

Strengthening independent media for marginalized communities in Ecuador

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 the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), the National Coordinator for Black Women (CONAMUNE), and the coordinator of Popular and Educational Community Media of Ecuador (CORAPE) to assess and support the sharing of information about COVID-19, elections, and other civic freedom-related issues for marginalized communities, undertaking three key activities:

- Capacity building for coordinating bodies on community outreach and engagement on COVID-19 issues;
- Analysis of information needs of marginalized communities; and,
- Technical assistance to media outlets supporting reporting to indigenous people and Afro descendent women.

Support was provided over the course of five months between February and June 2021.

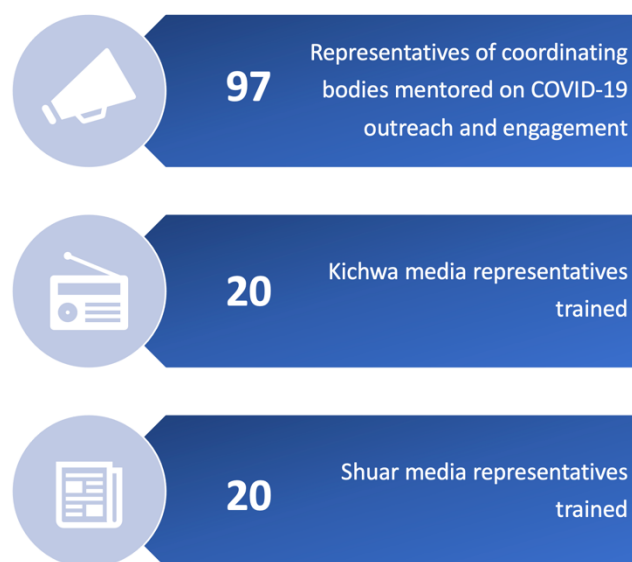
In this summary brief, we share learnings and lessons from key informant interviews and document reviews for these activities.

Outputs and Outcomes. The FRF activities in Ecuador were designed to produce several key outputs, including training and mentoring for CONFENIAE and CONAMUNE as coordinating bodies for information on COVID-19, production of an information needs assessment for Kichwa and

Shuar communities, and workshops for media to support programming.

Based on interviews with key informants who were involved in the program as well as a review of documentation from the FRF activities, the Ecuador team and partners achieved several key outputs, as highlighted in Figure 1 (FRF outputs).

Figure 1. Ecuador FRF Outputs



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

- **Strengthened capacity of independent media to engage with and amplify voices of communities.** Internews and partners recognized at the start of the project that much of the information about COVID-19 was coming from and reported to populations in the capital; however, many populations did not have access to the same critical information, and their stories

were not being shared with decisionmakers and the public. The training and mentorship undertaken by Internews and partners ensured that local media outlets are now actively engaging with and reporting on the experiences of women, indigenous populations, and those whose voices are not always heard.

“ This experience made them [independent media partners] realize that they need to be more near to communities, that they need to use the language of the communities. That made them realize they need more training so people can come to the media to help them use language of communities. They start to realize meaning of community media in these cases.

- Key Informant Interview (August 2021)

- **Increased capacity for new media to share information.** Key stakeholders noted that partners increased their capacity to use audio, video, and digital media to share information with populations that can be challenging to reach. The trainings and mentorship from this FRF led several local media outlets to utilize new social media channels to spread information. Further, CORAPE later developed a chatbot (separate from INSPIRES but motivated by learning from the project) to communicate directly with more than 200 local contacts regarding questions and rumors related to COVID-19.
- **Improved information on the needs and experiences of local communities.** In order to improve capacity of local partners to engaging with communities in reporting, partners first needed to understand how marginalized communities access and process information related to the pandemic and civic freedom. The information needs assessment conducted as part of the FRF activities was the first analysis of how Kichwa and Shuar communities experienced the pandemic and the information and misinformation they received. Partners cited that this information was critical in helping them design reporting and media coverage that would reach people and that this work prompted them to undertake a follow-on investigation to improve their reach with target populations.

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:

- **Local trainers** – informants noted the importance of trainings led by local partners, including those familiar with communities.
- **Inclusion of young people in trainings** – informants saw this as improving both the engagement and sustainability of their work.
- **Cross-country learning** – partners noted the value of engaging with colleagues in Colombia and Bolivia to gain new ideas for their work.

Hindering factors include:

- **COVID-19 restrictions** – informants noted the challenges associated with not being able to meet in person with partners and for trainings, as well as different perspectives among partners about the risks of meeting in person.
- **Local community engagement** – despite evidence that partners overcame their initial lack of engagement with communities, informants cited some challenges at the beginning of the project in gaining community trust as “outsiders.”
- **Capacity for financial reporting** – while the FRF activities focused heavily on technical capacity building for reporting, several stakeholders noted that partners also faced challenges with the reporting needs and requirements for the project.

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

“This project was an x-ray of communication methods in pandemic times. It was a small sample size, 230 persons, but it gives a great starting point. It hadn’t been done before - not on public information or the status of the communications and making sure they are adaptable to the communities. People would say what was happening in Quito, but they would like to know what is happening here, with the hospitals here and in my community. To respect the self determination of the populations - their proposals for alternative treatments, how they see death- they had not given visibility to those perspectives before in the media.”

- Key Informant Interview (October 2021)

