



Environmental
Investigative
Forum

Environmental Investigative Journalism

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Challenges & Successes

Environmental Investigative Forum - EIF

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www.eiforum.org

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Code RNA - W061014786

91 Rue Lamarck, Paris 75018, France

Disclaimer

This report was produced by **EIF** in partnership with **Oxpeckers, Info Nile, ARIJ, the Third Pole and CENOZO** and with the support of **IMS** (International Media Support) with the support of the **Journalism Fund Europe** “**Professional Grants**” program.



Journalismfund Europe vzw is a Brussels-based independent non-profit intermediary incorporated by citizens in 1998. The organisation was established with the purpose of facilitating investigative, cross-border and independent journalism.

International Media Support (IMS) is a non-profit organisation working to strengthen the capacity of media to reduce conflict, strengthen democracy and facilitate dialogue.



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For any enquiry about this report please contact us at team@eiforum.org

What is EIF ?

The **Environmental Investigative Forum** (EIF) is a global non-profit organisation registered in France since 2020 and specialises in **cross-border environmental investigation**.

The organization is composed of a team of 6 people, as well as a consortium of over 100 members, bringing together journalists but also environmental experts worldwide.

EIF aims to **foster new initiatives** related to **environmental investigative journalism** on a global scale through the following activities:

- **Environmental investigations:** with the development of a global consortium of experts and journalists to facilitate international environmental investigative collaboration.
- **Capacity Building:** by supporting our members and partners in carrying out their investigations (fundraising, training, technical support and consulting services).
- **Resource development:** by developing OSINT and investigative tools for systemic investigative research on a global and/or regional scale.



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Global consultation on EIJ

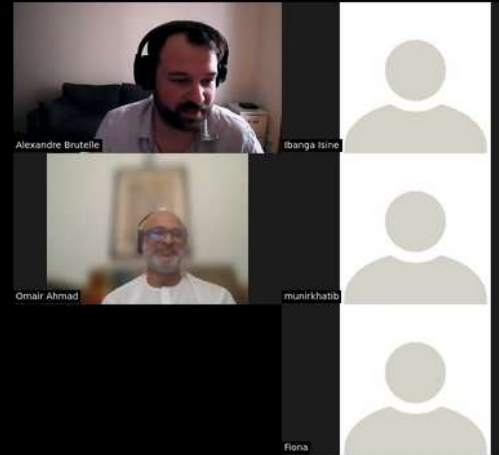
As part of EIF's recent board development and yearly goals to coordinate a global consultation on environmental investigative journalism, EIF's Advisory Board members are invited to take part in a series of webinars, all through 2023.

In parallel, a side questionnaire was available online as to allow a quantitative evaluation on the understanding of the field of environmental investigative journalism, but also its specific challenges.

This series of webinars aimed for each partner member to present their own **theoretical definition of the practice of environmental investigative journalism** as per their own region, supported by **recent use-cases** from their organizations.

Following this first phase of each webinar, each host organization presented a synthesis of **ongoing successes and difficulties** in terms of **cross-regional cooperation** applied to environmental investigations. This was followed by an **open discussion** discussions among the rest of the members over the information shared.

This consultation was led in partnership with **IMS (International Media Support)** and with the support of the **Journalism Fund Europe** through their Professional Development Grants for Environmental Journalism grant program. Results of this consultation were presented during the **GIJC23 Conference** in Gothenburg, Sweden.



GLOBAL INVESTIGATIVE
JOURNALISM CONFERENCE



EIF Advisory Board



The Third Pole



OXPECKERS
Investigative Environmental Journalism



SOCIETY OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
JOURNALISTS

As of the publication of this report, EIF's Advisory Board currently comprises:

- **ARIJ** (Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism), for the MENA region
- **Oxpeckers** (Oxpeckers Investigative Environmental Journalism), for the Southern African region
- **SEJ** (Society of Environmental Journalists), for North America
- **The Third Pole**, for the Himalaya Basin
- **Info Nile**, for the Nile Basin
- **CENOZO**, for the West African region

In 2023, **Oxpeckers**, **Info Nile**, **Third Pole**, **CENOZO** and **ARIJ** took part to our global consultation on environmental investigative journalism.

