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## **MUCKRAKING IN NAMIBIA:**

**The status of investigative journalism on the  
Namibian anti-corruption landscape**



BY SHINOVENE IMMANUEL

**IPPR ANTI-CORRUPTION RESEARCH PROGRAMME**

## KEY ASPECTS

Investigative journalism plays a key role in anti-corruption by informing the public of administrative and governance malfeasance and by shining a light of accountability and transparency on those who wish to perpetrate corrupt practices under a shroud of secrecy.

It is a form of journalism that goes farther and deeper than mere reporting and requires much of the journalist and the media organisation who engage in it.

Namibia has a proud history of investigative journalism stretching over decades.

However, at the same time investigative reporting has and continues to face many challenges.

The main challenges facing the full potential of investigative journalism in Namibia are:

- A lack of understanding of, commitment to and support for investigative reporting in many media houses;
- That only a small number of independent, private media organisations with limited resources engage in investigative reporting;
- A general lack of resources, both human and financial, to engage in investigative reporting initiatives;
- The daily newsroom grind which can distract potential investigative journalists from fully exploring the field of investigative reporting;
- An absence of collaborative investigative journalism initiatives and silo operations within media organisations;
- An increasingly unfavourable economic environment within which media organisations find themselves;
- The threat to traditional media business models which are increasingly shown to be inappropriate to current and emerging media landscape realities;
- The diversion, both in terms of audience attention and advertising revenues, towards social media platforms;
- The spectre of censorship in state-owned media and politically affiliated media organisations;
- And the absence of an access to information law and the fact that state-led whistleblower protections remain unimplemented.

It is against this backdrop that this briefing is situated and argues for more and improved investigative reporting.



## INTRODUCTION

Investigative journalism is widely known as a type of reporting that focuses on specific stories that seek to provide deeper context of issues that are mostly hidden from the public.

This type of journalism requires persistence, patience, passion, long days and sleepless nights, an eye for detail, tenacity, begging and hunting for information, as well as the full support of newsroom editors who believe in telling compelling stories that could lead to societal change.

In Namibia, for a long time there has been talk of a lack of investigative journalism, and debate has ranged for years about the causes of that lack.

Speaking to this concern, a report produced in 2007 by the Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID) on the state of investigative journalism in the country, argued that much needed to be done to encourage the emergence of more investigative journalism on the Namibian media landscape.

The report, titled 'Tracking Corruption' contains an analyses by Tangeni Amupadhi, the then co-editor of the current affairs *Insight Namibia* magazine.

Amupadhi, who is now the editor of *The Namibian* newspaper, argued at the time that investigative journalism in Namibia had a long way to go.

He pointed at the lack of grounding in newsrooms, skills shortages and resource constraints as some of the major challenges hampering investigative journalism in the country.

Senior editors either do not appreciate the role of investigative journalism or do not have the finances to devote to investigative reporting, he said.

According to him, few editors at daily newspapers and radio or television stations are likely to give a reporter a week or longer to work on a single story, as human resources and skills have always been stretched in Namibian newsrooms.

He acknowledged that Namibia has produced some very brave journalists, including Hannes Smith, the grandfather of Namibia's news media industry, who founded and ran the *Windhoek Observer*, and the world-renowned Gwen Lister, who founded *The Namibian* newspaper in 1985.

Amupadhi, who replaced Lister in 2011 as editor at *The Namibian*, also made a name for himself as a leading investigative journalist, sweeping national journalism awards, and turning *Insight Namibia* magazine into a fearless investigative media house that broke and covered some of the country's biggest news stories since independence in 1990.

At its peak, the magazine won eight out of the 13 categories for print media journalism at the Namibian media awards in 2007.

Amongst the major stories it broke was how the Social Security Commission (SSC) was fleeced of N\$30 million by a novice investment firm with links to influential ruling party politicians through dubious transactions. The Avid-SSC corruption case turned into one of the longest running cases in Namibia and was only concluded in late 2018, 14 years after the story was broken and almost a decade after the court proceedings started.

Despite such notable investigative journalism achievements, the debate about the lack and quality of investigative journalism in Namibia continues, 11 years after Amupadhi's assessment.

And concerns about the future of Namibian investigative journalism are valid, especially as local media houses are facing financial difficulties and political control of sections of the media landscape has grown, squeezing the space left to independent media voices and constraining newsrooms' ability to provide critical coverage of national issues. In fact, by late 2018, many Namibian media organisations were struggling to stay afloat.

At the same time, the state-owned media, especially in the broadcast sector, remain entrenched monopolies, which do not provide critical and balanced coverage of the state sector and dominant political elite, and are constantly faced with funding threats from ruling party politicians.

This has led to state-owned media largely shunning any sort of critical coverage of issues.

For instance, the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation – under the leadership of former director general Albertus Aochamub – banned popular programmes such as

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Open File because its investigations exposed government failure. The programme – a rare sort of journalism for the state broadcaster – was stopped in 2014 and has never returned.<sup>1</sup>

While it has been observed that Namibian audiences continue to be bombarded with press release driven journalism, it should be noted that there has been something of an awakening taking place in Namibian newsrooms.

