






Flexible and Rapid Response Funding: An analysis of helping and hindering factors

Introduction

The USAID-funded Illuminating New Solutions and Programmatic Innovations for Resilient Spaces (INSPIRES) program, led by Internews, has undertaken work to increase the understanding of the drivers of closing civic and political space and to strategically respond to the growing trend of closing civic and political space. Since launching in October 2018, the INSPIRES consortium (Internews, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), DevLab at the University of Pennsylvania, PartnersGlobal, and Results for Development (R4D)) has undertaken work to contribute to three complementary objectives:

1. Develop Innovative Analysis to Deepen Understanding of Civic Space Drivers and Inform Programmatic Priorities for Civil Society
2. Test Resiliency+ Framework Interventions
3. Empower Local Partners to Address Civic Space Threats Effectively (Flexible Response Funds)

Figure 1. FRF Fast Facts

	FRF Countries	51
	Number of FRF activities	76
	Estimated people reached through FRFs	8,288 ¹
	Civic Space Dimensions	Legal Enabling Environment; Media and Information; Access to Resources; and Strengthening Civic Ties
	Consortium Partners leading FRFs	Internews, ICNL, PartnersGlobal, DevLab

¹ This number includes only people directly supported through sub-grants, trainings, technical support and fellowships.

As the third objective of INSPIRES, the Flexible Response Funds (FRFs) provide support on emerging and urgent needs and opportunities for civic space protection and enhancement. The FRFs provide USAID missions and partners with easily accessible and flexible support in the form of technical assistance and subgrants to local organizations. It is intended to be both proactive, as warning signs of closing space begin to emerge; and reactive, as civic space begins to shift. The effort is built around ICNL's longstanding and successful Legal Enabling Environment Program (LEEP) but has been expanded under INSPIRES to encompass a broader array of common civil society needs in challenging environments, including capacities around information, finances, connectivity, and resilience.

Since 2018, INSPIRES has led more than 75 FRF activities in 51 countries. The majority of FRF interventions have been between \$10,000 to \$70,000 over a period of up to 18 months, but there is flexibility to adjust those parameters based on identified need.

Helping and Hindering Factors – a Framework

For every FRF activity completed before April 2023, the INSPIRES consortium undertook qualitative data collection and analysis to answer two learning questions regarding these activities:

- What preventative and responsive strategies were associated with positive civic space outcomes in the countries in which INSPIRES works?
- What factors helped to improve the effectiveness of FRF activities – and what factors hindered their effectiveness?

In addition to conducting process evaluations of individual FRFs, the consortium leveraged the quantity and scope of FRFs undertaken during the five years of INSPIRES programming to conduct crosscutting analysis of helping and hindering factors that emerged across multiple countries, implementing partners, and target civic space issue. The analysis of factors resulted in a four- component framework of factors (Figure 2) that may support or inhibit flexible and rapid response programming. The four components of the factor framework are:

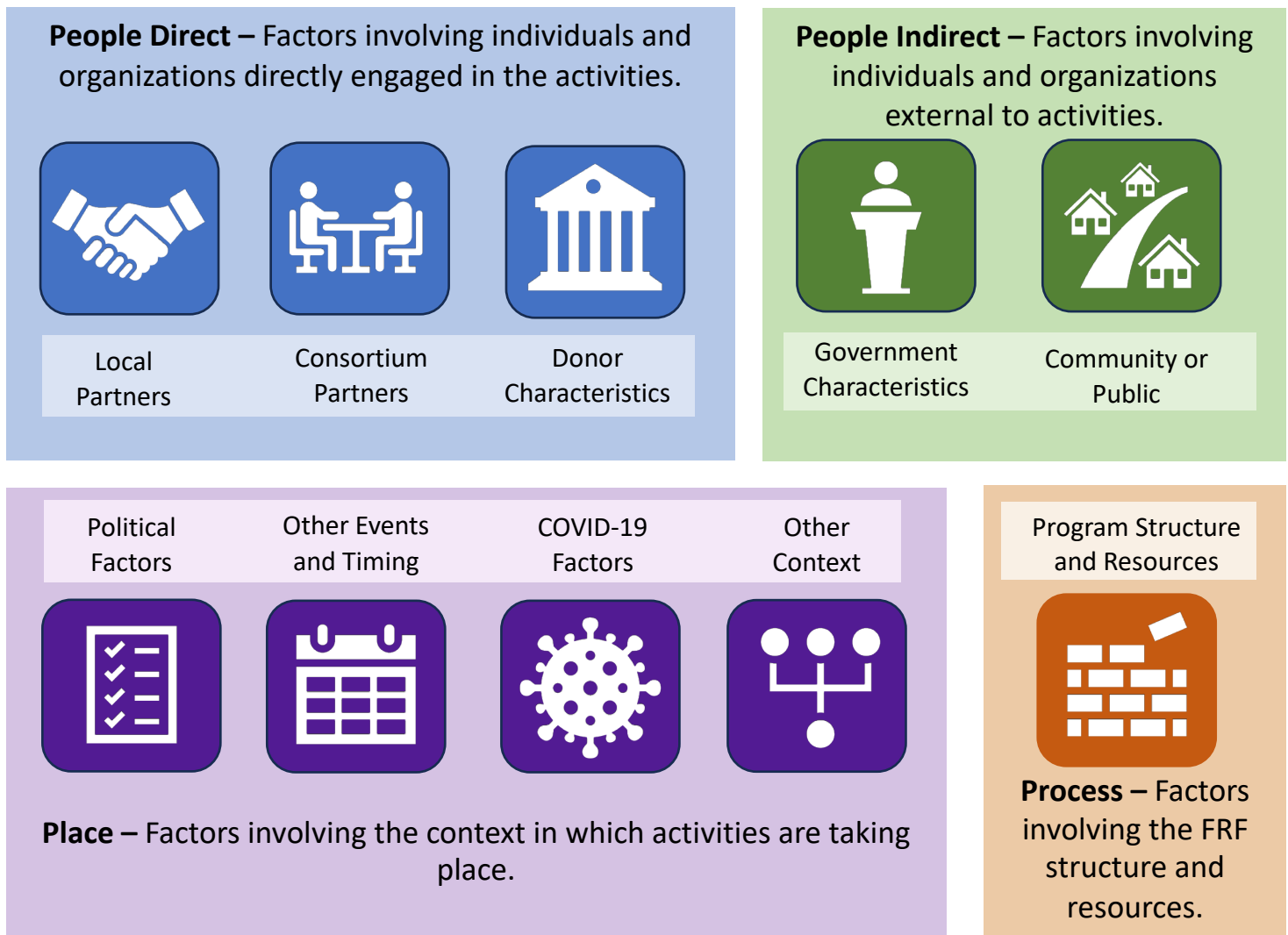
- **People (direct)** - these factors refer to characteristics and behaviors of individuals or organizations directly involved in the design, implementation, and funding of FRFs. Specific factors in this component include: Consortium Partners, Local Partners, and Donors.
- **People (indirect)** - these factors refer to characteristics and behaviors of individuals or organizations not directly involved in the design, implementation, and funding of FRFs but who may be affected by the programming (both positively and negatively). Specific factors in this component include: Government and Public/Community.
- **Place** - these factors refer to aspects of the external environment (enabling or restrictive) that affect the design, implementation, and/or success of FRF activities in achieving their intended results. Specific factors in this component include: Political, Other Events and Timing, COVID-19, and Other Context.
- **Process** - these factors refer to the structure, resources, and policies of FRF programming itself that affect the design, implementation, and/or success of FRF activities in achieving their intended results. Factors in this category have been combined into a single factor: Program Structure and Resources.

Methods

The analysis presented in this brief explores the shared helping and hindering factors across 46 diverse Flexible Response Funds (FRFs). A small research team at Results for Development (R4D) led 104 structured interviews with participants both virtually and in-person. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating structured interviews, monitoring surveys, documentation review, and thematic analysis to gain comprehensive insights into the research topic. This diverse methodological approach enabled a multi-dimensional examination of the participants' perspectives and the broader context of the study.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with a diverse group of participants from both consortium partners, local partners of INSPIRES, and other stakeholders who were involved in the FRFs. The structured format allowed for a systematic comparison of responses and facilitated quantitative analysis, offering valuable insights into the research objectives. While KIIs were the main data source for the factor analysis, quantitative and qualitative data from quarterly monitoring surveys and documentation review (e.g., use of materials from the FRFs and local partners) were also utilized. These additional data sources provided insight into the broader factor themes.

Figure 2. Flexible and Rapid Response Programming Factors Framework



Next, a thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns in the participants' narratives. The researchers employed open coding, enabling an exploratory and inductive approach to identify emergent factors. Subsequently, more specific themes were examined within each factor. This qualitative approach delved deeper into the participants' experiences and allowed for comparison between different contexts, ultimately offering a nuanced understanding beyond the predefined interview questions.

Limitations

The results shared in this brief are based on subjective data and thus reflect the perceptions and experiences of FRF stakeholders rather than objective data that can prove attribution between factors and FRF outcomes. However, the large degree of independent verification for many factors provides strong evidence that these factors played a key role in helping or hurting FRFs in many contexts.

A further limitation is in the distinction of different types of factors. While we developed the Factor Framework (Figure 1) to distinguish between the variables that may influence the effectiveness of FRFs, we also acknowledge that there are many findings that could be reported in multiple factor categories; for example, specific findings in Government Characteristics and Political Factors have some overlap, and the distinction between government actors affecting the FRF activities and broader political factors and trends is not fully clear.

Structure of the Brief

The rest of this brief is organized around the ten specific factors described in Figure 2, starting with People (direct) (Consortium Partners, Local Partners, and Donors) and followed by People (indirect) (Government, Community/Public), Place (Political Factors, Other Events and Timing, COVID-19, Other Context), and Process (Program Structure and Resources). Each section provides an overview of the data and findings for the respective factor, results on sub-factor frequency, and recommendations and implications for future flexible and rapid response programming.