EIF model



In 2023, EIF opened an **advisory board** within its governance structure, aiming to further develop into an umbrella network composed of regional investigative journalism units.

This development does not only aim to share further EIF's governance from an administrative level, but also to help **shape its future objectives** in partnership with relevant and well experienced regional partners of reference, worldwide, based on the following criterias:

- **Non-profit status** and **editorial independence**
- **Regional-focused organization**
- Well recognized experience in **investigative journalism**

Why EIJ diverges from climate journalism

Climate journalism and environmental investigative journalism (**EIJ**) share a **common foundation** of covering environmental and climate issues, but they differ in both scope, methodologies and public service focus.

The first is a subset of environmental journalism that **specializes in climate-related topics**, while **EIJ has a broader mandate to investigate a wide array of environmental concerns**, often with a focus on uncovering hidden truths and exposing wrongdoing.

Discussions held with **ARIJ, Oxpeckers, The Third Pole, CENOZO and Info Nile** showed that all agreed that the necessity to distinguish these two fields - without necessarily cancelling each other out. **87.5% of our respondents** also considered this distinction **relevant**.

But while "**Climate Journalism**" will typically focus on explanatory and fact-checking reporting over the climate change crisis, reporting on its victims, as well as considering a solution-based approach in its coverage - these criteria **do not fully match the essence of both environmental reporting and investigative journalism**.

Andiswa Matikinca, journalist for Oxpeckers, Africa's first journalistic investigation unit focusing on environmental issues, agrees that focusing solely on "**climate journalism**" can limit one's ability to produce disruptive investigative reports that **not only address the realities and consequences of climate change**, but **also address its causes** - and hold its enablers **accountable**.



"EIF's objective will be to develop global OSINT tools and investigative projects around environmental beats, by breaking both regional and thematic siloes within the IJ scene"

Alexandre Brutelle
(EIF)

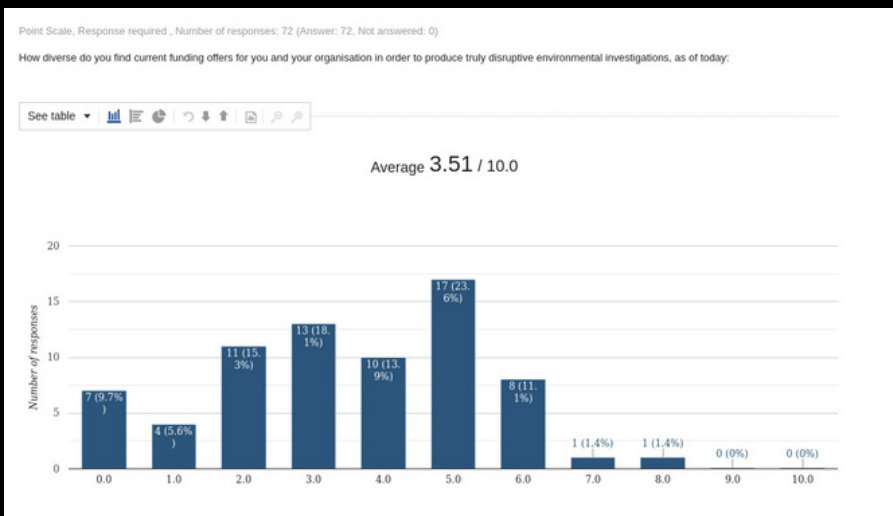
"Environmental Investigative Journalism is a field on its own"
according to **87.5%** of our survey respondents

Gaps to be bridged

Climate journalism and environmental investigations are **complementary** - but, in the non-profit scene, **does the current trend for “climate journalism” leave enough room** for producing impactful investigations ?

