

Final Report for the Mid-Term Evaluation of Vikes Programme



“Empowering rural communities through media East Africa”

“Independent Media Support Programme in Central America (phase 3)”.

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List of Abbreviation

Agenda 2030	United Nations' Agenda for Sustainable Development
APES	El Salvador Journalism Association
COMNETU	Community Media Network Uganda
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CAHC	Central American Association Humboldt Centre
CA	Central America
DTM	Development Through Media
DW	Deutsche Welle
EA	East Africa
Fingo	Finnish Development NGOs
FGDs	Focus Groups Discussions
FLED	Fundación para la Libertad de Expresión y Democracia
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IREX	Global Development Organization
ICT	Information Communication Technology
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
MCT	Media Council of Tanzania
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
PCIN	Journalists and Independent Communicators of Nicaragua
ToR	Terms of References
RB	Radio Baraza
RACCS	South Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region
RACCN	North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region
TADIO	Tanzania Development Information Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
VIKES	The Finnish Foundation for Media and Development
UJA	Uganda Journalists Association
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	U.S.A. Agency for International Development

Executive summary

The final report presented is a product of the mid-term-evaluation of Vikes programme that include two case projects: “*Empowering rural communities through media*” in East Africa and the project “*Independent Media Support Programme in Central America (phase 3)*”, from 2021 to 2024.

Vikes programme 2022-2025, funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland aims **to strengthen the role of journalists and media organizations in civil society and thus improve citizen's access to editorially independent information, and the diversity and gender-sensitivity within the media sector.**

The main outcomes of the Vikes programme founded on 1. production of inclusive reporting and quality journalism reaching wider audiences, including marginalized groups; 2. Gender equality mainstreamed in the policies and practices of media; 3. strengthened role of independent media and journalists in civil society, improving capacities to support their members to successfully advocate for the freedom of expression. Vikes programme is committed to the principles of Finland’s development policy, which **includes cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, non-discrimination toward ethnics’ minorities and person with disabilities, climate resilience, and low emission development.** In addition, the programme is founded on human rights approach, which main goal is to improve access of information.

These programme outcomes come from a defined action linkages contained in the **Vikes' theory of change.** According to Vikes approach to change **supporting in trainings, networking and capacity building with project partners, will have improved their capacity to support their members and media professionals and will lead a stronger role in the civil society for successfully advocate for freedom of expression.** Consequently, they will have enabled an environment that expands and gives access to information to a wider audience, including vulnerable groups, who will contribute to more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development.

The evaluation was conducted from February to June 2024. To guide this mid-term evaluation, Vikes ToR proposed **eleven evaluation questions, divided into five criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Sustainability, Impact and other issues on Vikes’ theory of change impact, indicators and linkages.**

The **main objectives of this evaluation** are:

- to assess and evaluate the progress of Vikes programme and the case projects against programme and project objectives and provide recommendations on what could be changed to increase the likelihood that the programme reaches its objectives.
- to assess the sustainability of the case projects and provide recommendations on how the programme strategies could be improved to strengthen the sustainability of the results.
- to assess the validity of Vikes theory of change and provide recommendations for its improvement and for future interventions.

Based on the agreement reached with Vikes’ representatives, **consultants proceeded to evaluate each case project and analysing the connection at programme level, which would validate Vikes theory of change to reach the priority objective of the evaluation.** The methodology of the evaluation was based on the collection of both qualitative and quantitative information. After gaining a comprehensive understanding of the project's design and on-ground dynamics, data collection mainly focused on document reviews for the quantitative data and key informant interviews for the qualitative data.

The evaluation team visited three countries of East Africa and three countries of Central America aiming to obtain an unbiased assessment of the Vikes program's implementation and outcomes including exploring on key lessons learned, best practices, and recommendations for future initiatives. Interviews and FGDs discussions were held with the respondents that were purposively sampled in accordance with Vikes representative. **In East Africa** data collection process progressed smoothly during field visits, although challenging weather conditions, such as heavy rains and floods, hindered travel to rural areas in East Africa, posing risks. **In Central America** despite the complex context the team collected the data smoothly during the field visit. However, was limited in FGDs participation mainly due to fear of reprisal and aggression. In the next table follow a resumed table of conclusions and recommendations coming from the evaluation exercise.