This includes fearless reporting by especially newspapers that has resulted in action from national leaders on thorny matters such as corruption.

This sort of reporting needs to be encouraged and nurtured and ways should be found to draw young reporters into investigative journalism.

It is against this backdrop that this paper proceeds, by laying out and briefly discussing the factors that constrain the widespread practice of investigative journalism in Namibia.

## THE CHALLENGES TO INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN NAMIBIA

### The economics

It is tough times for media entities across the world as they try to compete for audiences and advertising revenues, which are fast dwindling and shifting online, and Namibia is no exception.

Reducing advertising revenues and outdated business models have forced some local newspapers, such as *The Villager*<sup>2</sup> and *The Namibia Economist*<sup>3</sup> weeklies, to stop publishing newspapers in 2016 and to shift focus onto growing on the internet. The results appear to have been mixed, but mostly underwhelming.

Some media organisations have been through rounds of retrenching reporters and back office staff, while others stopped recruiting journalists to survive in the face of growing economic and financial headwinds.

Though hard figures are difficult to come by, there appears to have been a significant drop in revenue across the media landscape, which has not only curtailed media growth and had an impact on the general quality of journalism, but also emerged as one of the major obstacles to practicing investigative journalism – an often times costly pursuit requiring not just money, but also time and experienced, skilled journalists who know how to dig into stories.

Few Namibian media houses have investigative journalism departments that solely focus on in depth stories, with *The Namibian* newspaper perhaps the only media organisation that has placed investigations at the centre of its newsroom output.

This is because from taking over in 2011, one of Tangeni Amupadhi's priorities as editor of *The Namibian* has been to build investigative journalism capacities in the newsroom, which led to the formation of the newspaper's investigative unit in 2014.

Other private media organisations, such as *Confidante* and Namibia Media Holdings (NMH), which owns the *Namibian Sun*, *Republikein* and *Algemeine Zeitung*, have also over recent years set up departments that focus on investigative journalism.

Even though those initiatives seem to have brought mixed results, such moves suggest an appetite and intention by these organisations to invest in investigative journalism and to build such capacities in-house.

However, it should not be lost sight of that the economic and financial imperatives are at this stage not in favour of investigative journalism and the economics could become increasingly decisive in determining the future of investigative journalism in Namibia.

### Access to information

Press freedom is enshrined in the bill of rights in chapter 3 of the Namibian Constitution, which has contributed to a better working environment for reporters and positive

1. <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=120579&page=archive-read>

2. <https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/11640/the-future-is-here-it-is-digital/>

3. <https://www.namibian.com.na/159044/archive-read/Economist-retrenches-12-in-digital-move>



media landscape rankings for Namibia internationally over the years.

However, more should be done to ensure access to information for all citizens through the media.

For one of the long-standing obstacles to investigative journalism in Namibia is the absence of an access to information (ATI) law which has been promised by the government since 1998.

Media freedom activists, policymakers, editors and nongovernmental organisations have over the years called for the introduction of a law that would allow journalists to have information that would strengthen their reporting.

The absence of this law has turned Namibian journalists into serial beggars for information that should be made available by authorities.

This, in most cases, has resulted in journalists relying on unnamed sources which sometimes turn out to be half-baked because the information which was supposed to be in the public domain is withheld from reporters.

Some stories even reach a dead end because there is just not enough evidence to back up stories.

An ATI law would be in line with the Windhoek Declaration – a statement on the principles of press freedom put together by African journalists – that emphasises the importance of an independent press, transparency, freedom of expression and the free flow of information, and the need for journalists to be protected.

There is a perception that journalists mostly focus on corruption in the public sector.

Women's Solidarity Namibia director Rosa Namises said in 2015<sup>4</sup> that Namibia lacks investigative journalism, and issues are limited to those of government.

Such sentiments are genuine and require context to understand the root cause of this trend.

Perhaps there is a need to analyse why the media focuses a lot on government-related stories, instead of balancing coverage to substantially include the private sector.

This heavy focus on government is because it dominates what happens in society and is the single largest force in the economy, through its procurement. Namibia's current economic troubles have shown that even the private sector relied heavily on the state for business.

Given this, one would assume that the media would, in one way or the other, find a link to the government because of the nature of the Namibian state-led economy.

However, the trend of focusing on government corruption is also affected by the lack of an ATI law that could force companies to reveal information in the public interest.

At the moment, private companies can refuse to provide information such as financial statements because it would apparently be "used by competitors".

Even basic information such as the ownership of companies, which often gives journalists a lead into a story, is hard to get.

Unlike close corporations whose owners are easier to determine by requesting information from the Business and Intellectual Property Authority (Bipa), it's difficult to find out who the owners are of proprietary limited companies.

Reporters can get this information from company auditors, but these refuse to provide such information.

Unless an ATI law is introduced, investigative reporters are likely to struggle to get information about the beneficial ownership of proprietary limited companies in sectors such as the corruption tainted fishing industry where close corporations are being phased out.

Another challenge for investigative reporters is the absence of an internet-based search function at Bipa, which is a state-owned agency, among others, to manage company records.

