

Supporting journalists and journalism on issues of COVID-19 and governance in Rwanda

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 **Rwanda**, Internews collaborated with local partners the Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC), the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), the Rwanda Journalists Association (ARJ), Pax Press, and Media Impacting Communities (MIC) to provide support to journalists and media outlets in Rwanda to help them report on and share critical information about governance issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, undertaking five key activities:

- Providing training to journalists on safety during COVID-19;
- Providing person protective equipment (PPE) to journalists;
- Awarding stipends to journalists to produce investigative content on COVID-19, governance issues, and citizen concerns;
- Supporting radio talk shows on COVID-19, governance issues, and citizen concerns; and,
- Translating and disseminating materials for the deaf community in Rwanda.

Support was provided over the course of six months between August 2021 and January 2022.

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 Rwanda were designed to produce several key outputs, including journalistic content, PPE distribution and materials to communities that are often underserved in reporting and journalism.

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

Figure 1. Rwanda 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:

- **Strengthened capacity of journalists to report accurate information on COVID-19 and governance issues.** As part of INSPIRES, journalists and media outlets that were supported received training on reporting on the technical issues associated with COVID-19, with a special focus on identifying and debunking false information about the

pandemic. The individuals and organizations that were part of this activity ran many stories, even beyond the timeline of the project, that provided citizens with scientific facts. These stories helped to ensure that communities had the information that they needed to make evidence-informed decisions about their health.

“On our side, we liked that we gave journalists a chance to see that they had a big role to play as media in this pandemic. So, training them and giving them the basics of investigating and engaging their audiences, that is a success for us because we got to see the media with piqued interest and understanding of the information and misinformation around COVID. They were able to engage local authorities to train them and speak to them about these issues.”

- Key Informant Interview (February 2022)

- **Increased information and reporting to marginalized populations, including Rwanda’s deaf population.** Beyond general reporting, media that was supported as part of INSPIRES produced content that targeted people that are not always reached by journalists. Journalists travelled to and reported on issues faced by communities outside of the capital and shared information from medical professionals in their stories in the local languages. Further, one major activity focused on ensuring that critical information and reporting was made available to people who are deaf and who might not have access to common forms of journalism, such as community radio programming. While the project cannot measure the exact reach of this information, programs and content that targeted these populations are estimated to be in the millions.
- **Improved funding and resources for journalists.** In addition to outcomes related to the provision and dissemination of information, the project was also able to provide much-needed support to journalists themselves during this challenging time in the form of both funding for journalists and the provision of PPE to help ensure the safety of reporters when they conducted field interviews.

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:

- **Government institution partners** – informants cited that having project partners that represented the government helped to get buy-in from media houses and ensure that reporters had updated information on national guidelines.
- **Interactive and targeted approaches** – the project sought to achieve the greatest and most effective reach by using several methods to get accurate information out to people, including having interactive elements (in talk shows) and providing targeted information (through WhatsApp and other platforms).

Hindering factors include:

- **Delays in programming** – due to lockdowns.
- **Challenges in getting sources** – community journalists in particular faced challenges in getting input from government sources for their reporting, as is required in Rwanda.
- **Timeline** – several informants noted that the timeline was limited for the content and reporting that the project sought to complete.

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

“We realized that there was much information going around, but we specifically tried to reach out to underrepresented and marginalized communities. We noted that the deaf community was not being served. So together with our partners, members of the deaf community picked questions and myths that were circulating. Experts answered these frequently asked questions and debunked the myths and rumors, and after doing this, it was translated into sign language. The community was very happy. One institution that is based in a press house is an organization dealing with people living with disabilities, including hearing impairment. They were on board with this project, and they provide the interpreter. So apart from just this information being on radio and TV, they also took it and spread it through WhatsApp groups they have.”

- Key Informant Interview (January 2022)