



Vikes

Viestintä ja kehitys -säätiö
Finnish Foundation for Media and Development

Programme Results Report 2023


Viestintä ja kehitys -säätiö

Table of Contents

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations	1
Summary	2
1. Introduction to Vikes 2023 Results Report	4
2. Results of the Vikes Programme 2023	7
2.1. Outcome 1: More diverse and inclusive reporting and quality journalism reaching wider audiences	7
2.2. Outcome 2: Gender equality is mainstreamed in the policies and practices of media organisations	9
2.3. Outcome 3: Vikes partners have strengthened self-sufficiency, effectively advocate for freedom of expression and protect the interests of their members	10
2.4. Outcome 4: Increased commitment of duty-bearers and understanding among wider public on freedom of expression, sustainable development, and the issue of media representation	11
2.5. Summary of achievements	13
3. Risk management	14
3.1. Main external risks and their mitigation	15
3.2. Main internal risks and their mitigation	16
3.3. Overview of risk management in 2023	17
4. Overall assessment of the year 2023 and lessons learnt	18
4.1. An analysis of the achieved results within the programme	18
4.2. Contribution to impact-level changes	20
4.3. Contribution to Finnish political agenda	21
4.4. Lessons learnt and future development needs	22

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KPT	Kehityspoliittinen toimikunta / Development Policy Committee
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
PMEL	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
PSEAH	Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
Vikes	Viestintä ja kehitys -säätiö / Finnish Foundation for Media and Development
WIM	Women in Media project

Summary

Finnish Foundation for Media and Development (Vikes) is a journalists' solidarity organisation devoted to strengthening democracy and active civil society by supporting freedom of expression, quality journalism and pluralistic media around the world. During the period of 2022–2025, Vikes is implementing its first development cooperation programme after many years of experience in development cooperation projects. The Vikes programme includes development cooperation projects implemented by and with partners in the global South, as well as global education, communications and advocacy efforts in Finland.

In 2023, Vikes continued its operations in Myanmar, Nepal, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Central America, and Finland. The partners in the global South include media associations, journalist unions, independent media and civil society organisations (CSOs), who produced quality journalism on diverse topics, advanced gender equality within media organisations, and advocated for press freedom and the rights of media workers. In Finland, Vikes reached media and students of journalism through global education and communications.

The main results of 2023 reflect steady progress across Vikes' programme areas. The programme demonstrated effective strides in enhancing diversity and inclusivity in media reporting, with a significant increase in content production and expanded reach through new platforms. Efforts to mainstream gender equality within media organisations showed moderate progress, with improved policy adoption but slower tangible changes. Empowerment of media organisations and journalist unions advanced, achieving several targets ahead of schedule. Public engagement and educational outreach were strengthened, though challenges in data collection and stakeholder engagement persist. Overall, the results underline the programme's effectiveness in advancing its strategic goals and set a strong foundation for continued progress toward its long-term objectives.

The programme results contributed to impact-level changes as well as broader Finnish political agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, the focus on freedom of expression and media pluralism aligns closely with Finland's commitment to promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law globally. The programme's contributions to SDGs 5 (Gender Equality), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) are particularly noteworthy, as they underscore the role of free and independent media in fostering equitable and democratic societies.

Also, challenges were faced throughout the year, particularly in adapting to the varied and often volatile contexts in which the programme operates. Political instability and limited resources in some regions posed significant obstacles in achieving desired outcomes, but flexible risk management and mitigation measures allowed Vikes and its partners to continue their operations. Additionally, a shortfall in fundraising led to budget cuts mid-year, impacting programme activities especially in Tanzania and Nepal.

Lessons learnt and development needs identified in 2023 will inform the ongoing refinement of Vikes' approach. These include the need for further capacity-building among partners,

particularly in the areas of data collection and analysis, to strengthen the evidence base for measuring progress and impact. Additionally, there is a recognized need to streamline reporting processes to reduce the administrative burden on partners and staff, allowing for more focused efforts on achieving the programme's core objectives.

1. Introduction to Vikes 2023 Results Report



The Vikes 2023 Results Report describes the results of the second year of the Vikes development cooperation programme, funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA). The report is structured according to the Vikes Results Framework, with the focus on the outcome level results:

- 1) Media organisations provide diverse and inclusive reporting and quality journalism that reach wider audiences, including marginalized groups;
- 2) Gender equality is mainstreamed in the policies and practices of media organisations;
- 3) Partners (e.g. media organisations and journalist unions) have strengthened self-sufficiency and effectively advocate for the freedom of expression and protect the interests of their members; and
- 4) Vikes and Finnish media professionals supported by Vikes have increased the commitment of duty-bearers and the understanding among wider public on freedom of expression, sustainable development, and the issue of media representation in global and national context.

As per the Vikes Theory of Change, these outcomes will contribute to the **impact level** result:

Journalists and media organisations have a strengthened role in civil society and have for their part improved citizen's access to editorially independent information and improved the diversity and gender-sensitivity within the media sector. This will lead to strengthened freedom of expression and a more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development.

The programme includes previously started projects as well as new programme components specifically designed for the programme period:

- Empowering rural communities through media, 2021–2024 (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda)
- Independent Media Support Programme in Central America (phase 3), 2021–2024
- Women in Media – Towards Gender Equality in Media and Journalism in Nepal and Tanzania 2021–2024
- Freedom of Expression and Democracy as a Prerequisite for Democracy: Study programme for media students, 2021–2022 (global education and communication project in Finland); followed by a new global education programme, 2023–2025
- Cooperation with Yangon Film school in Myanmar, 2022–2025
- Country programme for Somalia, 2023–2025

In addition, Vikes’ communications and advocacy in Finland are key elements of the programme.