Bipa still uses an ancient manual system to sift through the piles of company files to get documents requested by the public.

This does not only make it easy to tamper with or hide company documents, but there have been cases where documents were deliberately withheld from reporters because a subject in a story told a public official at Bipa to do so.

Transparency advocates have over the years insisted that information about company ownership should be public to fight white-collar criminals and corporate crime.<sup>5</sup>

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4. <https://www.namibiansun.com/news/bouquets-brickbats-for-namibian-media>

5. <https://www.namibian.com.na/168028/archive-read/Business-processes-remain-cumbersome>



### The status of investigative journalism on the Namibian anti-corruption landscape

“Gone are the days when news was reported as it happened the previous day because in today’s world, with many people connected through mobile internet, it is not newsworthy anymore the following day because it would already have been all over social media.”

The use of hard copy files by Bipa is outdated, especially as larger countries like the United Kingdom have easily moved to digital and online systems, with a website where the public can subscribe and have access to information, such as company ownership records. Access to information laws have been used by investigative journalists in other countries to expose corruption.

For instance, the amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism in South Africa used the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) to investigate corruption in the private and public sectors.

In 2013, amaBhungane publicly released more than 12 000 pages of evidence<sup>6</sup> on how the state funded upgrades at former South African president Jacob Zuma’s private Nkandla estate, in the KwaZulu-Natal province.

In Namibia, there is however still hope that an ATI law will be passed soon.

Information minister Stanley Simataa said earlier in 2018 that an ATI bill would be tabled in parliament by the end of the year.<sup>7</sup>

#### Concerns about race

There are still concerns – especially among the black elite and their associates – that the media is unfairly targeting black people who are often splashed across newspaper front pages in cases of alleged corruption.

In his 2007 report, Amupadhi argued that it was difficult to dismiss the racism argument and that a review of the stories published up until then gave weight to the perception.

The dwindling number of white journalists may account for the apparent lack of depth in coverage of the white part of Namibian society, he said then.

The media will have to critically review itself to see how to tackle the perception of racial bias in choosing what to cover, but this should happen without violating journalism ethics in the name of balancing the reports about a certain race or ethnic group. Newspapers have over the years reported on dubious dealings involving white Namibians, but these stories received little attention or none at all largely because whites make up such a small proportion of the population and blacks dominate the state sector, which is the largest economic sector in the country.

Even so, this remains an uneasy issue within media circles.

#### The impact of social media

Another challenge facing traditional journalism and media in Namibia is the increasing impact of social media.

There is no doubt that social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have become a source of news for the public.

Gone are the days when news was reported as it happened the previous day because in today’s world, with many people connected through mobile internet, it is not newsworthy anymore the following day because it would already have been all over social media.

Traditional media are not only being challenged to maintain credibility as a result of unverified information being spread as news on social media, but are also coming under attack from senior political and government officials for sometimes spreading and legitimising false information or for not calling out those who do.

Namibian vice president Nangolo Mbumba, for instance, attacked and threatened the media in 2018 because of fake social media stories. Mbumba said the government would deal with some media houses and those creating a negative narrative of the state through social media.<sup>8</sup>

There is however an opportunity in this digital age, as it forces journalists to dig deeper and provide information and context to news stories and to fact check false stories spread online.

Namibian First Lady Monica Geingos summed<sup>9</sup> it up in 2016 when she said: “If there was a time we required professional and investigative journalism, it would be now, as social media has become the crime scene for the production of weaponised lies.”

6. <https://mg.co.za/article/2013-11-13-evidence-about-state-funded-nkandla-is-released>

7. <https://www.leramobile.com/content/73187/Access-to-Information-Bill-to-be-tabled-by-end-2018/>

8. <https://www.namibian.com.na/177026/archive-read/Mbumba-cautions-on-fake-news>

9. <https://www.newera.com.na/2017/09/.../first-lady-responds-to-critics-of-new-york-trip...>



Geingos was referring to some social media attacks that claimed her family travelled to the United States on government's bill.

### Big Brother is watching

Another serious issue that needs discussion is the suspicion that state security agencies are spying on journalists and intercepting their communications.

Some politicians<sup>10</sup> have over the years spoken out about their phones being tapped by intelligence agencies, but this topic has mostly been a taboo among journalists to the extent that reporters have accepted it as a normal working hazard.

Even though many journalists have turned to encrypted messaging applications, such as Signal Messenger and WhatsApp, to communicate with sources, there are still fears that spies are listening at a higher rate than before.

Being spied on is not new to journalism. Some reporters prefer not to use digital technology to contact sources or to meet face to face to avoid the trap.

A large part of journalists' fears stem from the suspicion that unaccountable intelligence and security agencies could be abusing their surveillance and interception powers to pervasively spy on citizens, including journalists, which could expose sources who are key to investigative journalism.

The issue of spying on journalists has been extensively discussed in South Africa and the surveillance powers of state security agencies are even being challenged in courts there.

South African advocacy group Right2Know (R2K) produced a report in 2018 that showed that journalists who have exposed corruption in state intelligence agencies were targeted in surveillance by government and private sector spies.