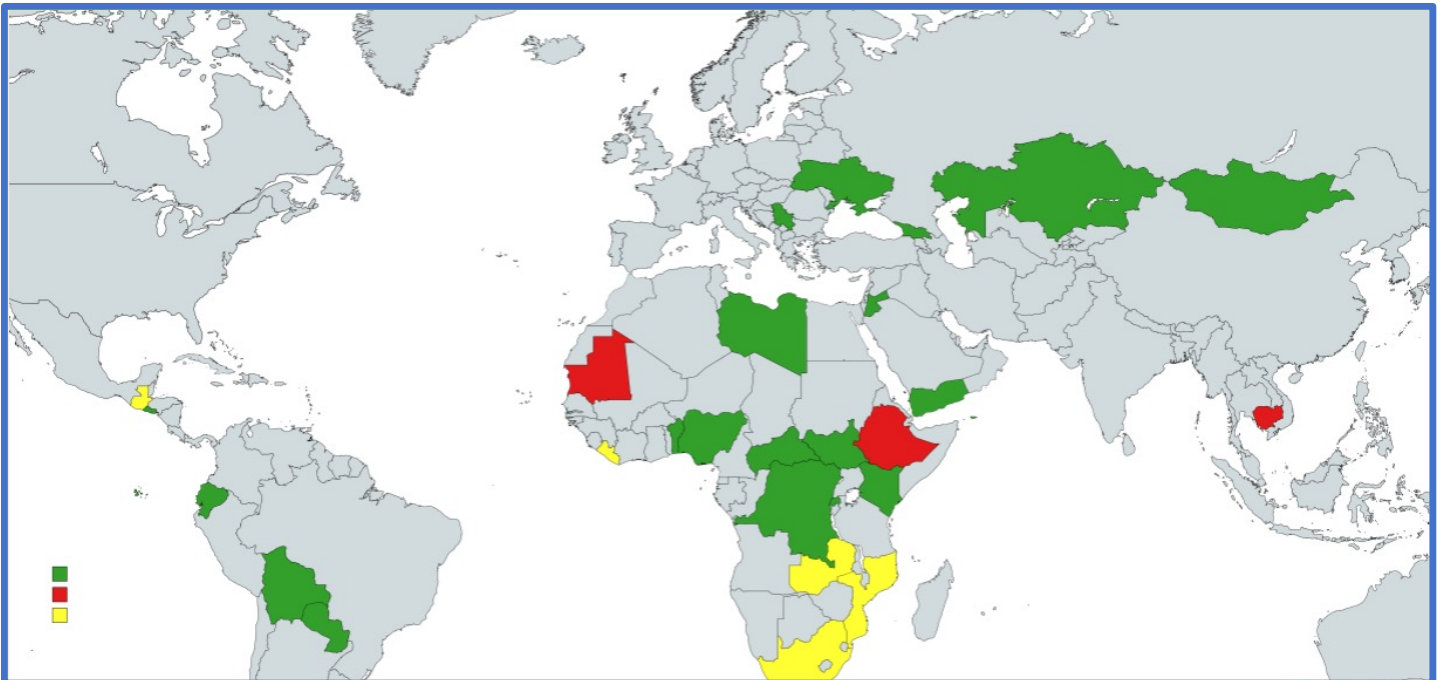


Consortium Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Consortium Partner Characteristics are defined as the skills, resources, actions, behaviors, and other elements of the relevant INSPIRES project consortium partner leading an FRF activity. Consortium partner organizations involved in leading FRF activities include Internews, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), PartnersGlobal, and DevLab at the University of Pennsylvania. Consortium partners play a significant role in FRF activities, even when significant parts of the FRF are implemented by local partner organizations. These factors are included in the People category of the Factor Framework.

With the important role of consortium partners in designing, implementing, and monitoring FRF activities, it is not surprising that Consortium Partner Characteristics were one of the most frequently cited factors in key informant interviews. Among interviewees and in particular local partner informants, Consortium Partner Characteristics were overwhelmingly cited as helping factors in the implementation of FRF activities. Characteristics including management skills, technical skills, and collaborative behavior were independently highlighted as important for the success of FRFs across all regions in which INSPIRES operated. The small set of hindering factors, in many cases reported by consortium partner representatives themselves, present clear opportunities to build on the strength of INGO partners in areas such as expanding local networks and providing adequate resourcing for local consortium staff support.

Figure 1. Map of FRFs with Helping and Hindering Factor



■ = Country reported Helping Factors only, ■ = Country reported Hindering Factors only,
■ = Country reported both Helping and Hindering Factors.



Consortium Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor

12

Project management and coordination (12). Informants noted that consortium partners were efficient, organized, flexible, and responsive.

12

Technical support (12). Translation services and trainings on media literacy, disinformation, COVID-19, and financial planning supported various FRF activities.

9

Key expertise (9). Informants noted that consortium partners had strong knowledge of the issues and provided feedback on methodology.

8

Fostering relationships and co-creation (8). Informants observed a positive partnership between consortium and local partners. Moreover, connections were made within their wider network.

7

Clear and open communication (7). Feedback provided quickly and efficiently supported a subset of FRF activities.

5

Reputation and trust (5). Good reputations within communities, due to previous projects and maintained relationships, supported a subset of FRF activities.

4

Knowledge and recognition of local context (4). Informants noted that consortium partners were familiar with local contexts and in some cases communicated in local languages.

Clearly another successful point was the fluency in original languages... which allowed for deeper connection with remote communities. [LANGUAGE] speaking communities are often left out, and this project did not reproduce that mistake.

The good attitude of [CONSORTIUM PARTNER] as a donor was a contributing factor to our success. There was no micromanagement; they gave us freedom for action and the space to develop and work within our own tactics. We also had a sense that we had a safety net; if something didn't work out, we had support from them. They were flexible with changing situations and did not create huge problems if there were changes in our workplan.



Consortium Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Hindering Factor



Need for more diverse or expansive network (5). In a subset of FRF countries, informants noted that the consortium partner's limited networks of in-country partners prevented FRF activities from achieving their potential outcomes.



Internal staffing and bandwidth limitations (4). Consortium partner staff turnover and competing priorities, especially within country or regional offices, prevented some FRF activities from being adequately resourced.



Limited knowledge and skills related to local context (2). In a small set of cases, consortium partners worked in countries in which they did not have extensive experience, and they cited that this lack of local knowledge limited their activities.



Limited flexibility from consortium partner (2). While program flexibility was highlighted as a significant helping factor, a small number of informants noted that their consortium partner contacts prevented them from making changes to their workplans and activities that they believe would have improved the reach of the work.

When Consortium Partner networks become a hindrance. Not all FRFs were implemented in countries in which the lead consortium partner had extensive experience or an expansive network; however, this was only highlighted as a hindering factor in a sub-set of these countries. For activities that explicitly required local partners for implementation (such as trainings or reporting), informants did not cite limited networks as a factor that hurt the impact of the FRF activities. Instead, this hindering factor was highlighted in cases in which local partners were not critical to the main FRF work plan (for activities such as research and analysis) but ultimately would have been able to support activities such as dissemination and advocacy.

"We don't really have partners in [COUNTRY], no organizations that we have experience with or at the ready for us to engage. So, it would've taken quite a lot for us to convene local civil society and get inputs from them. Our work could have been richer and more tailored to the country context had we had that."





Consortium Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

Based on the analysis of helping and hindering factors, we recommend the following for program implementers (consortium and local partners):

- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers should ensure that they budget adequate time for local and regional staff** to provide support to the FRF activities. Even when the majority of work is led by local partners, the consortium partner needs to be resourced properly to address issues related to sub-granting, project management, and relationship management.
- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers should leverage other consortium partners' expertise and networks when working in new countries and contexts**. Even when a partner leading an FRF does not have a strong in-country network, other members of the consortium may have local partners who can support engagement and activities in the country.
- ☐ During implementation, **implementers should identify the technical skills as well as skill gaps of all partners working on the FRF**, including consortium partners and local partners. FRF activities should include knowledge sharing and feedback loops between partners to ensure that all partners can learn from each other's technical expertise.
- ☐ During implementation, **implementers should build and maintain open communication channels and moments to pause, reflect and adapt with all partners**. These actions were frequently cited as supporting FRFs in more successfully achieving their stated goals.
- ☐ Outside of FRF activities, **implementers should find opportunities to expand their networks of local partners and local knowledge** in countries or regions where they anticipate working in the future. While building these skills and relationships can be initiated at the start of a FRF activity, INSPIRES stakeholders consistently cited that activities worked more effectively when these skills and networks were already in place before the start of the FRF.