The following table illustrates how the programme components feed into the outcome level results:

Programme component	Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3	Outcome 4
Empowering rural communities through media (Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda)	X	-	X	-
Independent Media Support Programme in Central America	X	X	X	-
Women in the Media (Nepal, Tanzania)	X	X	X	-
Cooperation with Yangon Film school in Myanmar	X	X	-	-
Country programme for Somalia	X	X	X	-
Global education in Finland	-	-	-	X
Communications and advocacy in Finland	-	-	-	X

Table 1: Contribution of programme components to outcome level results

Local ownership and localisation within the Vikes programme

The programme is implemented in close cooperation with local partners. Most of the partners are media organisations, independent media, and journalist unions, and they have the main responsibility of planning and implementing the project activities and collecting the monitoring data in their respective countries. Partners have a strong ownership of the projects. The role of Vikes is to support the partners with both the programmatic as well as administrative implementation of the projects. Vikes and Finnish media professionals have also provided technical expertise and peer support to journalists in the global South.

Local ownership and localisation are foundational principles of the Vikes programme, ensuring that project activities are rooted in and driven by the needs, priorities, and capacities of local communities and stakeholders. This approach enhances sustainability, effectiveness, and relevance across diverse geographical areas where Vikes operates. Below, the main means to

strengthen local ownership within the Vikes programme are described, with selected practical examples from different geographical areas.

Empowered partnerships: Central to Vikes' strategy is the empowerment of local partners. These partners play a central role in project implementation, from planning to implementation and reporting. For instance, in Central America, partners collaborate closely with Vikes to address critical issues like democracy, governance, and human rights through local media initiatives. This collaborative approach not only ensures that activities are locally relevant but also builds the capacity of partners to sustain these efforts beyond the programme period.

Local leadership and decision-making: In Myanmar, the partner's management team works closely with and through alumni networks, including alumni and student steering committees. These networks and committees advise on project implementation, leveraging local insights and relationships to navigate complex socio-political contexts. This local leadership is crucial for ensuring that project activities align with community needs and that decisions reflect local priorities and dynamics.

Community engagement and participation: Somalia exemplifies Vikes' commitment to community engagement by actively involving young people, women, and other stakeholders in programme activities. Beyond serving as mere participants or beneficiaries, Vikes engages leaders of other CSOs in planning and implementing programme activities, fostering ownership and sustainability within the community. This participatory approach ensures that interventions are culturally sensitive and responsive to local challenges, thereby enhancing their impact and longevity.

Capacity building and skills transfer: Across all regions, Vikes prioritises capacity building and skills transfer to local stakeholders. In Nepal, for example, trainees from media organisations actively contribute to project implementation by enhancing their skills and fostering inclusive media practices. This hands-on approach not only builds local capacities but also promotes the integration of diverse voices and perspectives in media content.

Adaptive and responsive programming: The East Africa project demonstrates Vikes' adaptive programming through targeted trainings and support for rural journalists and young upcountry reporters. By equipping them with tools and skills to utilise new media platforms, such as online radio portals, Vikes enhances local media's reach and impact. Continuous feedback mechanisms, like those in Uganda where participants provide input through questionnaires, ensure that programmes remain responsive to local needs and challenges.

Sustainability and long-term impact: Ultimately, Vikes' emphasis on local ownership and localisation aims to foster sustainable development outcomes. By empowering local partners, promoting community engagement, and building local capacities, the programme sets a strong foundation for lasting impact. This approach not only strengthens the role of media in promoting democracy and social justice but also contributes to a more equitable and inclusive society. Through its commitment to local ownership and localisation, Vikes' programme ensures that interventions are contextually relevant, sustainable, and effective. By empowering local

partners, fostering community participation, and promoting skills transfer, Vikes strengthens local capacity and resilience, driving positive change in media landscapes and beyond.

The following chapters introduce the main outcomes of the Vikes programme in 2023 and describe the key actions for risk management. The final chapter provides an overall analysis of the programme results, its contribution to impact-level changes as well as broader Finnish political agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and highlights the main lessons learnt and programme development needs for 2024 and onwards.

2. Results of the Vikes Programme 2023



2.1. Outcome 1: More diverse and inclusive reporting and quality journalism reaching wider audiences

In 2023, the programme made notable progress toward its annual and overall targets, marked by substantial advancements in media content production, audience reach and support for journalists. These achievements underscore the programme's commitment to fostering diverse and inclusive reporting and enhancing the quality of journalism.

The increase in media content production and audience reach in 2023 was significant, with the number of media content pieces doubling compared to 2022. This growth can be attributed to the new programme components that started to feed into Outcome 1 in 2023. The implementation of the Country Programme for Somalia started, and Women in Media (WIM) project was integrated into Outcome 1 as the programme results framework was revised. Considering these changes, the overall progress aligns with the expected results, demonstrating that the programme's expansion and strategic initiatives are effectively contributing to its goals.

In 2023, the result matrix shows an increase in the diversity of themes covered by media content, with a slight increase in reporting on disability and minority groups, while environmental issues and climate change were slightly less represented than in 2022. Also, while there was a slight decrease in the overall focus on gender issues compared to 2022, the scope of gender-related reporting broadened to include themes of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, indicating a deeper and more comprehensive approach to addressing gender issues in media content. In addition, new themes such as democratic governance and the culture of peace and violence eradication gained prominence in 2023. These themes were building on the programme's previous efforts especially in Central America, and the new country programme for Somalia was also significantly contributing to them. Yet, it is important to note that not all partners were able to provide detailed information on the themes covered, and the increased diversity of themes is partly due to slightly different classification of themes during reporting. Thus, the thematic analysis and the percentages in the result matrix should be taken as merely indicative. In the future, more emphasis will be placed on having clearer structures to monitor the different themes, enhancing Vikes and the partners' ability to demonstrate more precisely how our efforts are contributing to the programme's overall goals.

Yet, it is safe to say that the targeted support and capacity-building initiatives by Vikes and its partners have directly enhanced the skills of journalists, resulting in higher quality and more inclusive media content. Training programmes for journalists were expanded in 2023, receiving positive feedback for their effectiveness. These trainings have contributed to the inclusion and empowerment of women journalists, with initial steps showing promising progress. While previously the strengthening of professional skills of female journalists was particularly covered under Outcome 2, increasing the risk of overlap in data collection and reporting, in 2023 and onwards this is included under Outcome 1, output indicator 1.1.1., across the programme.