Dimensions	Conclusions	Recommendations
<p>Relevance Are the case projects relevant for the needs of the partners and journalists in East Africa and Central America?</p>	<p>The evaluation found that case projects are relevant for the Vikes partners and journalist in both target region. In East Africa project has significantly enhanced the skills and capabilities of journalists across three countries, enabling them to effectively integrate digital technologies. In Central America despite the worsening of the political situation the project is relevant to journalists but demands to be adapted to the independent press workings from exile.</p>	<p>In East Africa partners are recommended to strengthen their skills by training on digital advertising and quality recording. Also, to coach their editorial feedback mechanisms and to concentrate on their capacity building to institutionalize key project activities.</p> <p>For Central America is recommended to continue strengthening partner's axes of activities, receiving dedicated trainings, coaching in strategy, and media organization management.</p>
<p>To what extent is the Vikes theory of change and programme results framework consistent with the needs and priorities of the partners and beneficiaries?</p>	<p>In Central America Vikes' theory of change and programme results are consistent with the needs and priorities of the partners and beneficiaries, but it urgently needs to face new challenges for independent journalism, still living a forced exile with no short-term prospects for improving their situation. While in East Africa two third of the assumptions in Vikes theory of change and programme results framework are consistent with the needs and priorities of the partners and beneficiaries.</p>	<p>In Central America it is highly recommended to involve Vikes partners in the design of the new programme to give direct voice to the diverse parts of society that journalists represent.</p> <p>In East Africa challenges still exist in prompting relevant authorities to respond effectively to stories. It suggests continuing project activities to ensure the strengthening of democracy and access to information for all, especially for marginalized groups like women facing barriers to participation.</p>
<p>How the cross-cutting objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination have been integrated into programme design and implementation?</p>	<p>The evaluation concludes that the cross-cutting issues were integrated to the programme in both region and they have been a useful component to quality investigative journalism.</p>	<p>In East Africa it is recommended to expand training modules and specialize workshops based on cross-cutting issues. In Central America interchange among different region partners (Central America and East Africa) is recommended especially in peer-to-peer modality where partners could work together and share their expertise and knowledge.</p>
<p>Effectiveness To what extent have the programme and the case projects achieved their intended outcomes and outputs?</p>	<p>In both regions the case projects archived with their intended results and outcome even though in Central America partners needed to adapt the activities to the new exile condition.</p>	<p>In East Africa it is recommended to: Document the project model for integration into the relevant ministries strategies to support development journalism; to embed a clear learning agenda in its monitoring to capture the overall journey of empowering rural communities In Central America it is highly recommended a support to organization/media partners in restoring activities in legal, operative and economical terms and to foster coordination and collaboration among partners.</p>
<p>Are the case projects contributing to the intended outcomes of Vikes programme?</p>	<p>The case projects in both regions are contributing to Vikes programme outcomes, even though in Central America the press freedom and freedom of expression of journalists and CSOs are under threats.</p>	<p>In East Africa partners need to collaborate with the government towards establishing better protocols for journalists to access information from government sources. In Central America it is recommended, to continue supporting media organization and independent journalists and provide them funds their own survival and therefore for citizens to have access to independent information.</p>
<p>Have the relevant risks been identified and appropriately managed at project and programme level?</p>	<p>Both case projects in East Africa and Central America have an appropriately management risk into practice and know how to get partners involve.</p>	<p>In East Africa, it is suggested to improve the financial stability of partners by assisting them in developing resource mobilization strategies. Also to update the risk management and be review by partners. In Central America it is recommended, to follow the situation by having constant contact with partners, expert journalists, or other donor organizations for a coordinate support in media protection.</p>
<p>Sustainability How sustainable the results of the case projects are expected to be?</p>	<p>In East Africa: the evaluation of the project highlighted its strong emphasis on sustainability through several</p>	<p>In East Africa, it is recommended to increased engagement with radio owners to foster a willingness to invest; also, to improve clarity regarding portal costs and the financial implications of maintaining it; to</p>

	<p>strategic mechanisms designed to maintain results after its completion. In Central America the sustainability of the results is highly connected to new funding due to journalists and media need to face a new scenarios and challenges of exile journalism and is linked to the journalism community internal and international capacity to support their recovery</p>	<p>increase project visibility that promote uptake of the project and scalability to other areas In Central America, it's highly recommended to finalize, consolidate, and operationalize the partners proposals into a cohesive plan as a fundamental document to orient organization future path.</p>
<p>Are there relevant and appropriate strategies and plans to ensure sustainability of benefits?</p>	<p>In East Africa there no concrete written strategy for sustainability but rather plans on integration of activities that remain in the preliminary stages. In Central America, sustainability of the project's achievements is deeply rooted in the engagement of the local partners, thus a strategic plan and re-institutionalization are vital.</p>	<p>East Africa, it is recommended to support partners to consolidate existing undocumented proposals into a plan; to prioritize the retention of an active editorial team; to build capacity in resource mobilization; to prepare a transitioning plan. Central America, a new support program is highly recommended involving all the partners and other stakeholders with a participatory approach. Moreover, a dialogue among donors is necessary to avoid duplication of efforts and fund overlapping.</p>
<p>Impact Are the case projects contributing to the intended impact of Vikes programme?</p>	<p>Central America and East Africa cases projects are making significant contributions to the Vikes program's intended impact of strengthening journalists' and media organizations' roles in civil society, because it improves citizens' access to information and enhances diversity and gender-sensitivity within the media sector.</p>	<p>Addressing practical limitations and ensuring the project's sustainability are critical next steps in both regions to solidify and extend the contribution to more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development and above all amplify the positive impacts carried on.</p>
<p>Other questions Are the linkages in Vikes theory of change, especially between outcomes and impact, strong and valid?</p>	<p>Despite the complicate environment in Central America projects successfully managed to advocate for freedom of expression and demonstrated resilience in accordance with the theory of change's assumptions. East Africa the evaluation revealed a logical link between the project assumptions, output and outcomes are coherent.</p>	<p>To continue supporting all partners to address freedom of expressions through training, advocacy capacity building, and access to information.</p>
<p>How appropriate and usable the Vikes impact level indicators are, considering the theory of change and available resources for data collection and analysis?</p>	<p>The evaluation confirms that Vikes' impact level indicators are well-aligned with its Theory of Change, effectively focusing on essential areas such as capacity building, media diversity, freedom of expression, and democratic values.</p>	<p>To further the project needs to differentiate and unpack outcomes according to the roles and influence of various actors, as these actors operate in different capacities and environments.</p>