That report said "the threat of surveillance can have a hugely intimidating and traumatising effect on journalists — when a journalist fears being spied on, it can have the effect of silencing them from doing the courageous work that is expected of them".

While it is unclear to what extent spying on journalists and civil society activists is happening in Namibia, anecdotally there have been several incidents of journalists being tipped-off that they should be extra careful with their communications because intelligence agencies could know a lot more about them than they think.

Lack of oversight of Namibian intelligence services have increased concerns that spy agencies are abusing their powers.

These concerns have been ramped up after reports emerged in 2018 that the government sought to buy devices which can "monitor large numbers of mobile phones over broad areas".

Documents leaked by Wikileaks show that Namibia's national security agents also contacted Italian surveillance malware seller Hacking Team in 2014 to buy a system that would allow tracking of "at least 30 targets at the same time".<sup>11</sup>

In 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) called out the Namibian government over surveillance practices and expressed concern that interception centres operated by state security were operational despite the fact that the section of the law – part 6 of the Communications Act (Act No. 8 of 2009) – that would enable communications surveillance and interception was not yet in force.

The UNHRC said it was concerned about the lack of clarity regarding the reach of legal interception and about the safeguards to ensure respect for the right to privacy in Namibia.

Concerns about the unchecked powers of spy agencies are coupled with the fact that the government planned to enact a law to fight internet crimes by inserting surveillance clauses into it.

According to the Electronic Transactions and Cybercrime Bill, a police or intelligence officer could seek a warrant to snoop on someone's communications after getting permission from a judge, without having to account transparently for such intrusive measures.<sup>12</sup>

There have been calls to reform national security laws which, in essence, threaten investigative journalism and news reporting in general.

The public debate around this issue was sparked by the decision of the Namibia Central Intelligence Service (NCIS) to stop a weekly newspaper, *The Patriot*, from

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10. <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=121406&page=archive-read>

11. <https://www.namibian.com.na/175475/archive-read/The-rise-of-the-Namibian-surveillance-state-Part-3>

12. <https://www.namibian.com.na/164913/archive-read/Govt-reveals-spy-plans>

### The status of investigative journalism on the Namibian anti-corruption landscape

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reporting on government properties allegedly being misused by former members of the spy service.<sup>13</sup>

The High Court rejected the attempt by the spy agency earlier in 2018, with judge Harald Geier reprimanding the NCIS, saying “the NCIS operates in the context of a democratic state founded on the rule of law, which rule subjects all public officials and all those exercising public functions, whether openly or covertly, in the interest of the state, to judicial scrutiny”.

*The Patriot* eventually published the story in June 2018, but the decision by the spy agency to appeal the High Court decision was seen by some as a way to use state funds to financially drain (through legal costs) a newspaper that was doing its work.<sup>14</sup>

Several organisations, such as the Namibia Media Trust (NMT) – owner of *The Namibian* newspaper – have called for the repeal of the 1982 Protection of Information Act and a review of the Namibia Central Intelligence Act of 1997.

NMT said these types of laws have the potential to cover up illegal acts and corruption as they inhibit maximum access to information and subsequently public scrutiny of wrongdoing because of serious criminal penalties attached to the Protection of Information Act, which affects the work of journalists reporting freely in the public interest.<sup>15</sup>

The official opposition Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) president McHenry Venaani has also added his voice to calls for reforms to the powers of the national spy agency saying that the parliamentary standing committee on defence and security should investigate the affairs of the NCIS.<sup>16</sup>

The issue of the unaccountability of the national intelligence agency also came to the fore in August 2018 when newspapers reported on suspected criminal activity involving a fishing company co-owned by the NCIS that was declared a “national security” issue by a court to block the public from knowing the details of the case.

The media, taking a cautious approach, reported on the story, but decided not to name the high-ranking official in the Namibia Central Intelligence Service who was charged with multiple counts of fraud and corruption of around N\$17 million.

The media however reported the name of the suspect as senior manager for crime intelligence Paulus Tshilunga after he was found dead in his car on the outskirts of Windhoek in September 2018.

#### Whistleblower protection

The Namibian public has largely been receptive and supportive of the work of journalists and often open their doors to queries from reporters. There is a believe that more should be done to encourage the public to embrace a culture of whistleblowing.

A key component of investigative journalism is that it requires documents and information that are in the hands of a few people, but affects many more people.

Journalists should also use technology wisely to avoid exposing their sources, by using Signal Messenger for instance, one of the most secure and highly recommended mobile applications for confidential and encrypted communications.

Former US National Security Agency contractor turned whistleblower Edward Snowden endorsed Signal Messenger as a secure application to communicate with sources.

Popular messaging application, WhatsApp, is also secure but journalist should encourage sources to delete messages after they communicate to avoid exposure if the phone or device lands in the wrong hands.

As for whistleblowing in general, Namibia has enacted whistleblower protection legislation in 2017, but this has not been gazetted or implemented yet, as the Namibian government has claimed that there was no money to create the institutional infrastructure to enable state-led whistleblower protection.

#### Motivating Reporters

Investigative journalism requires time, money, and editors who believe in the value of digging deep into complex issues.