In addition, online platforms established for community radio stations have expanded the reach of diverse reporting, ensuring better representation and information for marginalised communities. The Tanzanian radio portal received the online media services licence in October 2023. Despite some bureaucratic obstacles still pending in Uganda, the online platforms are operating and actively broadcasting the content of various community radio stations in both countries. All these efforts collectively advance the programme's goals of fostering diverse and inclusive reporting, thus reaching wider and more varied audiences.

Finally, to better reflect Vikes' work and enable more detailed examination of outcomes and outputs, a new indicator, "Number of media students enrolled in vocational education programmes", was added to the results matrix (output indicator 1.1.2.). This indicator includes media students who have participated in vocational training programmes in Vikes' programme countries, in 2023 namely in Myanmar. Previously, supported students were reported together with all beneficiaries under "Number of journalists and associated media personnel supported" (output indicator 1.1.1.). This revision allows for more precise reporting to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) aggregate indicators.

2.2. Outcome 2: Gender equality is mainstreamed in the policies and practices of media organisations

For 2023, the programme indicators show some advancements in improving gender equality within media organisations. Journalists, gatekeepers, and media managers reported an enhanced understanding of gender equality and increased knowledge to counter sexual harassment. While 2022 saw improved understanding, 2023 built on this with heightened motivation and efforts to refine policies. For example, the establishment of a new gender desk at Zanzibar government newspapers is expected to improve the equality of decision-making and gender sensitivity within the newsrooms. Initiatives like "La Sala" in Central America highlight focused efforts on empowering women journalists and promoting gender-sensitive content, which aligns with the broader goals of the programme.

Yet, concrete improvements in the workplace remain a challenge. In 2022, general improvements were observed in HR and recruitment policies, but by 2023, no concrete improvements were reported, despite positive developments like network formation of women directors, and increased awareness among male colleagues. This suggests that while foundational changes are occurring, translating these into tangible workplace improvements will require more time and targeted efforts.

According to the result framework indicators, the percentage of targeted media organisations with a gender policy and reporting system for violations increased from 30% in 2022 to 57% in 2023. However, it is important to note that this significant increase is mainly explained by gaps in data collection and decreased number of targeted media organisations in 2023 due to budget cuts. This resulted in significantly smaller sample size compared to previous years. Thus, the indicator data between 2023 and previous years is not comparable. In the future, these types of discrepancies will be addressed by strengthening the Vikes Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL) system and the partners' capacity in data collection and reporting.

As Vikes aims to improve its data collection practices across the programme, highlighting its emphasis on gender inclusivity, a new indicator was introduced in 2023: tracking the number of media content or articles published by women journalists. While some challenges in data collection occurred due to newly added indicator and security concerns requiring journalists to use aliases in some countries, the data shows that approximately 75% of all journalistic work in 2023 was produced by women journalists. While further development work and training in data collection is still needed to ensure comparable results from different partners, this achievement already indicates the programme's success in promoting gender diversity within the media sector.

All in all, the positive trends indicate that the programme's interventions to mainstream gender equality can be effective, the media organisations are willing to implement gender policies, and there is a growing awareness and commitment within media organisations. However, it is important to note that the gaps in data collection, such as inconsistent reporting from all partners, suggest that the indicator data might be slightly skewed, and the overall progress may not be as positive as it appears. Also, the budget cuts of 2023 significantly affected the

implementation of activities under Outcome 2, for more information please see chapter 3. Risk management. To ensure the programme targets are met by 2025, more emphasis on the relevant activities and further development and training on data collection practices is needed.

2.3. Outcome 3: Vikes partners have strengthened self-sufficiency, effectively advocate for freedom of expression and protect the interests of their members

In 2023, Vikes continued to support its partners' institutional and organisational capacity, as well as their networking and collaboration with various stakeholders. The results indicate a steady progress towards the programme goals, with some indicators already being achieved or exceeded.

Four partners demonstrated improvements in financial sustainability, one of them already showing improvement in 2022. This brings the cumulative total for 2022-2023 to eight partners, indicating that the programme is on track to meet its target by the end of the programme period in 2025. The improvements in financial sustainability were achieved through targeted support in financial management and fundraising. For instance, partners in Central America benefited from resources that strengthened their institutional capacities, including financial and administrative support, enabling them to navigate financial challenges of external market pressures and government reprisals, which forced them to shift focus from commercial revenue to alternative income streams such as memberships and events. Despite the challenges, all Central American partners continued to have the same sources of income, and one partner significantly increased their own income, which was vital for their operational costs. In East Africa, the economic environment posed significant challenges, limiting the immediate impact of financial management interventions. Despite weaker fundraising outcomes for some partners, positive indicators emerged with successful project proposals securing funds from UN organisations by one partner. These showcase the potential for enhanced financial management in the region, and the groundwork laid so far is expected to yield better results in subsequent years.

The number of partners actively advocating for freedom of expression increased to 14 in 2023, as the implementation of country programme in Somalia started. The Vikes partners engaged in various actions such as advocacy meetings, media monitoring, and training sessions with duty-bearers and gatekeepers. For example, the Central American partners continued to advocate for freedom of expression despite operating in challenging environments, addressing issues of press freedom, providing legal support for exiled journalists and contributing to the broader regional dialogue on press freedom.

Networking and collaboration events have been critical in enhancing the advocacy capacity of partners. By participating in local, regional, and international networking events, partners were able to share best practices, learn from each other, and build strategic alliances. These interactions not only provided moral support but also practical advice on handling common challenges. For example, the regional network forum for journalists in Central America (ForoCAP), played a crucial role in fostering a sense of community among journalists and media organisations. Different forums and network events provided platforms for training and

experience exchange, which are essential for developing a unified approach to advocacy. The collective voice and shared experiences amplified the advocacy efforts, making them more impactful.

