

Combatting disinformation and human rights violations during COVID-19 in Indonesia

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 **Indonesia**, Internews collaborated with local partners Mafindo (a grassroots anti-disinformation outlet) and Lokataru (a civil society organizations working on law and human rights) to support fact checking and journalists safety and rights during the COVID-19 pandemic through four key activities:

- Digital literacy training to help fact checkers identify hoaxes;
- Training and mentoring of journalists and citizen reporters to report on human rights violations;
- Support to journalists and citizen reporters to produce stories on human rights in their communities; and,
- Production of report highlighting existing research on public health and shrinking civic space in Indonesia.

Support was provided over the course of seven months between April and October 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 Indonesia were designed to produce outputs that include: multiple trainings for fact checkers, journalists, and citizens, published stories on human rights violations, and a report on public health and civic space research.

Based on interviews with key informants who were involved in the program as well as a review of documentation from the FRF activities, there is

significant evidence that these outputs were achieved, as highlighted in Figure 1 (FRF outputs).

Figure 1. Indonesia FRF Outputs



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

- **Increased capacity of citizens to identify rumors and misinformation.** While informants noted that hoaxes have long been a tool used by political parties in Indonesia, their perceived prevalence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many citizens not able to identify misinformation and disinformation about the virus and vaccines. The FRF activities ensured that almost 500 new fact checkers were trained to be able to identify misinformation, both to support the spread of accurate information about COVID-19 in their communities and to help their own decisions and knowledge about the pandemic.

- **Strengthened capacity of citizen journalists to report on human rights violations.** Outside of major cities, citizen journalists are a critical part of the media landscape in Indonesia. Through training and mentoring undertaken as part of this FRF activity, citizen researchers and journalists were supported to improve their capacity to identify instances of human rights violations as well as those responsible for these issues.

"In terms of research with citizen journalists, I was amazed by the research. It is good, there are many good things there, how they can link the cases happening with the bigger macro situation. Even I didn't realize it has connections with the other bigger issues in Indonesia, but they put it there in their research."

- Key Informant Interview (November 2021)

- **Increased research and evidence on hoaxes, including sources and actors involved.** In addition to training fact checkers, local partners undertook a mapping of hoaxes that permeated Indonesian culture in 2020, building evidence on the hoaxes themselves as well as where they originated and how was involved. Informants noted that this information is a new tool that they now have to help identify and combat hoaxes and misinformation that may emerge in the coming years.

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

Helping factors include:

- **Partner reputation as independent and unbiased** – informants noted the importance of local partners' reputations among Indonesian citizens as not being an arm of the government in reporting on COVID-19 facts and human rights violations.

- **Positive relationships with government allies** – at the same time, informants also noted that the positive engagement that partners had with some government officials helped to ensure that their work and research was shared with communities and with decisionmakers.

Hindering factors include:

- **COVID-19 restrictions** – informants noted the challenges associated with virtual training sessions and internet bandwidth issues, especially when working in rural areas of the country.
- **Government responsiveness** – while informants noted that positive relationships with some government officials helped the FRF activities, they also noted that it could be a challenge to get officials to respond in a timely manner.
- **Political pushback on partners** – for one local partner, political pressure and ultimately a subpoena on their director made it difficult to conduct major outreach on research and findings related to human rights violations, limiting the reach of their work. While the subpoena was not a direct result of the partner's work on the project, it does highlight the threats faced by organizations and activists working on these issues.
- **Resources needed for sustained change** – despite the significant content produced by citizen journalists as part of the FRF activities, informants noted that this may not be sustained without more resources to journalists to support their work moving forward.

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

"We tried to collaborate with the health workers and tried to collaborate with local communities and also with the stakeholders on the COVID problem and how we address the vaccination hoaxes. We work with every level of stakeholders – health workers, local communities and even the people representing the province."

- Key Informant Interview (December 2021)