

Improving COVID-19 reporting and journalist health and safety in Kenya

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 **Kenya**, Internews collaborated with several local partners – including the Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE), Media for Environment, Science, Health, and Agriculture (MESHA), Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ), Ghetto Radio (Nairobi), and Sauti ya Pwani (Mombasa) – to improve the coverage and quality of COVID-19 reporting as well as support to journalists through nine key activities:

- Support to journalists through science cafes for journalists and scientists;
- Story fellowships for COVID-19 stories;
- Publication of COVID-19 issues for Sayansi magazine;
- Social media content creation to share accurate COVID-19 information;
- Social media campaigns to combat misinformation on COVID-19;
- Production of radio magazine programs;
- Training of journalists on rights and legal processes;
- Documentation of cases of harassment of journalists; and,
- Support to journalists with mental health challenges and pressures.

Support was provided over the course of six months between April and September 2021.

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

Outputs and Outcomes. 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 the activities in Kenya led to several key outputs, as highlighted in Figure 1 (FRF outputs).

Figure 1. Kenya FRF Outputs



Note: Minimum reach is the highest number of views/downloads for one product or story. As such, these are likely to be significant underestimates for actual reach.

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

- **Improved quality of reporting on COVID-19 and public health issues.** One component of the FRF activities focused on supporting both scientists and journalists to become better science reporters and communicators. Informants noted that the media historically has

faced challenges in reporting on technical aspects of public health and science, making it more difficult to convey critical information to their audiences. The trainings and sessions between journalists and the science community were able to improve the ability of media representatives to both reach out to and report on more technical aspects of the pandemic, therapeutics, and the vaccines. Further, informants highlighted that the activities also helped scientists and health experts better communicate complex issues in a way that the general public could better understand.

“Bridging the gap between scientists and journalists – many people don’t understand when a scientist talks about the naming of the different variants of COVID. So, when a scientist breaks this down for a journalist, it is easier for journalist to break this down for a reader. So, this gap was reduced, and journalists could be fed information on technical jargon.”

- Key Informant Interview (October 2021)

- **Increased access to accurate COVID-19 information and pushback on misinformation.** The activities in Kenya took a multi-pronged approach to delivering accurate information as well as combatting misinformation on the pandemic, delivering facts through local community radio programs, blogs, social media campaigns, and print media. While many factors likely contributed to changes in behavior and attitudes related to the pandemic and the vaccines, multiple informants shared examples of media audiences who reported making changes to combat the spread of COVID after listening to or viewing partner content.
- **Improved and sustained support to journalists on issues of legal rights and psychological support.** A unique component of the FRF activities was the focus on supporting journalists themselves in overcoming challenges they faced during the pandemic. This included providing detailed and actionable information on the legal rights of journalists and the processes and resources for defending those rights as well as support for the mental and psychological challenges that journalists face. These

innovative efforts have already led to multiple informal support groups of journalists voluntarily coming together to continue serving as mental health support to their colleagues based on their engagement and training as part of the FRF.

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 engagement and complementarity** – all informants noted that co-creating with partners with unique skills helped the project.
- **Flexibility** – to adapt to changing needs.
- **Demand driven with local expertise** – partners and technical experts understood the needs and challenges in the communities in which they were working.
- **Timing** – because the activities began as Kenya started receiving the vaccines, there was significant interest in presenting accurate information on this phase of the pandemic.

Hindering factors include:

- **COVID-19 restrictions** – forcing many activities to be virtual.
- **Challenges engaging experts on radio programs and print media interviews.**
- **Resources and time needed for sustained change.**

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

“Looking at mental health, we were able to provide a platform for experience sharing and that helped journalists a lot to vent. Some of the trainers we were working with were very experienced and were able to engage journalists to share experiences and see how they can help themselves with challenges like stress and mental health problems. So, this was a unique training actually because no one was talking about it, and we were able to make a breakthrough in this area. It has now opened the platform for others to learn what other journalists are going through.”

- Key Informant Interview (October 2021)