

Developing guidance for better Freedom of Assembly and Association laws in Benin

As part of the [INSPIRES project](#), Flexible Response Funds (FRFs) are designed to provide USAID missions and partners with easily accessible and flexible support in the form of technical assistance and subgrants to local organizations that can help address urgent and emerging threats to civic space.

In Benin, ICNL collaborated with local partner Groupe d'Action pour le Progrès et la Paix (GAPP) to conduct analysis, develop guidance, and undertake advocacy related to Freedom of Assembly and Association (FOAA) legislation in Benin. This was done through six key activities:

- Co-developing a paper highlighting FOAA trends in Benin;
- Co-developing the digest on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Guidelines on FOAA;
- Undertaking advocacy activities;
- Disseminating analysis of draft legislation;
- Co-developing visual materials comparing draft and current legislation; and,
- Holding a CSO-government dialogue on the state of civic freedoms in Benin.

Support was provided over the course of 25 months from August 2020 to August 2022.

In this summary brief, we share learnings and lessons from key informant interviews and document reviews for these activities.

Outputs and Outcomes

The FRF activities in Benin were designed to produce several key outputs, including analysis and advocacy to civil society and government.

Based on interviews with key informants who were involved in the program, the Benin team and partners achieved several key outputs, as highlighted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. FRF Outputs



Evidence from key informant interviews as well as documentation from partners suggest that the FRF activities contributed to several key outcomes:

Improved guidance available to support better FOAA laws in Benin. While the project activities did not result in new legislation related to freedoms of assembly and association in the country, ICNL and GAPP produced important tools and resources that officials and civil society alike will be able to leverage to improve FOAA laws when the government picks up legal reform again.

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“Our success is that Benin’s largest institution for the protection of Human Rights which is the Commission for Human Rights has sufficient technical tools in terms of reforms. So next time the Government comes up with another idea to reform the law, the Commission has enough technical tools to propose amendments and very relevant observations.”

- Key informant interview, March 2023

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Increased awareness by civil society and human rights defenders of the importance of FOAA in their lives and work. Rather than only focusing dissemination and advocacy efforts on government officials and civil society already working on civic space issues, ICNL and GAPP worked to improve awareness and knowledge among a diverse set of stakeholders, including human rights defenders around the country. Informants highlighted how many human rights defenders and activists did not have critical knowledge about civic space and civic freedoms at the start of these activities, and the resources and outreach provided by the INSPIRES project have ensured that they are better placed to defend civic freedoms now and when new legal reforms come about in the future.

Helping and Hindering Factors. Key informants were asked about factors perceived to help or hinder this work. Understanding these factors can help support the implementation of future activities.

Helping factors include:

- **Local partner strength and network.** Informants noted that activities benefited from the local partner’s expansive network of civil society organizations across the country as well as positive reputation and relationships with Benin government officials and international organizations working on civic space issues.
- **Flexibility of project.** Due to the changing timeline for legal reform in Benin, informants stated that it was important to be able to adapt activities and approaches based on the shifting needs.

Hindering factors include:

- **COVID challenges.** Due to the timing of the pandemic, informants noted that some activities had to change into virtual formats or be cancelled altogether, which may have negatively influenced the results of the FRF.
- **Government changes.** While the partners have historically had champions within government for civic space issues, informants highlighted how changes in the government due to elections and turnover in positions made it more challenging to engage with officials on legal reform.

For more information about this FRF, please contact: info@inspiresconsortium.org.