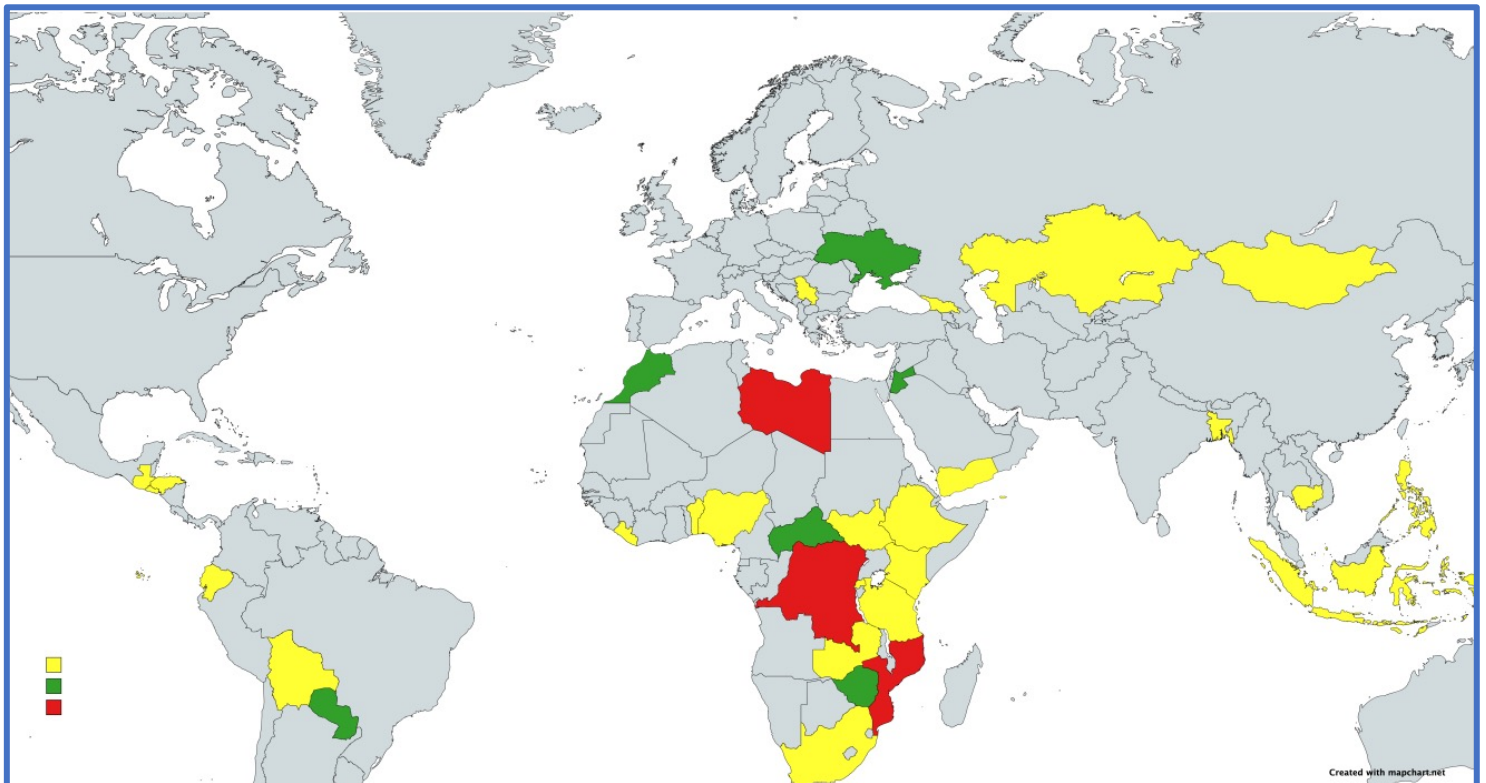
Local Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Local Partner Characteristics are defined as the skills, resources, actions, behaviors, and other attributes of the relevant INSPIRES project local partner leading an FRF activity. These partners include regional NGOs, CSOs, and media organizations working on issues of or facing challenges in enabling and protecting civic space. These factors are included in the People category of the Factor Framework.

In addition to Consortium Partner Characteristics, Local Partner Characteristics were one of the most frequently cited factors in key informant interviews. These characteristics were predominantly referred to as helping factors, with cooperative behavior, reputation, and expertise being emphasized as crucial contributors to the success of FRFs. Conversely, low capacity, non-responsiveness, and limited engagement with stakeholders were identified as primary deterrents to activities. In most contexts, informants noted that local partner characteristics were both helping and hindering, as indicated in the map below. The coexistence of challenges such as limited capacity, alongside strengths like wide network and reach, underscores the intricate and multifaceted nature of local partner contributions in diverse project contexts.

Note that, for the purposes of presenting results, we have separated the general local partner characteristics and media partner characteristics results.

Figure 1. Map of FRFs with Helping and Hindering Factor



■ = Country reported Helping Factors only, ■ = Country reported Hindering Factors only,
■ = Country reported both Helping and Hindering Factors.



Local Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

One Crucial Helping Factor

The most frequently cited contributing factor in 21 FRFs (46%) was the existence of **local partner networks, including relationships with experts, media, and governments**. Informants highlighted that these partnerships, **rooted deeply in the community** and **supported by strong alliances**, leveraged existing work and ultimately enhanced the outreach and impact of the initiatives.

Number of FRFs Reporting the Factor	Factor	Percentage of FRFs Reporting the Factor
1	1. Lack of training	100%
2	2. Lack of resources	100%
3	3. Lack of communication	100%
4	4. Lack of information	100%
5	5. Lack of motivation	100%
6	6. Lack of knowledge	100%
7	7. Lack of experience	100%
8	8. Lack of time	100%
9	9. Lack of support	100%
10	10. Lack of coordination	100%
11	11. Lack of planning	100%
12	12. Lack of organization	100%
13	13. Lack of leadership	100%
14	14. Lack of teamwork	100%
15	15. Lack of accountability	100%
16	16. Lack of responsibility	100%
17	17. Lack of commitment	100%
18	18. Lack of initiative	100%
19	19. Lack of creativity	100%
20	20. Lack of innovation	100%
21	21. Lack of problem-solving	100%
22	22. Lack of decision-making	100%
23	23. Lack of risk-taking	100%
24	24. Lack of flexibility	100%
25	25. Lack of adaptability	100%
26	26. Lack of resilience	100%
27	27. Lack of perseverance	100%
28	28. Lack of determination	100%
29	29. Lack of focus	100%
30	30. Lack of concentration	100%
31	31. Lack of attention	100%
32	32. Lack of observation	100%
33	33. Lack of listening	100%
34	34. Lack of understanding	100%
35	35. Lack of empathy	100%
36	36. Lack of compassion	100%
37	37. Lack of kindness	100%
38	38. Lack of generosity	100%
39	39. Lack of honesty	100%
40	40. Lack of integrity	100%
41	41. Lack of trustworthiness	100%
42	42. Lack of reliability	100%
43	43. Lack of consistency	100%
44	44. Lack of predictability	100%
45	45. Lack of stability	100%
46	46. Lack of security	100%
47	47. Lack of safety	100%
48	48. Lack of health	100%
49	49. Lack of well-being	100%
50	50. Lack of happiness	100%
51	51. Lack of joy	100%
52	52. Lack of pleasure	100%
53	53. Lack of satisfaction	100%
54	54. Lack of fulfillment	100%
55	55. Lack of meaning	100%
56	56. Lack of purpose	100%
57	57. Lack of direction	100%
58	58. Lack of guidance	100%
59	59. Lack of support	100%
60	60. Lack of help	100%
61	61. Lack of assistance	100%
62	62. Lack of aid	100%
63	63. Lack of relief	100%
64	64. Lack of comfort	100%
65	65. Lack of ease	100%
66	66. Lack of convenience	100%
67	67. Lack of simplicity	100%
68	68. Lack of clarity	100%
69	69. Lack of transparency	100%
70	70. Lack of openness	100%
71	71. Lack of honesty	100%
72	72. Lack of truthfulness	100%
73	73. Lack of sincerity	100%
74	74. Lack of genuineness	100%
75	75. Lack of authenticity	100%
76	76. Lack of originality	100%
77	77. Lack of uniqueness	100%
78	78. Lack of individuality	100%
79	79. Lack of personality	100%
80	80. Lack of character	100%
81	81. Lack of identity	100%
82	82. Lack of self	100%
83	83. Lack of ego	100%
84	84. Lack of pride	100%
85	85. Lack of vanity	100%
86	86. Lack of arrogance	100%
87	87. Lack of superiority	100%
88	88. Lack of inferiority	100%
89	89. Lack of equality	100%
90	90. Lack of fairness	100%
91	91. Lack of justice	100%
92	92. Lack of equity	100%
93	93. Lack of balance	100%
94	94. Lack of harmony	100%
95	95. Lack of peace	100%
96	96. Lack of calm	100%
97	97. Lack of serenity	100%
98	98. Lack of tranquility	100%
99	99. Lack of stillness	100%
100	100. Lack of silence	100%

Helping Factor



Reputation, influence, and trust (13). Trusted and recognized partners in the community had more legitimacy and visibility according to informants. In some cases, influential community leaders and celebrity trainers contributed to the success of FRF activities.



Key Expertise (12). Essential expertise by local partners in areas such as legal support, media training, knowledge of local context, and monitoring and evaluation, supported various FRF activities.



Enthusiasm and determination (10). Informants noted that local partners were dedicated, motivated, and committed to meaningful impact.



Cooperation across partners (8). Effective coordination among an extensive network of partners and strategic collaborations with key alliances provided support for several FRF activities.

Additional helping factors. In a small subset of FRFs, informants also highlighted the contribution of practical and flexible program design, ownership, and support to participants from local partners.

We engaged a network of experts with whom [CONSORTIUM PARTNER] was working with. These were the speakers, presenters, and sharers of experience. With one exception, they were all volunteers who were genuinely interested in the topic. So, it was 2 ways – not just teacher vs student but also a collaborative exchange, discussion, and more than a lecture... We had a network of lawyers and experts who we engaged with as volunteers who shared expertise with participants but also benefitted from the event.



Local Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor



High capacity (6). Informants noted that human resources and capabilities of local partners enhanced implementation and collaboration among organizations.



Effective leadership (6). Leaders of local partner organizations were recognized for their aptitude, passion, accessibility, and experience, displaying valuable skills in implementing activities.



Communication and dissemination (4). Informants also noted that effective communication prevented the spread of misinformation and distributed tools for a subset of FRF activities.



Knowledge of local context (4). The use of local languages and a deep understanding of local cultures and contexts made a valuable contribution for a subset of FRF activities.

Helping or Hindering?

While high capacity was noted as a positive influence in 6 FRFs, low capacity was the most common hindering factor among local partners, cited in 13 FRFs. Informants expressed satisfaction with human resources, especially for journalists; however, limited capacity in financial reporting, inadequate digital technology resources, and a general lack of staff time posed obstacles to the projects.



Coordination with people was essential. It is a job that [ORGANIZATION] has been doing for more than 30 years and the network has been working for 15 years. So, this positioning in the territory is fundamental. Many of the decisions and the possibility of working in these territories are based on trust.

The most important factor was the will from local partners. For example, you know this synergy, it is not a [CONSORTIUM PARTNER] proposal, they discussed and wanted to work together, so we found a way to work together and we decided to make this.





Local Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Hindering Factor

13

Low capacity and bandwidth (13). The most frequently cited hindering factor related to local partners was the issue of low capacity or bandwidth. Informants noted challenges including limited capacity for financial reporting, digital technology needs, and broadly lacking staff time to lead and support FRF activities in some cases.