Most media organisations cannot afford to focus on investigative journalism due to a

13. <https://thepatriot.com.na/index.php/2018/04/13/patriots-vs-spies/>

14. <https://thepatriot.com.na/index.php/2018/06/23/intelligence-extravaganza/>

15. <https://neweralive.na/posts/nmt-calls-for-review-of-intelligence-act>

16. <https://www.namibian.com.na/178890/archive-read/Venaani-wants-spy-agency-probed>





lack of resources in newsrooms that are already under-staffed.

Unlike in other countries where investigative journalists solely focus on in depth reporting, Namibian journalists are required to do daily and weekly reporting, while at the same time trying to work on long-term stories.

Investigative journalism requires motivated and self-driven journalists who can cope with the pressure of meeting daily deadlines while keeping an eye on investigative stories. In some cases, the pressure has resulted in frustrating journalists who end up being demotivated to conduct investigations and undermines their confidence, according to some journalists spoken to for this report.

Another long standing issue working against more investigative reporting is the journalism salary issue in Namibia.

Some journalists have complained that they are overworked and underpaid, while newsrooms are understaffed and have lost senior journalists to other communications fields.<sup>17</sup>

That reporters, especially investigative journalists, are under appreciated or not well paid is a universal trend.

At the same time, initiatives such as national journalism awards, that used to recognise journalistic excellence, have also faded out in Namibia.

The last national journalism awards were held in 2010 by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa Namibia).

National awards have not only the potential to improve the quality of journalism by increasing competition among journalists, but could also be an immense motivational force to encourage reporters and show them that their work was nationally appreciated. This could also encourage younger reporters to learn from the best recognised journalism.

## CASE STUDY: THE NAMIBIAN INVESTIGATIVE UNIT

*The Namibian* started its investigative unit in 2014 under the leadership of Tangeni Amupadhi.

First, the newspaper formed a partnership with the globally recognised and award-winning amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism in South Africa.

The partnership has allowed *The Namibian* to send reporters to intern at amaBhungane in Johannesburg for three months at a time in South Africa.

AmaBhungane started off as the investigative arm of the weekly *Mail&Guardian* newspaper over a decade ago.

This training provided to *The Namibian* was the first phase of setting up its own unit, and resulted in six journalists being trained at AmaBhungane from 2012 to 2018.

AmaBhungane has an agreement with the unit to help with training, fact checking and collaboration on investigative stories.

To illustrate the success this collaboration has borne, from February to December 2018 *The Namibian's* investigative unit produced over 35 investigative pieces.

Over the years, the unit has also partnered with established global investigative journalism projects and organisations, such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).

With ICIJ the unit worked on projects such as the 'Fatal Attraction' coverage in 2015, which focused on the dirty history of Australian mining companies in Africa.

The unit also partnered with the ICIJ and over 300 other investigative journalists on the award winning Panama Papers in 2016 and Paradise Papers in 2017, which show how the rich create offshore shell companies in tax havens to avoid paying taxes at home, to conceal their riches, and even to engage in crimes such as money laundering.

Following these investigative pieces, Namibian finance minister Calle Schlettwein cited the two collaborations as examples of how Namibia was a victim of tax haven jurisdictions.<sup>18</sup>

The unit also investigated how politically-connected business people were being shielded from the justice system.

One such case was in December 2016 when it was reported that Chinese millionaire

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17. <https://www.namibian.com.na/177107/archive-read/We-are-overworked-underpaid-%E2%80%93-journalists>  
18. <https://www.namibian.com.na/172459/archive-read/Schlettwein-rejects-EU-blacklisting>

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The idea is to train young people to become journalists while at the same time bringing specialist skill sets into the newsroom to improve investigative stories.  
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Jack Huang, president Hage Geingob’s business partner and friend, was under investigation for financial crimes in a N\$3,5 billion import tax scandal.

At the time, Huang’s representatives warned against naming him as one of the people being investigated, claiming that he was falsely linked to the case. The media named him, especially after journalists obtained clear evidence of his involvement in the alleged fraud.

Huang was arrested two months later and is now facing charges in the N\$3,5 billion tax evasion and money laundering case.

Over the years Namibian media companies have lost senior journalists to either corporate communications and public relations or to better-paid jobs in government owned newspapers, state-owned enterprises and the private sector.

While this has been happening, Namibian media organisations have generally struggled to recruit experienced journalists with backgrounds in accounting, auditing or with other specialised skills that could aid investigative teams in gathering and interpreting data.

To this end, *The Namibian’s* investigative unit introduced a three to six month internship programme in 2017 with the aim of bringing in young people with accounting and financial skills and backgrounds to provide a foundation for them as aspiring journalists, who are not necessarily going to be future investigative reporters, but for them to learn the basics of reporting to help them later in their careers.

Interns who prove themselves are often taken up in full-time employment or are given work on a freelance basis.

By the end of 2018, the unit had four such interns, consisting of a first-year journalism student at the Namibia University of Science and Technology and three graduates in accounting and economics.

Two other interns served on the unit for over six months each between 2017 to July 2018.

The idea is to train young people to become journalists while at the same time bringing specialist skill sets into the newsroom to improve investigative stories.

