legislation.** Collectively push for the implementation of anti-SLAPP legislation and offer expertise in drafting where applicable and appropriate. Further, support pushes for and drafting of, where applicable and appropriate, a Model Anti-SLAPP Law or draft resolution on countering SLAPPs at the African Union level.
4. **Support the training of the judiciary on the role of free press.** Offer expertise to assist in the training of lawyers and judges on the role of a free press, media freedom, and international standards of freedom of expression, as well as on recognising and responding to SLAPPs.

- For donors and journalism support organisations

1. **Strengthen and expand advocacy, legal, and financial support for countering SLAPPs. Increase support for legal advocacy efforts aimed at developing anti-SLAPP measures.** Collaborate and exchange data between all those offering support to victims of SLAPPs in Africa. Establish and support legal aid funds or pro-bono legal support networks to help environmental journalists challenge SLAPPs in courts, mitigating the need for unfavourable out-of-court settlements and self-censorship.
2. **Support environmental journalism.** Establish funds to support the production of high-quality journalism on climate and environmental topics in Africa, mitigating the financial barriers preventing further investigations into powerful corporate actors in the field.
3. **Support the development of coalitions and networks between national, regional, and international CSOs working to counter SLAPPs in Africa.** This includes supporting information sharing initiatives and collaborations between climate organisations, journalist networks, and press freedom organisations.