8

Slow or non-responsiveness of local partners (8). In some cases, consortium partners experienced challenges in getting inputs from partners, with partners being slow to respond to requests or not communicating with consortium partners for significant periods of time.

8

Challenges faced by local partners to bring critical stakeholders on board (8). Informants noted that some local partners struggled to gain support and engagement from donors, international partners, the media, or government actors due to myriad factors.

5

Disagreements between local partner and consortium partner (5). In a small number of cases, there were different opinions between consortium partners and local partners which created tensions and delays. These included different perspectives on handling COVID-19 protocols and different views of priority work plan activities.

2

Local partner staff turnover (2). Changes in the key people working on the FRF for local partners caused challenges in a small number of FRFs.

2

Local partners dropping out (2). Finally, in two cases, local partners dropped out of FRF activities early in the timeline, creating delays while consortium partners identified new local partners for the activities.

We in the organization have had to reduce staff due to the pandemic. It means disconnecting from friends, from talents, and others must assume other responsibilities, generating an overload of work. And that caused us delays in the reports to [consortium partner].

Another challenge was manpower. We were so constrained in the sense that the project came in at a time when we had downscaled staff. People had to do extra work to get translators in place, it was not very easy.



Media Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Local Media Partner Factors – in addition to the general local partner helping factors, informants noted some specific factors related to journalists and media partners of the program.

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor

● ● ● ●

Visibility and voice (4). Informants described the visibility and legitimacy of media partners as key contributing factors. The strong presence and voice of media organizations and joint coalitions influenced the reach and impact of a subset of FRF activities.

● ●

Collaboration across media sector (2). A few informants emphasized the importance of cooperation across the media sector, including print, radio, and science journalism. In one particular case, close collaboration between mainstream and independent media was noted as a helping factor.

● ●

Expert support and mentorship (2). Local media experts, including trained health reporters, supported various FRF activities. Moreover, journalism training provided by those experts was perceived as valuable and beneficial in a subset of FRF contexts.

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Hindering Factor

● ● ●

Challenges finding sources due to stigma (3). For COVID-related FRFs specifically, informants noted that finding sources willing to speak about the virus created significant obstacles for media partners.

● ● ●

Journalists not seeing value in training (3). Informants noted that some more senior journalists did not believe that they needed additional training, even on newer topics such as reporting on COVID-19 or new tools for rumor tracking.

● ●

Bias from reporters in working with diverse trainers (2). Relatedly, journalists also expressed resistance to being trained by female and LGBTQ+ journalists in some cases.

● ●

Lack of coordination across the media sector (2). For FRFs undertaking media advocacy activities, local partners representing the medias sector faced some challenges in getting buy-in and participation from other media outlets that saw them as competitors.



Local and Media Partner Characteristics: Factor Brief

Helping or hindering? The level of coordination or the lack thereof across the media sector proved to be a mixed factor, both helping and hindering projects. In two FRFs focused on media advocacy activities, competition hindered participation and buy-in. However, in two other contexts, informants highlighted positive examples of cooperation between different organizations, including established and independent media. Improving partnerships can ultimately foster collaboration and discourage competition, enhancing the effectiveness and reach of advocacy activities through a more unified and impactful media presence.

On the part of the pandemic mentors, he was on hand for follow-up mentoring and going with journalists in the field so that they had a guiding hand. And he has contacts; he has been doing this work since the pandemic began, working with government and UN agencies, so it was not as hard as it would have been if he had not been there.

We'd like other media channels to take up our work more, but they see us as competition and haven't been able to do that synergy and work together. The disinformation has tried to disparage the media, and we have tried to talk to them to let them know what is happening, but they weren't interested.

Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

Several recommendations related to local partners have already been included in the previous section on Consortium Partners. Based on the analysis of helping and hindering factors, we recommend the following additional actions for program implementers and donors:

- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers should engage in open and direct discussions with potential partners regarding the anticipated timeline, capacity, and resources needs and constraints** of the activity to ensure that local partners have full awareness of what the activity will include and can make well-informed decisions about participating.
- ☐ During implementation, **implementers and donors should incorporate capacity building of local partners directly into programming** to ensure that partners are building expertise and skills beyond direct project activities.
- ☐ Outside of FRF activities, **implementers and donors should invest in both enhancing local partner networks within their countries and across their region and promoting effective partner leadership.** Both of these local partner characteristics can play a significant role in either improving the reach and effectiveness of flexible programming or (when lacking) limiting the impact of the work. While it is not always possible to build this into FRF programming itself, implementers and donors could support these local partner capacity goals outside of flexible response programming.



Donor Characteristics: Factor Brief

Donors play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of projects. While the donor for INSPIRES project FRFs was USAID, the identified factors and the subsequent recommendations could be more widely applicable to donors in general. Donor characteristics are included in the People category of the Factors Framework.

The majority of informants who highlighted donor-related factors described positive donor support and engagement as well as knowledge of the local context. In the case of hindering donor factors, a small number of informants noted resistance or lack of involvement. Seeking ways to engage donors with partners can help advance project goals, but it is vital to maintain a collaborative approach that respects the expertise and autonomy of local organizations.

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor



Donor support and engagement (5). While informants primarily discussed local and consortium partners, a few cited the support provided by USAID. The donor's willingness and commitment to the project, as well as their dissemination of one organization's analysis, had a positive impact on the success of FRF activities. The presence of new leadership at USAID and their eagerness to learn were also cited as contributing factors.



Recognition of local context (2). An understanding of local knowledge and language proficiency was acknowledged as a supporting factor across numerous FRF countries. In a few instances, informants highlighted the value of USAID's advocacy for indigenous rights and the encouragement of local language usage.

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Hindering Factor



Lack of engagement or resistance by donor (2). In a limited number of cases, informants noted that there were challenges in getting the donor to engage on issues related to the FRF. In one case, this was noted as an issue of internal bureaucracy, while the other case was seen as active resistance by the donor in engaging on the civic space issue on which the FRF focused.



Challenges with donor branding (2). In addition, some partners expressed a need to distance FRF activities from the donor brand because of the perception that the target audiences for their work would be less willing to engage if the work was associated with the donor. Informants noted that they were able to mitigate this challenge in consultation with the consortium partners and donor.



Donor Characteristics: Factor Brief

Helping or hindering? In a few instances (2), informants cited challenges in engaging the donor on project-related issues, particularly around internal bureaucracy; however, in a larger number of cases (5), informants praised the donor's motivation and commitment to the project. This seemingly contradictory finding may be due to differences in the country missions with which consortium and local partners engaged or different needs and expectations from partners about the involvement of donors in the FRF activities.

Great support and engagement from USAID mission on the ground. They are very involved and have great advice. Civil society does not always agree with their advice, which is fine, but they know the people and can be connectors. They put us in touch with some of the government offices as well and tried to act as a go-between for governmental offices and CSOs.



Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

Based on the analysis of helping and hindering factors, we recommend the following additional actions for program implementers and donors:

- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers and donors should engage in an open discussion about the expected roles and engagement level of the donor in the programming.** While significant donor engagement may be a benefit in some cases, it may be a roadblock in other contexts and on other issues. Setting the expectations at the start of a project will help to alleviate tensions during implementation.
- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers and donors should consult with local partners about the right fit regarding donor branding for the specific context and issue.** As with broader donor engagement, donor branding on FRF products can lead to either positive outcomes or negative consequences in different circumstances, and engaging with the local partners on potential benefits and pitfalls before deciding on the program-specific approach to citing the donor will improve the potential for the program to achieve its intended results.
- ☐ During implementation, **implementers and donors should continue open and consistent communication around activities and, where appropriate, find ways for the donor to play a supportive role beyond funding.** This could include activities such as dissemination of FRF products.

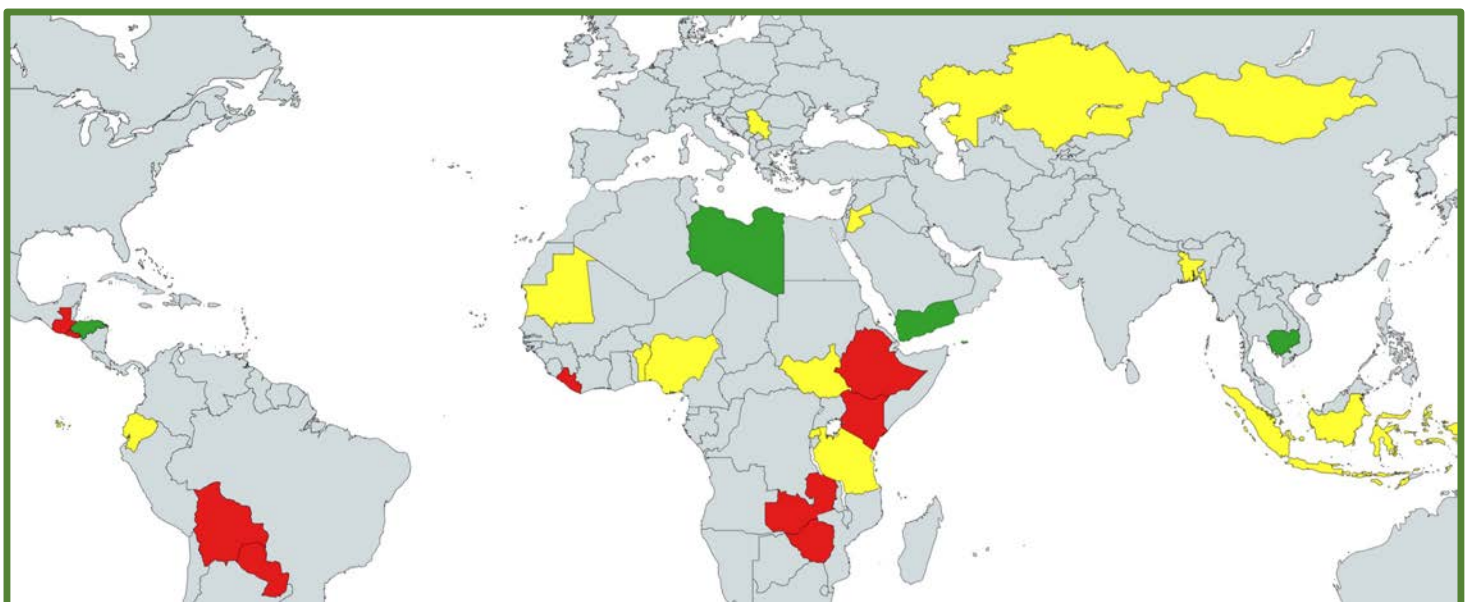


Government Characteristics: Factor Brief

Government Characteristics are defined as factors related to the skills, capacity, behaviors, and actions of domestic government actors in the places in which FRF activities took place. Government actors include national, subnational, and local officials, as well as both political figures and civil servants. Government actors are distinct from local partners because they do not receive funding support as part of FRF activities; however, it should be noted that the government actors cited by informants represented the full spectrum from champions of the work that consortium and local partners conducted to officials that stood in direct and active opposition to FRF activities. While government characteristics are included in the category of People in the Factor framework, these factors refer to individuals and groups that are not directly involved in FRF activities. These factors are distinct from Political factors because they refer to government actors themselves as opposed to broader institutional or political changes, context, or decisions.