Here, the results of our survey show that 72% of our respondents consider that current “climate change” funding opportunities **“occasionally” or “mainly” fail to integrate an investigative perspective.**

Despite quality grant-making from well established organizations that do allow funding for cross-regional environmental investigative work, those are also considered to be too few. Indeed, 63% consider funding opportunities on the matter to be below average.



However, methodological and thematic silos have started to show some cracks. Major consortium players from the non-profit scene are taking into ambitious **global investigations**, such as the ICIJ with their **Deforestation Inc. project**, or **regional ones** such as the **Forever Polluants** project coordinated by the European network Arena for Journalism.

Both non-profit and for-profit have started integrating an environmental beat into their work, or even creating dedicated editor roles focusing solely on **investigative and environmental journalism**, such as Mediapart, in France - beyond the notion of opening a “climate” or “environmental” reporter role.



“Donor priorities can be hard to navigate in order to maintain an investigative focus or include foreign regional partners”

Andiswa Matikinca
(Oxpeckers)

“Climate change funding opportunities either mainly or occasionally fail to integrate an investigative perspective”

according to **72%** of our survey respondents

Environmental IJ: “Follow the Money”

Follow the money is arguably the method that has led most of the past 10 years' consortium-based network models for collaborative investigative journalism such as the **ICIJ (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists)**, **OCCRP (Organized Crime & Corruption Reporting Project)**, the **EIC (European Investigative Collaboration)**, and many others.

Despite these organizations and the overall IJ scene getting progressively on board with uncovering environmental issues as an investigative topic, no global environmental investigative project had yet had a comparable impact to the one's of the iconic uncovering environmental issues as an investigative topic, no global environmental investigative project had yet had a comparable impact to the one's of the iconic **Panama Papers**.

Yet, today and tomorrow's generations of environmental journalists who will want to engage in similarly ambitious projects, and develop further the field, shouldn't build their own ivory towers while doing so. They should keep their fields of work open to intersections within other IJ beats.

While being a new playground for reporting innovation, GIS and satellite imagery shouldn't be substituted to other methods of work.

“We tend to feel that the “follow the money” practice is beyond our mandate”, shared one member of the audience during our GJJC23 side-event.

For climate and environmental investigative journalists, the financial beat seems to need a real push according to **Omaisr Ahmad**: **“we need to more in terms of tracking financial flows, following money is also what can lead us to uncover the systemic causes of climate change and environmental harm”**.



“We, as environmental journalists, need to do more in terms of tracking financial flows.”

Omaisr Ahmad
(The Third Pole)

“We tend to feel like that the “follow the money” practice is beyond our mandate as environmental journalists”, according to one audience member during our GICJ23 session.

Emerging techniques & skills disparity

Oxpeckers is typically seen as one of the **pioneers of environmental investigative journalism**, it's not solely for coining the expression itself. The South African-based organization has been **using geographical data over the past decade, not only in a data-visualization perspective**, but also in an **investigative one**.

This is most notable by some of the organization's online tools such as **#MineAlert**, a geo-platform mapping South Africa's mining activities and providing a **centralised platform** for users to access, track and share information and documents on mining applications and licences. The tool also documents water threats caused by the mining sector in South Africa.

Their most recent tool, **#PowerTracker**, enables the geo-tracking of renewable power projects and the decommissioning of coal plants in Mpumalanga, South Africa's energy capital.

"Their work and methodology was a source of inspiration for creating our organization", shares **Annika McGinnis**, co-founder of **Info Nile** along with journalist Frederick Mugira, a geojournalism platform that visualizes and maps data on environmental issues in the **Nile Basin**.

Despite similar initiatives existing in Latin America (**Info Amazonia**), the Congo Basin (**Info Congo**), the practice of using geo-analysis as a mean to investigate environmental topics is still fairly niche and emerging, with no equivalent organizations covering the West African, MENA, European and Asian regions.



"More should be done to overcome skills disparities within the African region"

Ibanga Isine
(CENOZO)

Over 71% of our survey respondents worldwide stated that "Geo-location tools, OSINT and data techniques" as one of their main needs to conduct proper environmental investigations.