Notably, the unit has seen that quite a number of interns have demonstrated an interest in investigative journalism – *The Namibian* newspaper received over 100 applications for its investigative internship programme since 2017.

Media organisations should hunt for training opportunities to train investigative journalists, like the workshops offered by the Namibia Media Trust in partnership with the amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism (amaBhungane) from South Africa.<sup>19</sup>

*The Namibian* journalists have also benefited from training and support from the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) and the Thomson Reuters Foundation’s Wealth of Nations.

### Mixed impact?

The media has played a key role in uncovering corruption and wrongdoing in government for many years.

Most of the stories that have made an impact are not once-off, but are consistently covered through a series of articles over a long period, which can be months or years.

The fact that reported issues have remained in the public eye has forced political leaders to not disregard what was reported, and to eventually take belated action in some cases.

For instance, president Hage Geingob has taken action after wrongdoing in government was exposed in the media, despite the sometimes bitter relationship between his administration and the independent media.

Reports by the media have led to the cancellation or investigation of questionable state procurement contracts worth over N\$20 billion in the last five years, including the cancellation of the N\$7 billion contract to upgrade the Hosea Kutako International Airport, outside Namibia’s capital Windhoek.

That tender process was stopped in 2015, three weeks after allegations of corruption and bribery were widely reported in the media.<sup>20</sup>

Other projects that have been cancelled since 2015 include the corruption tainted

19. <https://www.nmt.africa/News/25/Workshop-for-journos-to-dig-deeper>

20. <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?page=archive-read&id=145654>



N\$3 billion mass housing project, N\$1 billion tender to construct the new offices of the prime minister and the N\$5 billion Xaris Energy tender for the construction of a power station at Walvis Bay.

The media also consistently reported on the construction of the N\$5,5 billion national fuel storage facility, which was initially costed at N\$3,7 billion in 2014.

This led to a secretive investigation headed by then attorney general Sacky Shanghala, who later advised government to investigate the bank accounts of senior state officials responsible for the cost inflation.<sup>21</sup>

However, to some, this investigation was seen as a smoke-screen to cover up for officials who failed to protect the interests of the state.

The case implicated Shanghala's friend and business partner Leevi Hungamo, who was the permanent secretary of the National Planning Commission at the time, and Shanghala's right-hand man Chris Nghaamwa, the chief legal adviser in the attorney general's office.

Prime Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila and Hungamo blamed each other for the cost escalation.<sup>22</sup>

However, as of December 2018, no official had yet been held responsible in the national fuel storage facility cost escalation scandal.

Media reports over recent years have also shone the light on a controversial proposal to initiate seabed phosphate mining off the Namibian central coast. The proposal was pushed by a partnership between notorious Namibian middleman Knowledge Katti and an Omani billionaire, Mohammed Al Barwani.

In this case, the Namibian government cancelled the environmental clearance for the project in 2016 after media scrutiny and a public outcry.

Similarly, newspapers reported in 2016 how a deal amounting to N\$11 billion, that would allow the Namibian government to import crude oil from Angola and refine it locally through a Russian company, was stalled by a scramble among politically-connected Namibian business people for a slice of the action.

Weekly newspaper *Confidante* first reported this story in March 2016 about how this deal was hijacked by some local business people<sup>23</sup>.

*The Namibian* reported later that year about some of the key details of the proposed deal, including the cost, companies involved and why it was cancelled by government.<sup>24</sup>

Some stories do not have immediate impact, but vindication eventually comes.

This was the case with a 2016 story that showed how Namibian fisheries minister Bernhard Esau ignored advice from his officials and pushed ahead with the allocation of pilchard quotas, a species declared as "depleted" and in danger of extinction in Namibian waters.

Esau rejected the article as an agenda against him, but government announced at the end of 2017 that pilchard fishing was banned until 2020 because of extinction concerns.

Other investigative stories, such as the SME Bank scandal, took years to make an impact.

The media reported in 2013 how the now defunct SME Bank was wasting money and failing to adhere to financial regulations.<sup>25</sup>

Senior government officials at the time rubbished the in depth stories and branded them as xenophobic, because the senior managers of the bank were Zimbabwean nationals.

However, the reporting proved on-point as more details came to light after the bank was being liquidated in 2017 and 2018.

The media produced investigations that showed how N\$200 million was channeled out of the country and how politically-connected Namibians used it as their private fund.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout the long running story public concern around the collapsed bank, which was meant to help uplift small and medium enterprises, focused on the suspicion that none of the people who squandered the bank and depositors' money would be held

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Some stories do not have immediate impact, but vindication eventually comes.  
”

21. <https://www.thevillager.com.na/articles/11118/shanghala-wants-fuel-storage-tender-probed/>

22. <https://www.namibian.com.na/162841/archive-read/Fuel-storage-facility-cost-divides-officials----As-Kuugongelwa-Amadhila-deflects-blame>

23. <http://www.confidante.com.na/2016/03/tenderpreneurs-after-lucrative-angola-namibia-oil-deal/>

24. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-11-25-amabhungane-namibia-geingobs-pals-sank-oil-deal/>

25. <https://www.namibian.com.na/112719/archive-read/SME-Bank-in-dubious-connections>

26. <https://www.namibian.com.na/166665/archive-read/SME-Bank-millions-linked-to-Lebanese-fertiliser-company>

### The status of investigative journalism on the Namibian anti-corruption landscape

“  
The newspaper has extensively covered the president’s business dealings over the years, including his unexplained wealth, his private real estate ambitions and his sidestepping of import taxes to bring luxury furniture from China.  
”

accountable. So far this suspicion has proven to be accurate, as former bank officials and those who enabled the looting of the bank had yet to be brought to book by the end of 2018.