Unlike many factor categories that skew toward helping factors, informants cited government characteristics as hindering roughly as frequently as they were cited as helping factors. Several partners experienced collaboration and enthusiasm on the part of government counterparts, providing windows of opportunity for FRF activities to succeed in achieving their intended results. For FRFs that experience government as a hindering factor, challenges included passive resistance (such as a lack of response to requests for information) and active resistance to activities. It is also worth noting, as demonstrated in the figure below, that many FRF informants cited both helping and hindering government characteristics in the same country, potentially demonstrating a strategy of seeking out government champions when experiencing pushback from other government stakeholders.

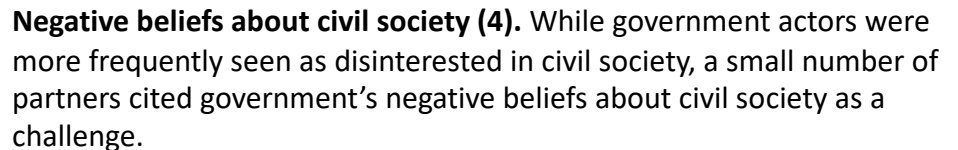
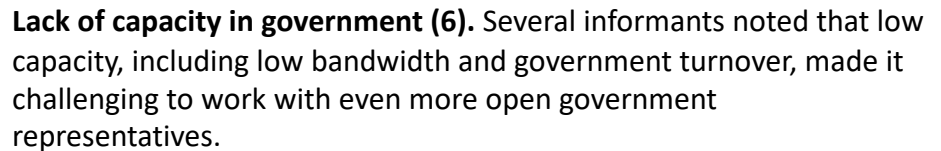
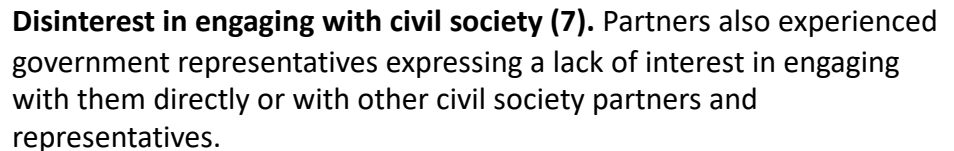
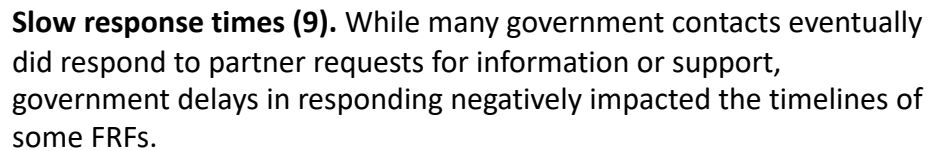
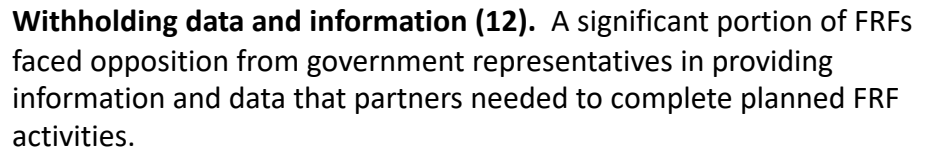
Figure 1. Map of FRFs with Helping and Hindering Factor



■ = Country reported Helping Factors only,
 ■ = Country reported Hindering Factors only,
 ■ = Country reported both Helping and Hindering Factors.



Hindering Factor



A challenge was what I told you about the lack of willingness to speak from government officials. There were some offices from which I had no answers; others took maybe 2 weeks or 2 months to get documents I requested.



Government Characteristics: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor



Collaboration and engagement (14). Many informants noted a positive relationship and engagement with their government. Despite the challenges, fostering cooperation supported the ease and operation of FRF activities.



Willingness and enthusiasm (11). In addition to collaboration, informants spoke about the willingness and interest they observed from the state. In some cases, government partners were receptive, accessible, and eager to exchange ideas.



Direct and personal communication (5). Informants noted that direct and sometimes informal communication supported the success of FRF activities. In some cases, partners had personal connections to state officials or reached out using a variety of pathways.



A new administration (5). In a few contexts, shifts in government and new leadership supported a more participatory process.

We are trying to build a coalition and relationship with the government and parliament in a friendly and good way so whenever we try to criticize them, it is considered to come from a good place.



Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

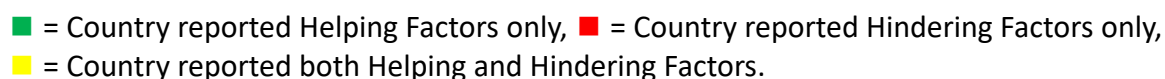
Based on the analysis of helping and hindering factors, we recommend the following for program implementers (consortium and local partners):

- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers and donors should build buffer time into the work plan to account for slow responsiveness from government officials** if government input is required as part of the activities. Even when government actors do not actively oppose FRF activities, INSPIRES activities suggest that slow responses can result in significant activity delays.
- ☐ During implementation, **implementers should dedicate resources to identifying government champions**. This includes leveraging the will and engagement of government stakeholders who show signs of supporting the goals of the FRF and seeking out new government stakeholders when other officials show signs of resistance to FRF activities.



In comparison with other Factor categories, Community and Public Characteristics were less frequently cited as helping or hindering factors. FRF participants and partners were more likely to cite aspects of Community and Public Characteristics as hindering factors than helping, noting that the public had other priorities than those raised by the FRF or negative attitudes toward civil society. However, in a limited number of cases, informants experienced strong participation from and collaboration with the public that helped make these activities more effective.

Figure 1. Map of FRFs with Helping and Hindering Factor





Community / Public Characteristics: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor



Eager participation (4). In a subset of FRF countries, informants noted the enthusiasm and commitment of the public. Youth, in particular, were eager to learn and contribute.



Strong civil society collaboration (4). Informants also spoke generally about a strong civil society in their country. This played an instrumental role in the success of their FRF activities.



Community leadership and voice (2). In a small set of cases, informants noted the coordination with community leaders through town halls and assemblies. Providing spaces to consult influential members of the community gave partners more legitimacy and thus supported FRF activities.

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Hindering Factor



Public has other priorities (6). Many FRFs sought to engage communities and the public on issues that affect them but may not get significant attention in the media or by civil society. However, some informants noted that they ultimately struggled to get the public to care about civic space issues when they had other priorities.



Public has negative views of civil society or media (5). In some cases, partners noted that they faced active resistance when they tried to engage with communities on civic space issues, a challenge that was exacerbated during the proliferation of disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Specific resistance to information on COVID-19 (4). In addition to general resistance that some local partners experienced, those partners working on COVID-related FRFs cited stronger and more direct resistance from the public on any efforts to share evidence-based guidance on the virus.



Community / Public Characteristics: Factor Brief

I would just say, and this may go back to the people, but in general youth in [COUNTRY] are very eager to learn something new. They come to trainings and are eager to learn stuff. Your training is only as good as your participants, so having an eager audience is really important.

Another challenge was the cultural view on vaccination. Historically, these communities do not trust Western medicine. Hence, certain colleagues did not dare to push content related to vaccination for fear of "clashing" with the public.

Spotlight on Freedom of Information Threats. While only half of FRF activities focused on threats to information (including the rise of disinformation and misinformation), the majority of FRFs for which public and community characteristics were cited (both helping and hindering) came from information space-focused FRFs. This may reflect the fact that these activities often required community or public action or behavior change to be successful in achieving their intended outcomes.

Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

Based on the analysis of helping and hindering factors, we recommend the following for program implementers (consortium and local partners) and donors:

- ❑ During the design phase, **implementers should identify sub-populations of the public or community that are predisposed to the target issues and design activities directly to involve these groups**. Among INSPIRES FRFs, young people were frequently seen as enthusiastic and engaged on issues of civic freedom and human rights; implementers should find ways to involve youth in activities when possible and appropriate.
- ❑ During and immediately after implementation, **implementers and donors should amplify and widely disseminate success stories** to build public interest and enthusiasm around civic space opening and how this affects the lives of community members.
- ❑ Outside of FRF activities, **implementers and donors should find other mechanisms to support building an enabling environment for the public to prioritize civic space issues**. While FRF activities can contribute to this goal, larger mindset shifts and changes in public will and interest are better suited for sustained support that shorter-term funding like FRFs cannot provide.



