

Strengthening reporting to combat illegal fishing in the Galapagos

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 **Ecuador**, Internews collaborated with local partners—leading Ecuadorian investigative media outlet GK and Universidad San Francisco de Quito's School of Journalism (COCOJA)—to improve environmental reporting on protected areas in the Galapagos and contribute to a strong evidence base to inform conservation decision making through the following activities:

- **Capacity building** for journalists and civil society actors focused on the Galapagos, including:
 - Trainings led by GK and Internews' Earth Journalism Network
 - Internships for student journalists at GK's newsroom
- **Training and distribution opportunities** for journalists and content creators in the Galapagos, including marine journalist mentorship for student journalists
- **Story grants** for professional and student journalists to support illegal fishing story production for local or national media

Support was provided over the course of eleven months from April 2021 to February 2022. In this summary brief, we share learnings and lessons from key informant interviews and document review for these activities.

Outputs and Outcomes.

The FRF activities in Ecuador were designed to produce several key outputs, including trainings on topics such as governmental accountability, foreign influence, and unsustainable fishing practices; mentorship for student journalists; and funding programs for story publication.

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

Figure 1. Ecuador Fishing FRF Outputs



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

- **Increased awareness of illegal fishing practices and other environmental threats in the Galapagos among journalists, the media, and public readers and officials through news publications.**

Participating journalists of this FRF highlighted the significance of the Internews trainings, guidance, and publication opportunities in increasing their knowledge on the illegal fishing industry. They noted that this topic was not very pressing in the media compared to other social issues or very open for discussion among government officials. Nevertheless, they believe their work led to increased public awareness about illegal shark trade, positive effects on fishing policy, and strengthened understanding among fishermen about harmful fishing methods.

“(T)he topic was highlighted in many media channels – digital and print. If you Google now, you’ll get a lot more hits on the topic thanks to this scholarship, and this was really positive for the legal change in the future and the awareness. There is more information out there than before.

-Student Journalist
Key Informant Interview, March 2022

- **Expanded knowledge and interest of student journalists in investigative journalism, and specifically on illegal fishing, and ability to use a variety of news channels to circulate their work.** The focus of these FRF activities on supporting student journalists has allowed them to gain real world experience in environmental investigative journalism. Through the onsite interviews and reporting in the Galapagos, students were able to develop their own research and publications using a variety of methods, and some were inspired to further specialize in environmental journalism. Specifically, one student noted wanting to

pursue a related degree in graduate school, one student pursued a legal angle for their investigative journalism report, and another student took the creative route of developing a musical audio byte which has been heard playing in taxis and vans in the Galapagos.

“The interest of the journalists really [has been the biggest impact] – they have been incentivized to take up these topics. Environmental journalism in Ecuador is not as big as in the US or Germany and so journalists are usually more focused on corruption and politics and scandals. I think that was the best, that it was a big group and working together on this topic. I have colleagues in Plan B that also wanted to continue this work and are now doing illegal mining.

-Student Journalist
Key Informant Interview, March 2022

- **Strengthened network of Ecuadorian professional and student journalists to continue environmental journalism work.** Multiple journalists spoke to the development of formal and informal networks as a result of the FRF activities as incredibly useful for their future work. This included the launch of a new formal network that began with individuals and organizations directly involved in the FRF activities that has since expanded to a wider set of journalists interested in increasing reporting and awareness of environmental issues. Respondents specified that the ability to exchange ideas with colleagues, work together in their investigations, and support student journalists with knowledge and connections are opportunities they would like to see continue. The new formal network of Ecuadorian environmental journalists led to a conservation project with USAID, a tangible result of the community they had established.



I think it created some kind of community through this network. I hope it sustains through time. But I think the principle impact is that there is a big difference when you work with a group than when you do it alone. I know other people who work as freelance, they do a big and good job, but for me I always rely on orgs – it gives you knowledge ... contacts in other places, so this helps a lot of young journalists like me.

-Student Journalist
Key Informant Interview, March 2022



Helping and Challenging 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:

- **Strengthened understanding of context and culture.** A core component of the FRF activities was a trip for journalists organized by Internews to speak with and engage with people in the Galapagos. This experience was almost unanimously cited by informants as a key factor that allowed journalists to better understand the issues and nuances of fishing in Galapagos and provided the tools needed for stronger and more compelling reports on their topics.
- **Involvement of and mentorship by diverse journalists and partners.** Many participants noted the value of having multiple opportunities to engage with journalists and organizations that brought different perspectives to their work. These included journalists from both Ecuadorian and international news outlets; editorial staff from news outlets in which journalists were ultimately published, and professors from

COCOA who provided important insights into their work.

- **External political and culture influences.** In addition to factors that were in part driven by the project, informants cited several factors that created a positive tide for FRF activities. These included an increased interest in and engagement on the topic of conservation and illegal fishing by the US government and investments on this issue in Ecuador by international celebrities made concurrently with the project.

Hindering factors include:

- **Challenges related to government transparency and willingness to respond.** While many journalists reported on strategies they developed to overcome this challenge, one hindering factor noted by many respondents was the difficulty in getting data, information, or responses to interview requests by Ecuadorian officials at many levels.
- **Safety concerns.** Because illegal fishing often has ties to other activities including drug trafficking, respondents highlighted that they sometimes needed to change approaches or tactics in their reporting to ensure their safety.
- **Public lack of knowledge or interest in the topic.** While there is some evidence that the FRF activities helped mitigate the issue of the public not having an interest in illegal fishing, this challenge was still one that journalists faced during the project. In addition, other priority stories (such as major flooding) made it more difficult to get publication and readership during the time that many stories from the FRF activities were scheduled to be released.

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



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