Another example of the impact of investigative journalism and persistent reporting from 2018 was how the media covered the partnership between the Roads Contractor Company and a Chinese company called Jiangsu Nantong Sanjian.<sup>27</sup>

Through the partnership, the Chinese company was to give the RCC a N\$580 million loan in exchange for partnering with the Namibian parastatal on road building projects in which the Chinese company’s stake would have amounted to over N\$2 billion.

It required investigative skills to uncover the terms of that contract and it paid off after the government cancelled that deal a month after the reporting started, saying the agreement was illegal and officials responsible would be held accountable.

Despite this pronouncement, and like the airport and the fuel storage facility deals, no official has yet been held accountable for the cancelled RCC deal.

On the same theme, several Namibian media organisations have investigated President Geingob since he came to power in early 2015. For its investigations of his financial dealings Geingob has referred to *The Namibian* newspaper as an “enemy” whom he smiles at.

The newspaper has extensively covered the president’s business dealings over the years, including his unexplained wealth<sup>28</sup>, his private real estate ambitions<sup>29</sup> and his sidestepping of import taxes to bring luxury furniture<sup>30</sup> from China.

The Chinese furniture story took over a year and a half to write because it required patience to obtain certain documents.

To counter some of the claims made against him, Geingob has repeatedly indicated that he divested himself of some of his private interests or keeps an arms length distance from them in order to avoid conflict of interest, including a claim in 2017 that he “sold” his shares in a company that wants to build a luxury township near his private house on the outskirts of Windhoek.

To his credit, president Geingob has always answered questions sent to him and has encouraged investigative journalists to exhaust publicly available information to help with their stories.

Geingob said in 2017 that the media kept him on his toes and encouraged people to contact the media to expose corruption. And he has admitted that some media stories have led him to take action.

There are more examples of how the government has taken action because of media reports and investigative journalism, including the story of how the Business and Intellectual Property Authority (Bipa) bought a property valued at N\$4,6 million for N\$18 million.<sup>31</sup>

In a rare instance, the government, via the finance ministry, has taken implicated officials to court in 2018 to get back the N\$18 million.

In 2018 the finance ministry was also key in cancelling a N\$117 million property deal in the Angolan capital Luanda after it was found that treasury had not been informed about the details of the transaction.<sup>32</sup>

As this section illustrates, the results of investigative journalism initiatives have had mixed results – while on the one hand some accountability has been demonstrated by government in notable instances, by investigating or cancelling dubious deals and transactions, on the other hand in very few cases have the implicated officials and their associates actually been held personally liable and accountable.

27. <https://thepatriot.com.na/index.php/2018/04/20/rcc-in-bed-with-chinese/>

28. <https://www.namibian.com.na/138679/archive-read/Geingob%E2%80%99s-unexplained-cash>

29. <https://www.namibian.com.na/150972/archive-read/President-in-township-deal>

30. <https://www.namibian.com.na/175539/archive-read/Geingob-tax-free-furniture>

31. <https://www.observer.com.na/index.php/national/item/8853-ministry-buys-bar-for-n-18-million>

32. <https://www.namibian.com.na/178856/archive-read/Tweya-told-to-cancel-Angolan-land-deal>



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering where investigative journalism is in Namibia, the following recommendations are made:

- Namibian media organisations should invest more resources in recruiting and grooming younger journalists;
- Besides improving the quality of graduates, universities and other training institutions should making it easier to train young reporters who in most cases are constrained by a clash between attending classes and being mentored on the job. Students from the University of Namibia for instance attend classes during their internships;
- Media companies should explore investigative journalism training opportunities offered regionally and internationally to train reporters. However, journalists also have a choice to make. The elite opportunities are mostly awarded to independent media organisations which tend to be more interested in investigations, and not the well-paying state-owned media sector, which tends to shy away from critical coverage and where some forms of censorship are commonplace;
- Namibian media houses, especially independent organisations, should find ways to collaborate on investigative stories. Pooling resources could be one way to tackle long-term investigative stories which can also involve civil society organisations and activists who sometimes have a lot of information and can link reporters with community sources;
- Media organisations should look beyond employing journalists because of their writing skills. People with specific skills, such as economics or accounting, should be brought in to strengthen stories;
- Legitimate private companies, non-profit organisations and civil society can pool resources to revive credible national journalism awards to recognise the work of reporters in order to motivate them;
- Media organisations should find creative ways to fund investigative journalism, instead of using a lack of funds as an excuse not to engage in investigative reporting. Several models include support from private companies or non-profit organisations, as long this does not compromise future stories related to the same companies.