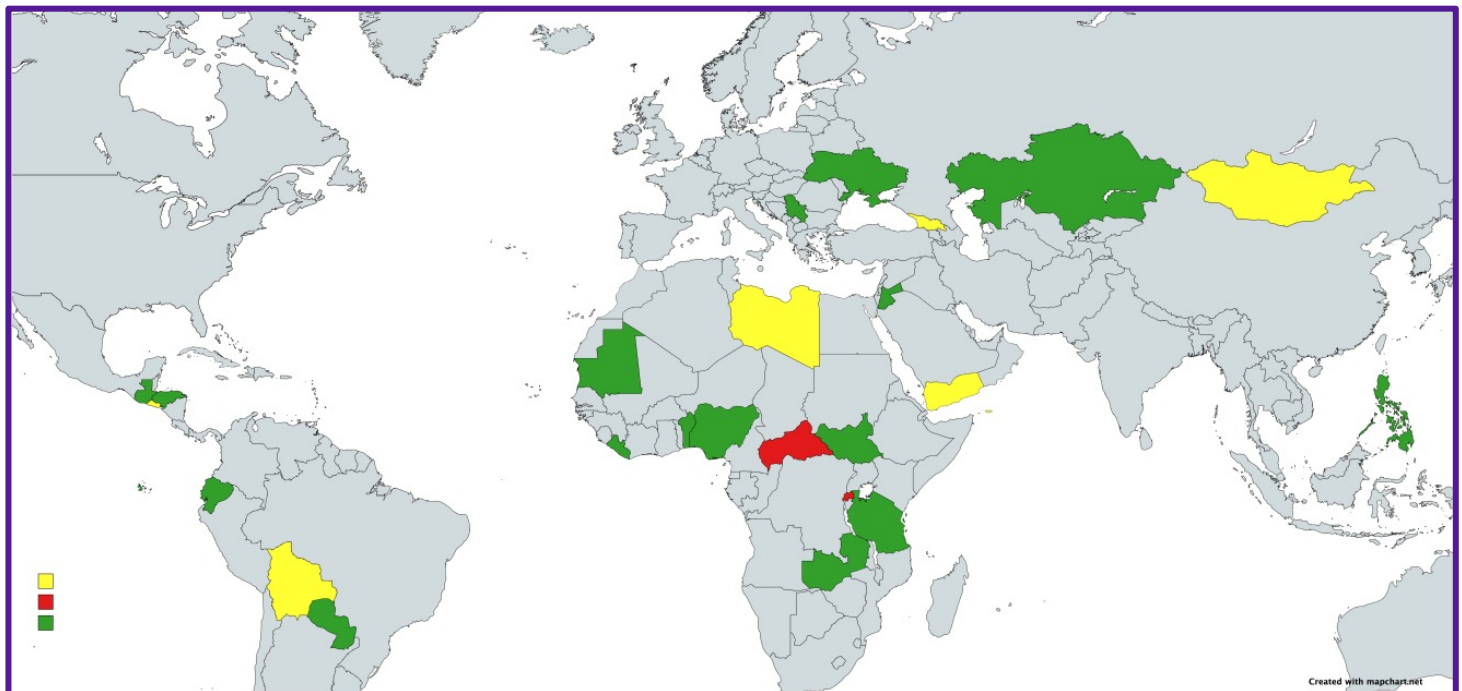
Political Factors: Factor Brief

Political factors refer to the specific set of circumstances, influences, and dynamics that shape the political landscape within a given FRF context. This brief consists of both domestic and international factors that may have influenced the outcomes of FRF activities. These factors are included in the Place category of the Factor Framework.

Informants predominantly cited helping political factors, emphasizing the significance of international cooperation and pressure. In contrast, hindering factors were less frequently mentioned, with political instability being the most common factor cited. Notably, the fluidity of political contexts led to instances where both helping and hindering factors coexisted. For example, the shifting political situation in one context posed challenges for completing FRF activities; however, before the elections, reduced distractions and a more stable political environment facilitated progress.

In other cases, the same political factor led to both positive and negative outcomes. For example, war in one country limited in-person collaboration for a consortium partner but fostered greater virtual communication and international cooperation. Similarly, in a different context, while clashes with ruling and opposition parties hindered activities, political protests raised awareness and improved outreach. The multifaceted and nuanced nature of politics underscores the complexities involved in implementing project activities.

Figure 1. Map of FRFs with Helping and Hindering Factor



■ = Country reported Helping Factors only, ■ = Country reported Hindering Factors only,
■ = Country reported both Helping and Hindering Factors.



Political Factors: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor

International Cooperation (12). Many informants emphasized the significance of their partnerships with INGOs and global agencies as critical components for the success of their FRF activities. Shared learning across countries and the inclusion of global experts served as valuable contributions.

International pressure on the state (10). The public visibility surrounding certain issues as well as the pressure exerted by international bodies and partner organizations was cited as a helping factor. In some cases, engaging in activities as part of a consortium conferred additional leverage or influence.

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New state leadership (5). Informants noted that government transitions towards greater liberalism and a focus on human rights supported various FRF activities.

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Crisis and deterioration of civic space (3). In a small subset of cases, the decline of civic space due to an emergency or the enactment of unfavorable legislation drew people's attention. Additionally, targeted attacks compelled individuals and organizations to become engaged.

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Open political structure receptive to change (3). Informants also made general references to the political framework and the presence of effective governance as contributing factors.

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Political reform (3). Finally, demonstrations against the government and calls for reform were identified as helping factors within a subset of cases.

Helping or Hindering? Dynamic political landscapes such as a crisis can both help and hinder activities. In one context, the *proliferation of disinformation* and the *weaponizing of social media* were identified positively as catalysts, as they prompted civil society to collaborate and combat these challenges collectively. However, for a larger number of FRFs (6), political instability posed as a major challenge.

In terms of actors, support from international NGO networks and other organizations has been really crucial to bring the issue into the light. Also, their support on carrying out the analysis, advocacy and other activities, their resources, knowledge, tools and practices, all helped to make this possible. Because if it was only the civil society consortium of [COUNTRY] and local organizations, we would have already been crushed.

Crisis always creates opportunities and give in a way positive results. This is mostly because it gives the chance to explore and formulate new proposals. And this was clearly the case for [COUNTRY].



Political Factors: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Hindering Factor

6

Political instability (6). In many countries in which FRFs took place, activities were designed to address issues directly or indirectly related to political upheaval in the country or in specific regions. Challenges related to deteriorating security situations and political conflicts acted as hindering factors for many activities.

3

Rapidly changing political situations (3). Relatedly, informants highlighted that changing political contexts, including unexpected changes in political leadership and government policies, required partners to quickly adapt activities.

2

Difficult-to-understand political climate (2). In a small number of cases, partners noted that the opacity of government processes and decision-making made it challenging to design activities that would target the proper channels for change.

Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

Based on the analysis of helping and hindering factors, we recommend the following additional actions for program implementers and donors:

- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers should identify local partners to support better understanding of political structures and decision-making within the country.** While there are myriad roles for local partners in flexible programming, one critical role is that of guide to domestic political context.
- ☐ During implementation, **implementers should monitor and take advantage of political transitions.** While not all political changes are enabling, many still provide opportunities to identify windows of opportunity to engage with new government actors and advocate for changes to repressive and restrictive policies.
- ☐ During implementation and outside of FRF activities, **implementers and donors should seek opportunities to support regional and international exchange among local partners.** This strategy is one that was cited repeatedly in interviews as helping partners develop new ideas for how to navigate political shifts in their own countries.
- ☐ Outside of FRF activities, **implementers and donors should monitor and advocate for greater engagements by international and diplomatic bodies on key civic space issues.** Many FRFs that were able to make progress on key civic space issues did so in part because of attention placed on the issues by global leaders and institutions.



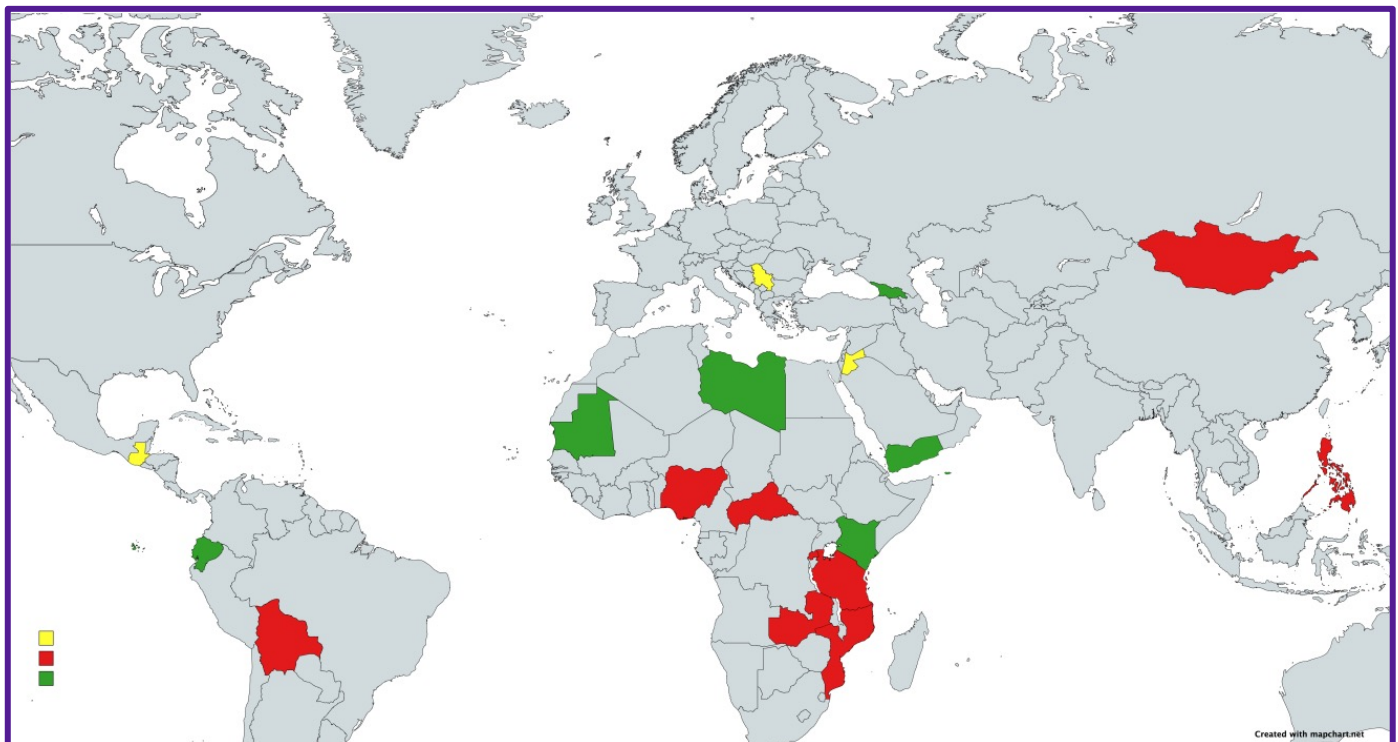
Other Events and Timing: Factor Brief

Timing can be a critical factor in determining the execution and outcomes of a project. This brief highlights specific events, largely political and COVID-19-related, that have impacted FRF activities. These factors are included in the Place category of the Factor Framework.