Collaboration with duty-bearers also strengthened partners' advocacy initiatives. By engaging directly with policymakers and other influential stakeholders through consultative meetings and workshops, partners were able to advocate more effectively for freedom of expression and press rights. These collaborations facilitated a more comprehensive approach to advocacy, combining grassroots actions with high-level policy discussions. Yet, the level of involvement and collaboration with duty-bearers varies significantly between different countries, being significantly more active in East Africa and Somalia. In Central America's current political situation, there are no conditions to make actions to bring state actors together with CSOs or media organisations, and thus the advocacy work is conducted through published articles and international forums and networks. Same goes for Myanmar, where collaboration with military government is kept to the minimum.

Finally, the ongoing development of a harmonised Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL) system is laying the groundwork for stronger partners and more effective and coordinated work. Even though the system was still under development in 2023, it is expected to enhance partners' ability to monitor their activities and outcomes more systematically. When ready, a robust PMEL system will not only support the better achievement of outcome area 3 but can benefit both Vikes and its partners to more systematically track their progress, evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies, and make informed adjustments as needed.

2.4. Outcome 4: Increased commitment of duty-bearers and understanding among wider public on freedom of expression, sustainable development, and the issue of media representation

In 2023, Vikes made mostly steady progress in enhancing public understanding on key themes such as freedom of expression, sustainable development, and media representation through its communications, global education, and advocacy work. Yet, some challenges were faced, indicating the need for improvement especially in data collection practices.

Through Vikes **communications** and public engagement, media professionals, students, development actors and the general public have received high-quality information about Vikes' programme, its results and partners. In addition, Finnish journalists and media professionals have utilised the communications material and participation opportunities provided by Vikes as expected, showing steady progress towards the targets of 2025. The number of articles published on Vikes' website in 2023 exceeded expectations, indicating effective content production. Social media reach also significantly surpassed initial targets, although it decreased from the exceptionally high levels of 2022. This demonstrates substantial enhancement in Vikes' online engagement and dissemination of key messages. However, website visits in 2023 fell short of expectations, suggesting that while social media engagement is high, it does not necessarily translate into website traffic. All this suggests that while the communications efforts

are yielding results, there is a need for more integrated digital strategies to drive social media audiences to Vikes' website for more in-depth content.

Good-quality and active communications efforts have resulted in increased public understanding particularly in media diversity, equality in media, and the work of Vikes and its partners in the programme countries. This aligns with the programme's thematic targets, indicating a broadening awareness among the audience. However, consistent efforts must be maintained to deepen this understanding further, particularly in press freedom, democracy, and sustainable development. The new Vikes website mini surveys were launched in 2023 to collect reader feedback on Vikes articles. As there were some technical challenges in the beginning of the year, the amount of data was not as big as expected, potentially affecting the results. Nevertheless, 62% of respondents indicated that the website articles had provided them new ideas or perspectives on the topics. It is noteworthy that the result is lower than the baseline of 2021. While this may be due to the differences in data collection methods, and as such relatively easy to address by enhancing data collection practices, regular monitoring and further analysis on factors affecting reader feedback is needed when more data is collected during the programme period.

In **global education**, Vikes continued to build on its strategic cooperation with Tampere University. The cooperation model with Tampere University, where Vikes supports financially and with expertise while the university maintains ownership, has proved to be effective. This model facilitated a broader reach and sustainable impact on journalism education, aligning with the programme's long-term goals. Despite some challenges in collecting disaggregated data on remote participants, the indicators demonstrate consistent and effective organisation, and the programme has shown strong performance in organising educational events and trainings.

The combined global education initiatives included various educational events and trainings that reached more than 180 media professionals and students in 2023 alone, and the overall targets for the whole programme period have already been surpassed. Feedback from these events indicate a substantial increase in participants' knowledge about sustainable journalism, press freedom, and democracy. Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive, with an average of 85% reporting an increased understanding of the topics covered. This already exceeds the 75% target, indicating the high quality and impact of Vikes' training and events. This aligns well with both annual and programme period targets, underscoring Vikes' success in educational outreach, capacity building, and engagement efforts.

Finally, the programme **advocacy** work has shown good progress in reaching duty-bearers, which surpasses the annual targets and reflects successful advocacy efforts. So far, the advocacy work in Finland has been mostly reacting to current events in the context of development cooperation, since the completion and implementation of the advocacy strategy has been delayed. One of the notable challenges faced in 2023 was the lack of outcome level data regarding stakeholder engagement, which makes it difficult to measure progress in this area. This highlights the need for either revising the results matrix, to include relevant and feasible indicators only, or to improve tracking and reporting mechanisms to assess stakeholder commitment effectively. Despite the challenges, advocacy efforts in 2023 were also marked by

strategic successes and unforeseen outcomes. The successful gaining of membership in the Development Policy Committee (Kehityspoliittinen toimikunta, KPT) was a significant milestone, providing Vikes with a platform to influence national development policy discussions, particularly on media development as a foundation for democracy. Moreover, Vikes' involvement in the finalisation of the OECD/DAC Media Principles, adopted in March 2024, underscores its role in shaping international media development standards. This involvement not only aligns with the annual targets but also contributes to the broader goals of the programme period by embedding media development principles in international frameworks. In addition, an unexpected advocacy outcome was the heightened awareness and discussion around SEAH (sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment) issues within the NGO sector, where Vikes advocated for more rights-centred approach. This demonstrates Vikes' capacity to influence critical discussions beyond its primary advocacy themes, showcasing the organisation's broader impact.

2.5. Summary of achievements

The Vikes development cooperation programme has demonstrated good progress also in its second year, making substantial strides towards its annual and programme period targets across all outcome areas. The results achieved in 2023 not only validate the programme's theory of change but also showcase the effectiveness of strategic interventions in enhancing diversity, inclusivity, gender equality, and public engagement in the media sector.

On **outcome area 1**, Vikes Programme has shown steady progress toward achieving its annual and programme period targets. With increased diversity of themes, higher quantity of content produced, and increased reach and diverse voices, it is expected that at the end of the programme period all targets are well reached or exceeded. The 2023 results strongly support the validity of the programme's theory of change and the assumptions underpinning it. The steady increase in media content production, with the number of pieces doubling from 2022, the active promotion of women journalists leading to 75% of content being produced by women, and the expanded audience reach through new online platforms for community radio stations, have collectively contributed to more inclusive and impactful reporting. These outcomes align with the programme's theories, confirming that the strategic interventions implemented are effective in achieving the desired results of diversity, inclusivity, and broader engagement in the media sector.