## WHAT THE EDITORS SAID

- **FESTUS NAKATANA**

**Namibian Sun editor**

I don't think there is plenty of investigative journalism being carried out in Namibia at the moment. Despite a commitment to report accurately and objectively on issues of the day, Namibian journalists are relatively struggling to make inroads as far as investigative journalism is concerned. Firstly, the authorities are reluctant to implement or enact legislation that will protect the work of all journalists and a law that would provide for a freer media system – an access to information law – which I believe is still far from being tabled in the National Assembly.

Secondly, not many journalists are challenging themselves to be better by consistently holding the powerful in our society to account. Journalists are seemingly afraid of overstepping legal boundaries and this is an issue in many newsrooms.

Thirdly, tertiary institutions in Namibia clearly lack the capacity and expertise to teach investigative reporting to budding journalists.

We must also bear in mind that investigative journalism can only thrive optimally where civil society is proactive and there is a strong opposition that speaks truth to power. Journalists have to be groomed at an early age to do investigative stories and this requires media owners to invest sufficient resources into training for investigative journalism to thrive.

- **TANGENI AMUPADHI**

**The Namibian editor**

I believe the question is not so much about shortcomings of investigative journalism in Namibia, though there are many areas that need improving.

The number one area for improvement is the perception of investigative journalism itself, whose standards have been lowered.

Within the media industry, investigative journalism is either seen as merely doing the basic journalism truly well by covering all the angles, for instance; or exposing corruption of public officials is viewed as being the ambit of investigative journalism to the exclusion of every day life issues and other topics.

Then there are the usual matters outside of our immediate control, mainly people, time and skills, and financial resources.

Popular and sexy topics (workshops and townhall meetings) attract more resources than the painstaking drill that a reporter is required to go through to become a well grounded investigative journalist.

We need people (journalists and advisers or assistants outside the newsroom) with skills to be always available at short notice, which is not so simple. These are people in finance, economics, engineering, law, etc.

How easily can any of our newsrooms afford to give reporters the time and space to look for stories, while knowing some of those may never be pulled off?

How also will impact be seen, gauged and rewarded by readers and others, who can pay, knowing how expensive the work is?

- **TOIVO NDJEBELA**

**New Era managing editor**

There are good attempts to revive investigative journalism in Namibia and with time we'll see the full manifestation of such efforts.

Right now investigative journalism hinges very much on materials often supplied by people who seek certain ends, sometimes of parochial nature.

Investigative journalism in Namibia must reach a level where critical issues are inves-



tigated through reporters' own initiatives.

If, for argument sake, there are fears that Namibia is captured by China, as is often alleged, why can't investigative journalism fully unpack this debate by delving into the ties between political and corporate leaders in the two countries, the favours exchanged, the control, if any, that China wields in Namibia, the nature of bilateral agreements reached and their true meaning to the future of both countries? Why isn't investigative journalism leading us to the doorsteps of people poaching our rhinos and elephants? Rather than relying entirely on speculation.

Why aren't there concerted efforts by investigative journalism to help authorities capture Avihe Ujaha's killer(s)?

In a country that enjoys some of the freest press globally, Namibian journalists have the best platform to put their investigative hats on and compete at the highest level.

True, this would require resources, which the industry often doesn't have, the will and the skills. Local universities, where most of our journalists studied, must also jack up their curriculums so that there are deliberate efforts to inculcate a culture of investigative journalism along with skills.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shinovene Immanuel is arguably the foremost investigative journalist in Namibia and heads up *The Namibian* newspaper's investigative unit. Immanuel has broken a number of key stories implicating high ranking government and political officials, as well as private sector operators, in alleged corrupt dealings and transactions and has worked the Namibian legs of both the Panama Papers and Paradise Papers with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). Immanuel is also an alumnus of the amaBhungane Centre for Investigative Journalism in South Africa and has collaborated on a number of investigations with amaBhungane.

## ABOUT OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (OSISA)

The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) is a growing African institution committed to deepening democracy, protecting human rights and enhancing good governance in the region. OSISA's vision is to promote and sustain the ideals, values, institutions and practices of open society, with the aim of establishing vibrant and tolerant southern African democracies in which people, free from material and other deprivation, understand their rights and responsibilities, and participate actively in all spheres of life. OSISA's mission is to initiate and support programmes working towards open society ideals and to advocate for these in southern Africa. Established in 1997, OSISA is part of a network of autonomous Open Society Foundations established by George Soros, located in Eastern and Central Europe, the former Soviet Union, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the US. OSISA operates in ten southern African countries: Angola, Botswana, DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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The Institute for Public Policy Research was established in 2001 as a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to deliver independent, analytical, critical yet constructive research on social, political and economic issues that affect development in Namibia.

Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)  
House of Democracy  
70-72 Frans Indongo Street PO Box 6566  
Windhoek  
Namibia  
info@ippr.org.na  
Tel: +264 61 240514 www.ippr.org.na  
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Directors: M M C Koep, D Motinga, N Nghipondoka-Robiati, J Ellis, G Hopwood