Hindering factors related to timing were more frequently observed across a wider range of contexts. In several contexts and especially in sub-Saharan Africa, changes in legislative timelines and COVID-19-related prioritization posed challenges to FRF activities. Conversely, in one East African context, informants noted that successful outcomes were achieved due to the heightened focus on COVID-19.

Moreover, in three countries, as shown in the map below, both helping and hindering factors simultaneously influenced project activities. For instance, one informant noted that while COVID-19 led to fatigue and apathy, a sense of emergency also propelled activities forward. In another context, elections served as both deterrents to FRF activities and positive barriers to preventing harmful legislation. Finally, in a third context, while the government was prioritizing laws unrelated to FRF projects, political reform ultimately contributed to the project's success. The interplay of these factors underscores the dynamic and intricate nature of timing and outcomes.

Figure 1. Map of FRFs with Helping and Hindering Factor



■ = Country reported Helping Factors only, ■ = Country reported Hindering Factors only,
 ■ = Country reported both Helping and Hindering Factors.



Other Events and Timing: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the
Factor

Hindering Factor

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Changes in legislative timelines (5). Many FRFs sought to influence laws and policies as a key outcome, and frequent and unexpected changes in legislative timelines were a major challenge for these activities. In some cases, these changes meant that activities such as support to CSOs had to be completed before the target law was presented, debated, or decided upon.


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Changes in prioritization due to COVID-19 (5). FRF activities also experienced challenges when country government and stakeholder priorities changed in relation to the pandemic. This shift negatively affected FRFs in different directions, with COVID sometimes taking precedence over FRF-focused civic space issues and with COVID-related civic space problems losing momentum as focus on the pandemic waned in some countries.


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Elections (3). Impending elections also shifted both the activities and the focus of partners and stakeholders in the case of some FRFs.

Helping or hindering? Elections played a multifaceted role in various FRF projects, at times, serving as a helping factor providing a rationale to prioritize project-related matters. In other contexts, approaching elections led to changes in activities and shifted the focus of stakeholders away from FRF objectives. The complexity of election cycles underscores the dynamic interaction between political events and their influence on priorities, making it crucial for stakeholders to adapt and respond strategically to achieve desired outcomes.




"With Inspires itself, we know that these (FRFs) are supposed to be short engagements, but we had delays with the legislative schedule. We did not want to end the engagement too soon. Even now, we could keep going. But there was unpredictability, especially during COVID and with schedules being pushed back. But I think we were able to adapt well."



Timing really accelerated the activities. So much happened all at once during the summer crisis. Strategic plans implemented and tested and found to be successful in real life situations.

I can speak to this work because the ripple effect was huge. It was specific – it responded to a specific need and provided a timely response, so had a big impact.





Other Events and Timing: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor

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Favorable timing (5). Informants noted that the timeliness of projects was key. In some cases, FRF activities coincided with key international events or changes in leadership.

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Crisis or political reform as a catalyst for change (3). In a small subset of FRFs, a sense of emergency due to a crisis or political protests contributed to participation and the success of activities.

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Prioritizing activities related to COVID-19 (2). Informants highlighted the timing of FRF activities in relation to the pandemic as an avenue for implementing specific projects, particularly around vaccination efforts.

● ●

Election cycles (2). In certain cases, increased emphasis on elections either served as a diversion to prevent the passage of detrimental legislation or provided a rationale to prioritize project-related issues.

Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

Based on the analysis of helping and hindering factors, we recommend the following additional actions for program implementers and donors:

- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers should have open discussions with local partners about the likely role of election cycles on program goals.** In the Inspires FRFs, we observed that elections were sometimes helpful and sometimes harmful to FRF goals, and local partners may be best placed to forecast how elections will influence advocacy and other activities on civic freedom issues in their country.
- ☐ Outside of FRF activities, **implementers and donors should undertake regular monitoring of political issues in countries in which they work to be ready to seize opportunities when they arise.** A major benefit of flexible and rapid response programming over other funding mechanisms is its ability to have a quick start-up to respond to emergent needs if these are identified in a timely fashion.

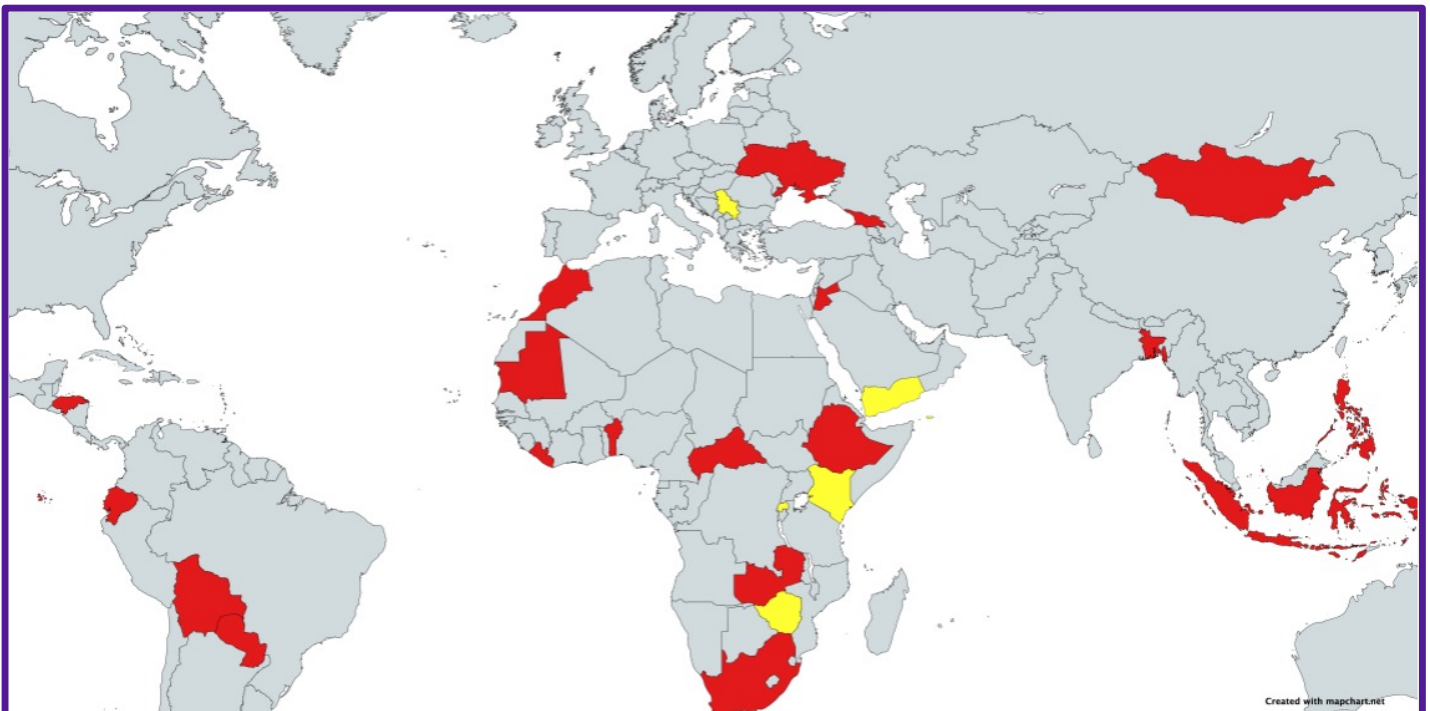


COVID-19: Factor Brief

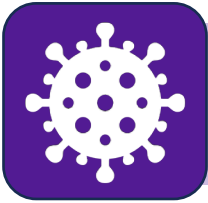
The COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant and global contextual change that was not anticipated or planned for by consortium partners, local partners, donors, or the target audiences for FRF activities. However, the magnitude and timing of the pandemic resulted in it playing a crucial role in all INSPIRES project activities, including FRF activities. Only three FRFs were completed before the start of COVID-19, and a large majority included in our analysis overlapped the critical first two years of the pandemic. COVID-19 factors are in the Place category of the Factor Framework.

INSPIRES adapted quickly to the onset of the pandemic in multiple ways. First, a large proportion of FRFs that were launched in 2020 and 2021 were designed to directly address COVID-related civic space restrictions and disinformation that spread rapidly around the world in the first phase of the pandemic. Second, consortium and local partners revised work plans to move to virtual engagement and work within other pandemic-driven constraints. Despite these adaptations, it is not surprising that the majority of COVID factors cited by informants were factors that hindered the effectiveness of FRFs. The most frequently noted factor across all factor categories was the pressure and challenge of moving to virtual communications and activities, especially in locations with limited bandwidth and other network restrictions.

Figure 1. Map of FRFs with Helping and Hindering Factor



■ = Country reported Helping Factors only, ■ = Country reported Hindering Factors only,
■ = Country reported both Helping and Hindering Factors.



COVID-19: Factor Brief

One Crucial Hindering Factor

In addition to the factors cited below, **over half (54%, 25 total) of FRFs stated that the necessity of moving to virtual communications, outreach, and other activities created significant challenges to their work**, making this the most frequently cited hindering factor among all Inspires FRF activities.

Number of
FRFs Reporting
the Factor

Hindering Factor

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Challenge getting information from the government (4). Media-focused COVID civic space FRFs in particular struggled to get the data and information they needed from government counterparts to complete activities. Some informants noted that they believed that the government did not have the data they needed, while others stated their belief that officials may be withholding key information.