On **outcome area 2**, the results indicate moderate progress towards mainstreaming gender equality in media organisations. The programme's focus on capacity building, policy implementation, and fostering gender equality has led to structural changes within media organisations and a shift in attitudes and competencies among media personnel. However, while policy adoption and awareness have improved, concrete workplace changes have not materialized as anticipated. Gaps in data collection, particularly feedback and disaggregated data, present challenges for comprehensive analysis. This underscores the need for more robust monitoring systems and capacity building for partners. Despite these challenges, the encouraging results suggest that the strategies are on track, positioning the programme well to

meet its goals by 2025. Tailored interventions and consistent monitoring will be crucial for achieving the set targets and fully realizing the programme's theory of change.

On **outcome area 3**, the progress underscores the validity of the programme's theory of change. By empowering media organisations and journalist unions through capacity-building and strategic networking, Vikes has facilitated their transition towards greater self-sufficiency and advocacy efficacy. Despite the contextual challenges, most of the targets for 2025 have already been achieved. Moving forward, sustained efforts in these areas will be crucial in advancing the programme's ultimate goals of enhancing the role of media in civil society and promoting democratic development.

On **outcome area 4**, the achievements include enhancing public understanding and engagement, successful organisation of educational events, and strong social media outreach. Challenges remain in data collection for stakeholder engagement and the delayed advocacy strategy, but overall, the programme is on track to meet its 2025 targets. Continued focus on improving engagement strategies and leveraging the success of social media will be key to sustaining and amplifying these outcomes.

In conclusion, the Vikes development cooperation programme has made good progress across all outcome areas in 2023. The results achieved have set a strong foundation for achieving the programme's impact-level goals of enhanced freedom of expression, gender equality, and democratic development within the media sector. While there are areas needing further data and consistent implementation, the outcome-level efforts have validated the programme's theory of change and demonstrated the effectiveness of its strategic interventions. With sustained efforts, targeted interventions and effective risk management, the programme is well-positioned to meet or exceed its 2025 targets, contributing to a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic media environment.

3. Risk management



In 2023, Vikes faced various external and internal challenges that affected its operations. This chapter describes the main risks and mitigations measures taken in 2023, concluding with an overall assessment of the current Vikes' risk management practices.

3.1. Main external risks and their mitigation

The shrinking space of media and civic society remains the key risk for Vikes' operations, underscoring the importance of Vikes' mission. As many nations across the world are sliding towards autocracy, Vikes' role in ensuring freedom of speech and press becomes even more critical. This risk is particularly pronounced in Central America and Myanmar, where the programme operates in unpredictable environments, necessitating local expertise to adapt to volatile situations.

Especially in Myanmar, **political instability, violent unrest and conflict** has caused heightened security risks for civilians and civil society. Clashes between armed groups and the military have disrupted transportation and access to filming locations, while frequent power cuts and unstable internet connections have affected workflow and schedules. To address these challenges, several mitigation measures have been implemented. These include collaborating with alumni networks for their local knowledge and stakeholder relationships, coordinating with security focal points like the INGO Forum and embassies, and conducting thorough security risk analyses before travelling, restricting activities to safer areas when necessary. Additionally, provisions are made for students from conflict-affected areas to stay in Yangon longer, filming topics are chosen to be non-sensitive, and schedules are kept flexible with options to limit or abandon filming if conditions become unsafe.

In Central America, the continuous risk of **persecution and attacks against journalists** remain high. Partner medias have relocated their administration to other countries and sought international support due to false lawsuits against them. New risks in the region include Nicaraguan law reforms requiring permission to create audio-visual material and Nicaraguan intelligence operations extending into Costa Rica. To mitigate these risks, safety and security protocols, including emergency funds, are actively used for partner staff, even those in exile. Also in Guatemala, social outbreak has forced partner staff to work from home, affecting filming, locations, and production.

External economic risks, particularly **decreased donor funding**, remain significant for Vikes, though the risk did not fully materialise in 2023. The Finnish government's policy changes in 2023 resulted in general development cooperation budget cuts, but the impact on Vikes has been minor. However, the risk of decreased donor funding is increasing due to shifting political priorities and potential thematic funding restrictions. Vikes mitigates this risk by monitoring the situation, preparing for various scenarios, and building partnerships with other stakeholders. In Central America, **decreased financial resources** were identified as a new risk, potentially leading to media closures. To address this, the partners have participated in training and developed strategies for diversifying grants and audience revenues, and this work will continue also in the future.

In Myanmar, **economic instability**, including currency fluctuations and inflation, caused some budgetary issues, affecting salaries, travel expenses, and daily allowances, but did not impact overall programme implementation. Additionally, **natural disasters** like Cyclone Mocha, which affected the eastern coast in May 2023, posed security risks and necessitated rescheduling of filming. However, staying updated with weather warnings and avoiding high-risk areas allowed operations to continue without major issues.

In Finland, **a lack of interest among target groups** slightly manifested, as streamed events despite their high quality, reached only a handful of journalists thus limiting their impact. To improve engagement, Vikes is enhancing collaboration with other stakeholders. For instance, the International Press Freedom Day event in early 2024, co-organized with Demory, already tripled the number of participants compared to 2023.

3.2. Main internal risks and their mitigation

Internal economic risks were materialised in 2023 due to **inadequate fundraising**, leading to mid-year budget cuts. As Vikes has been growing fast, the fundraising has not been able to keep up with the increased programme budget. One significant source of self-funding was also lost in 2022–2023 due to their internal strategy changes. This financial shortfall caused delays in strategic processes and advocacy efforts, and impacted project activities especially in Tanzania and Nepal, where reduced budgets resulted in lower performance among some partners. To mitigate these issues, Vikes updated the budget for 2023–2024 to match with the secured self-funding and will do so also in 2025. This results in quite large amounts of transferred funds from year to year, but this will, due to strategically thought cuts, not affect the project and programme performance too much. In case more co-financing is secured, the budget can be increased accordingly. Recognizing the need for a more sustainable solution, Vikes began preparing a strategy to diversify funding sources and seek partnerships beyond Finland. This proactive approach aims to stabilize funding and reduce dependency on any single donor, thereby preventing similar financial risks in the future.