Cross-regional networking needs

When it comes to international collaboration, both **MENA and Sub-Saharan respondent groups** to our survey stated that the region where they had the most problems finding relevant partners to work over environmental investigative topics was actually **their own**.

Followed by that, **each other regions were the second hardest one for them where to find colleagues** to cooperate with.

“**In the West African region, this is mainly due to language disparities that are already a challenge for any proper collaboration for journalism projects, generally speaking**”, according to **Ibanga Isine** (CENOZO). **Munir Khatib** (ARIJ) welcomed the opportunity for further cooperation between the two regions around environmental topics.

According to our **European respondents**, the hardest region to find colleagues was considered to be **Asia**, just before the MENA and Sub-Saharan African regions. Asian and North America respondents were too few (less than 5), to be included in this report. respondents were too few (less than 5), to be included in this report.

Overall, “**networking opportunities with journalists from other regions**” than their own was declared **top priority** for the field of EIJ according to the vast majority of the journalists we surveyed.

72.% of our respondents also consider the state of **cross-regional networking opportunities** to be either “**insufficient**” (**51.4%**) or “**largely insufficient**” (**20.8%**).

Ibanga Isine, board member of **CENOZO**, stated that fellow journalists from the region were “**lacking behind**” in terms of data and OSINT skills. He emphasized that “more should be done to surpass the language barrier and enable cross-regional training between Eastern/Southern African journalists and West African ones”.



“**More needs to be done in terms of cross-regional collaboration between the MENA region and Sub-Saharan Africa**”

Munir Khatib
(ARIJ)

“**Networking opportunities with journalists from other regions**” was listed as a **primary need by 82% of our survey’s respondents** when it comes to fostering better collaborative environmental investigations.

Our resolutions at EIF:

As already outlined in our 2022 annual report, EIF plans to focus its mission to foster innovative and quality environmental investigative journalism, by maintaining its 3 levels of activities: **Networking & capacity building, investigative work and resource development**, in the light of this consultation process.

In 2024, we will set some precise and **specific triannual activity goals** to be further implemented based on the current report, our daily work experience in the field, as well as our **past and future cooperation with organisations worldwide**.



Thanks to this consultation process, we can already expect that these new goals will need to be articulated around - but not limited to:

- Promoting **inter-regional skill transferrability** and knowledge exchange
- **Connecting further regional investigative units on a worldwide scale**, specifically when it comes to the production of global or cross-regional investigative reports
- **Improving data-literacy around geo-data tools**, but also techniques and derivatives
- **Expanding the development of OSINT tools based around geo-data**, and pushing for the replication of existing regional tools to new areas of the world

EIJ needs a boost !

Our recommendations

Drawing from this brief consultation, that would benefit to be renewed and extended over the years, we can nonetheless say that environmental investigative journalism is a field of its own, and a growing one, recognized by a majority of media practitioners worldwide.

This could be achieved notably by:

- **Breaking down regional silos** by enabling cross-regional collaboration, the same way cross-border has been for the past years. Specifically among journalists from the Southern hemisphere.
- Similarly, an effort needs to be put in order to **enable inter-regional training among journalists experts from the South**, the African continent shows a good example where surpassing language barriers could increase skills exchange from the region itself.
- Geo-journalism platforms and regional investigative networks strictly dedicated to environmental affairs as spread into various regions of the world but is yet to be further developed, **particularity in West Africa, in the MENA region and in Asia**, where here as well, a good potential for innovation is waiting to be seized.
- While necessary to include a **climate perspective** into one's newsroom or freelancer's reporting, new support initiatives need to be pushed forward by **newsroom collectives, public donors and philanthropist organizations** to dedicate **specific programs** relating solely to **environmental investigations**;
- Senior journalists in the field recognize that, while the climate and environmental "trend" is **pushing some renowned global organizations into this field, they should do so in a perspective on inclusiveness towards regional environmental journalism units** that have been in place for a longer time for some specific regions.

This will require dedicated financial support, as well as a change of mindset from journalists, private media, but also donors.

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