

Enhancing COVID-19 information sharing between the government and citizens in Liberia

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 **Liberia**, Internews collaborated with the Government of Liberia's Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs, and Tourism (MICAT) and with local partners the Association of Liberia Community Radio (ALICOR), Local Voices Liberia (LVL), and Gbowee Peace Foundation Arica (GPFA) to facilitate information sharing and reporting on COVID-19 through seven key activities:

- Risk communication seminar for government stakeholders;
- Repackaging and broadcasting of MICAT press briefings for greater reach;
- Health reporting fellowships;
- Facilitation of public outreach on COVID-19 and Ebola prevention;
- Facilitation of public outreach on health aspects of COVID-19;
- Community dialogues through "town hall" talk show series; and,
- Expansion of COVID-19 Expert Sources Guide for journalists.

Support was provided over the course of fourteen months between August 2020 and September 2021.

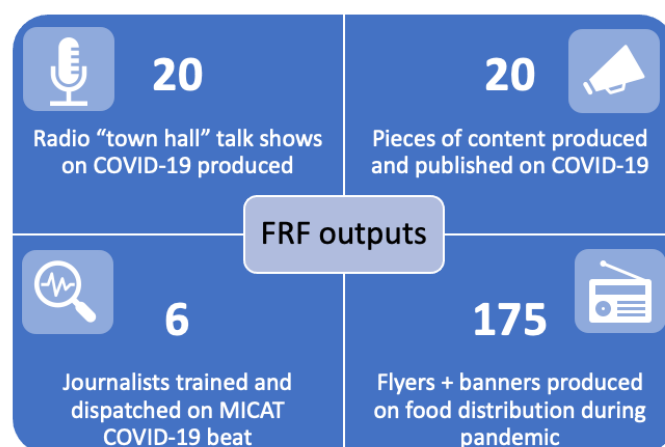
In this summary brief, we share learnings and lessons from key informant interviews and document reviews for these activities.

Outputs and Outcomes. The FRF activities in Liberia were designed to produce several key outputs, including -multiple seminars for government stakeholders, COVID-19 related content, multiple

talk shows, and an experts source guide for pandemic-focused journalism.

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. Liberia FRF Outputs



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

- **Improved coordination between government agencies.** One challenge that this FRF sought to address was the lack of coordination between government ministries and bodies regarding COVID-19. Through its risk communication seminar and broader engagement with MICAT and other government representatives, stakeholders reported improved communication between different agencies, allowing for a more timely and consolidated flow of information to the public.

- **Strengthened capacity of journalists to report on health and science issues.** Several informants highlighted an important outcome of the FRF activities as the improved capacity of journalists to report on COVID-19 and science stories more broadly. This was achieved through both training and mentorship provided to journalists and through tools produced such as the Expert Sources Guide that provided information on science and public health experts willing to speak to the media on science-related topics.

“Specializing journalists in Liberia is a problem. Journalists have minor training – and no detail on how to report on health. Although the group of journalists we worked with was small, the work had an impact on the journalists. We have people now saying “health reporting is an area I can do and work on for my own beat.”

- Key Informant Interview (November 2021)

- **Improved access to accurate and timely COVID-19 information, especially outside of the capital.** The FRF activities were designed specifically to ensure that content from the central government was being repackaged and shared with communities outside of Monrovia and in rural areas. In addition to written content, radio “talk show” programs ensured that citizens in six counties had access to accurate information on COVID-19, including information on vaccines and repercussions of the pandemic on programs such as food distribution. Further, engagement with local communities allowed journalists and media outlets to collect and share information regarding the situation in rural areas with policymakers in the capital.
- **Increased use of new media by journalists and media outlets.** Beyond COVID-19 reporting, the capacity building from Internews and Liberian partners helped to improve the capacity of local media outlets to utilize both social and traditional media to reach different segments of the population. Informants reported stories from young people in particular sharing that they had listened to programming with friends on mobile phones or used WhatsApp, Facebook, or other social media channels to

access information produced by the FRF partners.

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:

- **Local partners with local knowledge** – informants noted strong existing partnerships with organizations that work in local communities and that felt a sense of ownership for the project.
- **Past capacity building** – Internews and partners were able to build on past capacity building work with Liberian journalists, providing a critical foundation to work on this new crisis.

Hindering factors include:

- **COVID-19 restrictions** – informants noted the challenges associated with virtual mentoring and internet bandwidth in sharing content.
- **Government communications** – stakeholders noted some “hiccups” in government response to inquiries that slowed the process.
- **Time needed for sustained change** – while the FRF activities are associated with several impressive outcomes, several informants noted that changes in behavior and engagement requires more sustained engagement than the short FRF timeline allowed.

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

“I think the biggest impact is that [the project] provides the conduit through which accurate information is shared. Sharing information during a crisis is very important – the needs of people during a public health crisis like the pandemic are important as getting financial help or food help. People are now educated through the media on what they should and should not do and even what is happening, how possible it is for them to get assistance, it gives them courage and hope. You want to communicate to communities what the national people are doing, and also communicate to policymakers and influencers, whether local or international, they need to know what is happening in community so they can take action.”

- Key Informant Interview (November 2021)