Other significant risks in 2023 included **staff changes** both internally and within partner organisations, and the **limited human resources** resulting from these changes. These intertwined issues impacted institutional memory and strategic management, and hindered the timely completion of tasks and, on some cases, also the quality of work. Additionally, **institutional weaknesses among partners**, particularly in financial administrative capacities, posed challenges. The lack of standardised financial reporting formats complicated project finance management, especially during staff transitions. To address these issues, Vikes implemented several measures aimed at strengthening both internal and partner capacities. A new position, the Quality and Learning Specialist, was established and filled in 2023 to lead programmatic work and enhance overall programme performance. Vikes also unified its data and document management practices in Finland, ensuring easier access to relevant documents and smoother knowledge transfer within the team. The process of harmonising financial reporting formats is on-going, with majority of partners already using the new formats for 2023 reporting. Recognizing the need for a strategic approach to human resources, Vikes' new 2024–

2030 strategy will focus on developing human resources and ensuring adequate compensation for partner staff. This strategic focus aims to improve commitment, foster a collaborative work environment, and address resource-related challenges and team dynamics. As mentioned under Outcome area 3, Vikes is also developing common Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL) procedures. Although the process has been slower than anticipated due to the diverse situations of the partners, efforts included initiating external audits for most partners and starting the partner capacity assessment process in Q4 of 2023. The establishment of common PMEL procedures and the strategic focus on human resource development are expected to ensure better **compliance with programme standards** and improve the overall management and accountability of projects. These measures aim to create a more supportive and effective work environment, enabling Vikes and its partners to better navigate challenges and fulfil their mission effectively.

In 2023, Vikes continued to deal with the repercussions of an earlier alleged **sexual harassment** case in Tanzania, which highlighted the operational risks and potential reputational damage associated with any perceived mismanagement or misconduct by Vikes or its partners. Although project funding was released already before the final resolution, enabling the continuation of project activities, the experience underscored the need for ongoing vigilance to prevent similar operational disruptions. The risk of similar incidents, coupled with the stringent reputation management required by the MFA, could potentially lead to funding cuts and work halts. The risks to victims and whistleblowers, including potential unemployment due to halted funding, adds to these concerns. To mitigate risks of SEAH (sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment), Vikes implemented online training sessions for the leadership and staff of both Vikes and its partners, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the issue. This training is part of a broader initiative to help all partners develop and enforce their PSEAH guidelines, especially where they were previously lacking. Moving forward, a collective effort from all stakeholders is crucial to establish more robust measures for the prevention and to address any form of misconduct, emphasising that the commitment to PSEAH extends far beyond merely having a written policy.

3.3. Overview of risk management in 2023

In 2023, Vikes continued to navigate a complex landscape of risks while pursuing its mission to support freedom of speech and press in various programme countries. The year was marked by the manifestation of significant external risks, primarily categorized under "Risk of damage", which posed threats to the safety and security of Vikes' partners, beneficiaries, and journalists in the programme countries. These risks, inherent to Vikes' operations in volatile regions, underscored the necessity of robust and adaptive mitigation strategies.

The risk management framework employed by Vikes in 2023 was generally effective, though it revealed areas needing enhancement. During the latest update in August 2024, the risk matrix was updated to include a column for direction of travel (risk increasing/decreasing/static), allowing Vikes to monitor the evolving nature of risks more closely and to implement preventive measures as necessary. Yet, although the risk matrix offers a structured approach to risk management, the practical application of mitigation measures has been more nuanced and

further development of Vikes risk management practices is needed. The effectiveness of the response and mitigation measures often depends on the adaptability and local expertise of Vikes and its partners, which has proven essential in managing risks on the ground. However, there is room for improvement in aligning the risk matrix with on-the-ground realities. In addition, increasing risks related to limited human resources and technical failures highlight the need for continued investment in capacity building and technological support. Addressing these internal challenges is crucial to maintaining the effectiveness and sustainability of Vikes' programme.

4. Overall assessment of the year 2023 and lessons learnt



In 2023, the results achieved through Vikes' development cooperation programme meaningfully contributed to the overarching impact-level goal: strengthening the role of journalists and media organisations in civil society, thereby enhancing citizens' access to editorially independent information and improving diversity and gender sensitivity within the media sector. These advancements collectively aim to bolster freedom of expression and promote a more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development. This chapter reflects on the year's outcomes, examining the variations in results across different outcome areas and regions, the programme's contribution to impact-level changes, alignment with Finland's political agenda and SDGs, concluding with the key lessons learnt for future development.

4.1. An analysis of the achieved results within the programme

Despite the challenges, the second year of Vikes' development cooperation programme has proven to be a successful period, with a noticeable increase in indicator data and useful information regarding programme progress, including outcome-level advancements. This improvement indicates that the groundwork laid in 2022 has indeed yielded positive results. Unlike the previous year, where no significant differences between various outcome areas were

evident, 2023 has revealed distinct variations in the achievement of results across the different outcome areas and geographical areas.

Outcome area 1, focusing on diverse and inclusive reporting and quality journalism reaching wider audiences, has made noteworthy progress. In Somalia, although target levels were adjusted downward due to budget cuts and initial delays in activity commencement, the programme has still managed to achieve good results, albeit slightly below the revised targets. In Myanmar, the situation has been more variable. While the fragile security environment led to lower audience numbers than anticipated, the strong risk management capacity of the local partner enabled them to achieve most of the other targets effectively. The Women in Media project presents a more complex picture; with indicator data showing considerable variability within outcome area 1. This inconsistency stems from the fact that this outcome area was added to the project's results matrix only during the annual reporting thus affecting the systematic collection and analysis of relevant data. Despite these challenges, the overall programme progress in this outcome area has been considerable.