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Delays in legislation (3). Informants cited multiple legislative delays related to laws and policies that the FRF sought to influence due to COVID-19, leading to several redesigns in FRF activity work plans.

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Changes in prioritization of other civic space issues (3). Many issues that FRFs were designed to focus on were seen as less critical at the peak of the pandemic, with one informant noting “it is as if democracy became a second-order issue.”

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COVID-related stigma (3). For FRFs that required contributions from communities, many partners faced challenges in getting people to speak with them due to stigmas related to the virus. Informants noted that this stigma cut across the public as well as journalists and health experts in some cases.

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Physical health of partners (3). Several informants stated that local partner and consortium partner representatives contracted COVID, hindering the ability of the FRF activities to move forward.

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Impact on government behavior (2). Finally, the pandemic also influenced government actions in a small number of cases, making officials more suspicious of local partner activities and in one case leading to extra scrutiny placed directly on FRF activities.

We tried to keep a list of journalists that died or got sick, but we found that people were not willing to share that; there was still stigma. There is an unfortunate thing on our continent that some diseases, if not understood, there is something in how you would be treated and looked at. So, in our last count, we had 32 journalists lost to the pandemic. And these were just the names we were able to get. That was a big challenge.





COVID-19: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor



Engaging people through a digital platform (5). While country lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic constrained organizations, the shift to mobilizing within digital spaces led to a larger reach and impact in a subset of FRF activities. One informant also noted the cost-effectiveness of operating virtually.



Timing of the pandemic (2). Informants noted that COVID-19 was used as an opportunity to implement specific projects.

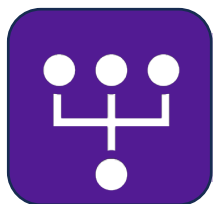
Helping or Hindering? While the pandemic was overwhelmingly cited as a hindering factor, several informants did highlight ways in which the move to virtual communications and support from the FRF helped them engage partners in new ways. In one FRF, an informant described how the pandemic stimulated creative outreach methods; partners explored novel and more informal approaches to complete their FRF activities.

The fact that corona was taking place, we were all stuck behind computers, it helped mobilization, and this helped us to be present and react quickly. Because otherwise we would have been in the field and doing this and that and this kind of concerted effort would not be efficient.

Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

Unlike all other factors identified and analyzed as part of the INSPIRES project, COVID-19 factors are associated with a unique event that was specific to the time in which this project was implemented. As such, the recommendations related to these factors are also unique, presented as general recommendations for implementers and donors:

- ☐ **Implementers and donors should continue fostering and building systems for virtual communications and engagement.** While such severe restrictions on movement may not occur again, many organizations and individuals developed innovative ways of working and sharing in virtual settings, and these should not be lost even if they are no longer required for work.
- ☐ **Implementers and donors should continue to work on and fund efforts to combat stigma surrounding mental and physical health crises.** This hindering factor transcends COVID-19; it remains a challenge for development activities, and combatting stigma requires sustained resources that go beyond the structure and purpose of rapid and flexible funding.



Other Contextual Factors: Factor Brief

This brief consists of additional contextual hindering factors that were not accommodated within other Place categories (Political, Other Events and Timing, and COVID-19). These encompass aspects such as perceptions and threats related to civil society, difficulties in finding experts, other unforeseen events, and language barriers, falling in the Place category of the Factor Framework. It is worth noting that all contextual Helping factors fit into other Place categories; as such, this category only included hindering factors.

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Hindering Factor

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Broad perceptions of civil society (7). While other briefs have noted specific challenges faced by local partners and the media due to negative perceptions of civil society, several informants also noted a broad distrust of these actors made it more difficult to achieve the intended outcomes of the FRFs.

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Dangers faced by civil society and journalists (5). In addition, several FRFs had to adapt and refocus their work due to the realized or expected threats faced by local partners and journalists due to the sensitive nature of the topics on which they work.

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Challenges finding technical experts (5). For some FRFs (especially those related to COVID-19), consortium and local partners had to identify technical experts to speak about specific topics, and some partners experienced difficulties in identifying such experts.

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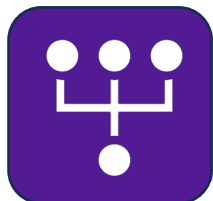
Major events that detracted from FRFs (3). During the implementation of FRFs, target countries experienced flooding, constitutional changes and scandals that pulled the attention of local partners, the public and other key stakeholders from the focus of the FRF.

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Language barriers (2). Finally, language barriers (especially in locations with many Indigenous and native languages) resulted in delays and additional resources needed to complete FRF activities.

...when you speak of these topics, you have to be careful of what you say because there are people who do not want this information to go public.



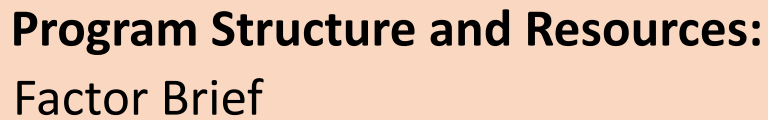


Other Contextual Factors: Factor Brief

Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

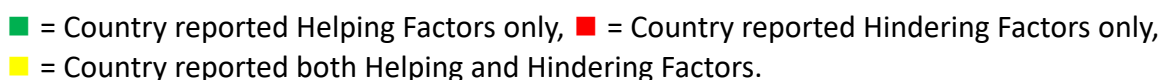
Based on the analysis of hindering factors, we recommend the following additional actions for program implementers and donors:

- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers should work with their local partners and other local experts to ascertain the risks of intervening on the focus civic space issue.** While there may be value in implementing FRFs even in dangerous contexts, a full safety and security review of activities and partners can help mitigate the risk of working on sensitive issues.
- ☐ Outside of FRF activities, **implementers should continue to invest in language skills as well as networks of technical experts.** These capacities can be difficult to build rapidly at the start of a FRF and, as such, are better to build outside of the emergent needs of flexible and rapid response programming activities.



The majority of Program Structure and Resources factors cited by informants are helping factors, with many consortium and local partners noting both the flexibility of the program structure to adapt to changing needs and context as well as the adequate financial resources for planned FRF activities. While some informants experienced the opposite with regard to resources (inadequate funding for planned activities), some informants also noted that this may be because the activities planned were more appropriate for non-flexible or rapid response funding mechanisms.

Figure 1. Map of FRFs with Helping and Hindering Factor





Program Structure and Resources: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Helping Factor

Adequate funding and resources (16). Many informants described the financial support as a crucial element of success. Moreover, efficient budget disbursement contributed to the achievements of one FRF activity.

Flexible design, activities, and tailoring of approaches (14). Flexibility was cited as a key helping factor as part of the design and implementation process. Participants were able to adapt activities to changing contexts and experiment with new ideas.

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Organized and streamlined process (5). A straightforward monitoring and reporting structure supported local partners in their work. Informants noted that the application process was quick and simple.



Speedy approval process (2). In a subset of FRF activities, the speed and flexibility of the approval process positively impacted the project.

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Innovative design (2). Informants also described the program as innovative and participatory. The approach to thinking and crowdsourcing information led to novel solutions.



Realistic timeline (2). A few informants noted that the time frame for implementation was accurate and flexible.

I really appreciated the innovation they brought to it, with how they approached thinking about how to collect and crowdsource important issues, societal issues in [COUNTRY] and how you respond to it. I appreciated that multi-media approach and I find it really crucial when addressing young people.

We can explore different alternatives – that flexibility helps us learn, experiment with bold ideas, and make sure that whatever solutions we are making respond to real-time or specific problems and needs of target groups.



Program Structure and Resources: Factor Brief

Number of FRFs
Reporting the Factor

Hindering Factor

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Slow approval process (10). Many informants noted that processes for approving sub-grants and activities took significantly more time than expected. These delays slowed FRF activities and, in some cases, hurt trust and collaboration between consortium partners and local partners.

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Lack of resources for adequate scope and scale (7). The small amount of funding for individual FRFs meant that consortium partners often had to limit the scope of their activities. Informants for several FRFs noted that the FRF would have been much more effective if they were able to expand to additional regions or target populations.

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Mismatch between programming decisions and funding available (4). Relatedly, some partners noted that their FRF plans sought to achieve too much given the timeline and resources available.

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Too little time for sustainable change (2). Finally, while informants pointed to important outcomes achieved during the FRF activities, some also noted that longer-lasting changes on civic space issues may require more time than what was allocated for the FRF.

Additional helping factors. Open communication was also cited as a helping factor. In some cases, digital tools were used to effectively communicate between partners. Moreover, consistent feedback was built into the program structure.

Additional hindering factors. In addition to the specific factors noted above, interviews from a larger number of FRFs cited general constraints to funding and timelines as hindering factors.

I don't know why it took so long for subgrants ... they were supposed to start in March, but most started in May. The subgrantees even felt, '(H)ave you abandoned the project? When is the money coming?' They had fears about continuing with the project.





Program Structure and Resources: Factor Brief

Recommendations for flexible and rapid response programming

Based on the analysis of helping and hindering factors, we recommend the following for program implementers (consortium and local partners):

- ☐ During the design phase, **donors and implementers should explore ways to reduce the burden of sub-grants and expedite sub-grant approval processes** as much as possible. The INSPIRES project began with a more tedious and time-intensive process for sub-grant approvals; however, the consortium and USAID worked together to streamline this process, and as a result, very few FRFs that began in the final two years of the project expressed that subgrant delays were a hindering factor.
- ☐ During the design phase, **implementers should ensure that proposed FRF activities are appropriate for FRF funding and timeline**. In the majority of cases in which INSPIRES informants cited limited time and resources as a hindering factor, the activities and desired outcomes for the activities may have been better implemented under a mechanism that was not designed for rapid and small investments.
- ☐ During implementation, **donors and implementers should allow for approved activities to be adapted to the changing needs and context on the ground**. Many of the most effective INSPIRES FRF activities were ones that updated plans based on what implementers experienced after they began the activities.