In contrast, **outcome area 2**, which aims to mainstream gender equality in the policies and practices of media organisations, has seen only moderate progress. This area requires attention and corrective measures to meet its set objectives. The misalignment between different contexts, the focus of the partners and their activities, and indicators has posed significant challenges. In Somalia, progress has been slower than planned, while in Myanmar, the results have varied significantly. In Central America, there has been no significant change in outcome area 2, either positive or negative. The Women in Media project has struggled with systematic data collection and budget cuts, and appropriate activities that align with this outcome area have not been effectively implemented. As a result, accurately gauging progress has been difficult, indicating the need for a more strategic approach to align activities with the set objectives.

Outcome area 3, which focuses on strengthening the self-sufficiency of Vikes' partners and enhancing their ability to advocate for freedom of expression and protect member interests, has generally progressed well. Many targets have already been met or even exceeded, although the PMEL system remains under development. While indicator data varies across programme components, this variation does not significantly impact overall progress. Notably, in Central America, progress has been commendable despite a challenging operational environment. In East Africa and Somalia, there has been above-average collaboration with duty-bearers, contributing to the successful advancement of this outcome area.

Similarly, **outcome area 4**, which aims to increase the commitment of duty-bearers and enhance public understanding of freedom of expression, sustainable development, and media representation, has also seen substantial progress. Many targets have nearly or fully been achieved and in some cases, even exceeded. This outcome area has particularly benefited from strong progress in global education, which has positively impacted the overall success.

In summary, the results of 2023 demonstrate clear differences in the levels of achievement across the four outcome areas of Vikes' development cooperation programme. Outcome area 1

has made the most significant strides, especially in promoting diverse and inclusive reporting. Outcome area 2 has encountered more challenges, requiring further alignment and targeted efforts to meet its objectives. Outcome area 3 has shown robust advancement, particularly in partner self-sufficiency and advocacy efforts, while outcome area 4 has also marked positive developments, notably in global education. These variations highlight the necessity for tailored strategies and resource allocation to address specific challenges, to capitalise on strengths within each outcome area and capacity building of partners, ensuring the continued success of the programme.

4.2. Contribution to impact-level changes

In 2023, the Vikes development cooperation programme demonstrated meaningful progress toward its impact-level goals. These goals focused on expanding the influence of media organisations, enhancing access to editorially independent information, and promoting diversity and gender-sensitivity in media content. The advancements of 2023 reflect the programme's sustained efforts to support freedom of expression, gender equality, and democratic development within the media sector. While the absence of impact-level baseline data makes it challenging to quantify the extent of the current improvements, impact-level indicator data was mostly successfully collected in 2023, supporting the monitoring and evaluation of progress in the future.

The outcome-level achievements observed in 2023 have contributed to the programme's broader impact-level goals of enhancing freedom of expression and promoting democratic development within the media sector. The adoption of gender policies, increased capacity of media personnel, and the production of diverse media content have all played roles in creating a more credible and influential media landscape.

Media organisations that have implemented gender policies and training programmes have enhanced their reputation and influence within their communities, serving as models for others. Initiatives like "La Sala" and the involvement of women in leadership roles in Central America indicate a shift towards greater female representation and influence in the media sector. The programme's focus on training and policy implementation has led to a noticeable improvement in the production and dissemination of independent information. Reports from various regions indicate an increase in gender-sensitive reporting and content that addresses the needs and perspectives of diverse and marginalised groups. This shift is crucial for fostering a more inclusive media environment. The programme has also made strides in improving access to editorially independent information, a crucial element in fostering informed and engaged communities. In East Africa, for example, the establishment of community radio portals in Tanzania and Uganda and the work of trained journalists in Kenya have helped expand access to independent media content, particularly from rural areas.

These developments are crucial for fostering a media environment that supports democratic values and human rights, and the efforts of Vikes and its partners are expected to yield even broader impacts in the coming years. The positive trends observed in 2023 provide a strong foundation for continued progress, but a more systematic approach to data collection and

analysis will be crucial for demonstrating and enhancing the programme's impact in future years.

4.3. Contribution to Finnish political agenda

Vikes' development cooperation programme has contributed to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aligning with Finland's broader political agenda on human rights, democracy, gender equality, and sustainable development. Through targeted interventions in media diversity, gender equality, and advocacy, the programme has enhanced the role of journalists and media organisations in civil society. This has led to improved access to independent information, greater inclusivity in media practices, and strengthened democratic governance, paving the way for a more equitable and sustainable future in line with Finland's development cooperation objectives.

Human rights and freedom of expression (SDG 16)

Vikes programme actively promotes and defends human rights, particularly freedom of expression, which is fundamental to democratic societies (SDG 16). Through capacity-building initiatives, advocacy campaigns, and legal support, Vikes has empowered media organisations and journalist unions in partner countries to advocate effectively for press freedom. By promoting editorial independence and supporting investigative journalism, the programme has enhanced transparency and accountability in governance. This aligns with Finland's commitment to promoting human rights globally.

Gender equality and inclusive media practices (SDG 5, SDG 10)

Gender equality is mainstreamed throughout Vikes' programme, reflecting Finland's emphasis on promoting women's rights and empowerment (SDG 5). Vikes and its partners have worked closely with media organisations to integrate gender-sensitive reporting practices and to empower women journalists, contributing to reduced inequalities (SDG 10) by amplifying voices of marginalised groups through media. By fostering an inclusive media environment that amplifies diverse voices and perspectives, Vikes' programme efforts contribute to Finland's goal of advancing gender equality both within media sectors and in broader society. This is in line with Finland's commitment to the global agenda on gender equality and women's empowerment, including its efforts through international development cooperation.

Enhancing Finland's global engagement (SDG 17)

The programme has facilitated strong partnerships and collaborations, resonating with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Through networking events and strategic alliances, Vikes has fostered a cooperative environment where media organisations share best practices and support each other in advocacy and capacity-building efforts. This global engagement has amplified the impact of Finland's development cooperation on media freedom and democratic governance. By facilitating exchanges of expertise and promoting mutual understanding between Finland and partner countries, Vikes enhances Finland's role in global discussions on democracy, human rights, and sustainable development.

Quality education and skills development (SDG 4)

Vikes' programme has contributed to SDG 4 (Quality Education) by providing training and capacity-building initiatives, thus enhancing the technical and vocational skills of young journalists and media professionals and improving their employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Additionally, the programme has promoted education on sustainable development, human rights, and gender equality through media content and global education, contributing to a culture of peace and global citizenship both in Finland and in programme countries.

Sustainable industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9)

The programme's efforts to improve access to information and communication technology align with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), particularly target 9.c. By establishing community radio portals in Tanzania and Uganda and supporting the adoption of online platforms by community radios, the programme has enhanced the accessibility and affordability of information and communication technologies in underserved regions. These initiatives have not only improved the dissemination of editorially independent information but also fostered innovation and sustainable practices within the media sector.

4.4. Lessons learnt and future development needs

The Vikes development cooperation programme has continuously evolved, driven by a commitment to foster freedom of expression, gender equality, and sustainable development. Over the past year, numerous lessons have been learned and various areas for future development have been identified. This chapter examines the key themes that have emerged from project and programme implementation and internal assessments, providing insights into the programme's progress and outlining the necessary steps to enhance its impact and effectiveness moving forward.

Development of Vikes PMEL system

The programme results framework was revised after previous reporting of 2022 to clarify the definitions of indicators, eliminate overlapping indicators, and provide clearer distinctions between outcome areas 1 and 2, aligning data collection plans and sources of data with available resources, and supporting effective tracking of outcomes throughout the programme period. Yet, it has become evident that while the quantity and quality of data produced by the programme have improved, many partners still face challenges in data collection and analysis.

The shift to a programme support model has led to inconsistencies between the previous project-focused reporting methods and the new programme requirements. This transition has highlighted the need for a more streamlined and coherent reporting framework that addresses both project and programme-level needs. Developing a standardised yet flexible reporting framework that aligns project-level data with programme-level requirements is essential. Simplified reporting procedures should be adopted across all projects to ensure consistent and

accurate data collection. This will enhance overall programme monitoring and provide a clear picture of achievements.

In addition, the current annual reporting process, which involves a significant amount of data collection through the results framework and extensive narrative reports, has proven to be resource-intensive and cumbersome. One of the primary challenges is the sheer volume of data that needs to be managed. While the results framework has been developed to facilitate more efficient data analysis, the narrative reports require substantial manual effort to review, extract, and organise the content for comprehensive analysis. This dual system – semi-automated data handling in the results framework versus manual processing of narrative reports – creates inefficiencies and increases the risk of inconsistencies in the final programme analysis. To address these issues, future improvements should focus on streamlining the reporting process to reduce manual work and improve data integration. One potential solution could involve enhancing the alignment between the results framework and narrative reports, possibly through the development of a unified digital platform that allows for seamless integration and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Building on the plans from 2022, Vikes will continue to emphasize more systematic data collection and ongoing monitoring practices. The results framework and overall PMEL system will be further developed during the planning of the next programme period, Q3 of 2024 onwards, utilising insights from the programme's mid-term evaluation.

Strengthening risk management

There is clear need to refine the risk matrix to better reflect the practical challenges faced by the on-the-ground operations, such as incorporating more flexible and context-specific mitigation strategies that can be quickly adapted as situations evolve. Flexible risk management is already done on the ground, but enhancing flexibility in Vikes' risk management tools would support the systematisation of good practices and improve their usability. Building and maintaining strong local partnerships are critical in navigating the complex risk environment and leveraging local knowledge while fostering collaboration with regional stakeholders. Furthermore, including international entities will enhance Vikes' capacity to respond to emerging threats. To address the increasing strain on human resources, Vikes together with its partners could also benefit from more strategic workforce planning, ensuring that staffing levels and competencies align with the demands of its programme and projects. This may involve expanding training programmes and seeking additional funding to support staffing needs. In addition, regularly updating risk assessments and monitoring the effectiveness of mitigation measures is essential to help Vikes identify gaps and adjust its strategies proactively, ensuring that risks are managed effectively, and Vikes remains resilient in the face of new challenges. Strengthening risk management was also highlighted by the KPMG review, and it will be prioritised during the current programme period.

Capacity-building of partners

Internal assessments have revealed that while day-to-day management by local partners is effective, areas such as strategic development, funding, financial management, and reporting

often require support. The capacity building of partners may include involving international or local consultants to provide expert guidance and support, and enhancing local capacities in strategic planning, risk management, financial management and reporting to ensure that local teams are better equipped to manage and scale their operations effectively. Yet, as the organisational capacities of the partners vary, so does their need for support. Thus, these efforts will build on the partner capacity assessments started in 2023 and continued in 2024, focusing on the aspects that each partner finds the most topical for them.

Accountability and transparency between Vikes and its partners

Ensuring accountability and transparency has been a continuous effort, with regular meetings, workshops, and feedback sessions being key components of this process. However, there is always room for improvement in maintaining open communication channels between Vikes and its partners and involving all stakeholders in decision-making. Maintaining and enhancing accountability and transparency requires active engagement with partners and stakeholders. Regularly scheduled meetings, workshops, and feedback sessions should continue to be prioritised. This is increasingly important as Vikes starts the planning process of the next programme period, to ensure that the objectives, processes and practices will be in line and support the work of both Vikes and its partners.

Conclusion

The Vikes development cooperation programme has made significant progress in several areas, yet few key challenges remain. By focusing on improving data quality and analysis, enhancing PMEL systems and risk management, building strategic capacities, and ensuring accountability and transparency, the programme can continue to advance its goals of freedom of expression, gender equality, and sustainable development. The lessons learned provide valuable insights, and the identified future development needs offer a clear roadmap for enhancing the programme's impact and effectiveness in the coming years. While there has been progress in many areas compared to 2022, continued efforts are needed to fully address the remaining development needs and achieve the programme's long-term objectives.