Introduction

The present final report presents the results of the mid-term evaluation of The Finnish Foundation for Media and Development (Vikes) programme based on two case projects: *“Empowering rural communities through media”* and the project *“Independent Media Support Programme in Central America” (phase 3)*. Both cases project duration period is 2021-2024.

The final report takes into consideration the evaluation ToR, the evaluation proposal, and the evaluation planning and strategy described in the inception report, where Vikes’ representatives reached a common understanding of the evaluation design and process with the consultant’s team.

Vikes since its foundation in 2004 devoted its **efforts to strengthening democracy and active civil society by supporting freedom of expression, quality journalism, and pluralistic media around the world**, together with its partners who are independent media, media associations, journalists’ union, and civil society organizations (CSOs).

With its **first development cooperation programme 2022–2025**, funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA), Vikes decided to restructure its actions moving from a project based to a stronger programmatic approach. The programme was built on projects designed to be implemented in more than one country; thus, they are intertwined: Empowering rural communities through media 2021-2024 in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya; Independent Media Support Programme in Central America (phase 3), 2021–2024; Women in the Media – Towards Gender Equality in Media and Journalism in Nepal and Tanzania 2021–2024; and Freedom of Expression and Democracy as a Prerequisite for Democracy: Study programme for media students, 2021–2022, in Finland.

Vikes’ programme top objective is **to strengthen the role of journalists and media organizations in civil society and thus improve citizen's access to editorially independent information, and the diversity and gender-sensitivity within the media sector**.

The main outcomes of the Vikes programme are:

1. Media organizations 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 houses.
3. Journalist unions, media associations and independent media have a strengthened role in civil society and better capacity to support their members and media personnel, interconnect the media sector, support quality journalism, and to successfully advocate for the freedom of expression.
4. Vikes and Finnish media professionals supported by Vikes increase the understanding among the audience on freedom of expression, and provide new perspectives on sustainable development, developing countries and development cooperation.

The main outcomes of the programme come from a defined action linkages contained in the **Vikes' theory of change**. According to Vikes approach to change supporting in trainings, networking and capacity building with project partners, will have improved their capacity to support their members and media professionals and will lead a stronger role in the civil society for successfully advocate for freedom of expression. Consequently, they will have enabled an environment that expands and gives access to information to a wider audience, including vulnerable groups, who will contribute to more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development.

To guide this mid-term evaluation, **Vikes ToR proposed eleven evaluation questions**, divided into five dimensions: **Relevance, Effectiveness, Sustainability, Impact, and other issues on Vikes’ theory of change impact, indicators and linkages**. Based on the agreement reached with Vikes’ representative during the evaluation meetings consultants proceeded to a carry out **to evaluate each case project** on the first three criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, and Sustainability) and **continued analysing** the last two criteria (Impact

and other issues on Vikes' theory of change impact, indicators and linkages) **at the programme level**, it's to say in a framework of Vikes development cooperation programme 2022–2025.

The decision to follow this approach was made considering:

The political and social contexts of the case projects in the two regions of action have evolved over the years in different ways, in the last years Central America is experimenting a repressive and hindering period towards independent journalism. Based on the above considerations, **case project coordinators expressed** the need for an evaluation of individual projects before placing them in a programme context. This approach would have allowed for feedback on the progress of case project activities and then analysed them in a programme approach for the future Vikes development cooperation period.

The present report is intended for the following users:

Vikes decision makers: It will contribute to construct Vikes programme in 2026 for confirming or changing strategic orientations. In this direction, the recommendations are going to be consolidated for the two projects and could serve as a guide for designing a next-step programme.

Vikes project managers and partners: it will help project managers to adjust management, coordination and/or their interactions with their partners and beneficiaries. In this direction, detailed information, quotes from interviewees' thinking, and lessons learned are provided together with more technical issues.

Donors: It will be also useful to donors that funded the project/programme and expect to receive accounts, so they will also get more information about the situation in the field, dynamics and changes for accomplishing the strengthening of freedom of expression and more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development.

This report follows a structure defined to allow have a project and programme result of the evaluation exercise. The first chapter is dedicated to the evaluation exercise background with the description of the contexts of operation in the two target regions, the description of the case projects and of the main framework of Vikes' programme and the theory of change supporting that. Methodology and limitation of the exercise are included in the chapter allowing a consolidated view of the basis of the evaluation. A second chapter enters the analysis of the evaluation dimensions and questions where findings are addressed, conclusions are reached, and recommendations are proportioned. A final chapter includes the main lessons learned emerged from the field interviews and some case studies significant for the investigation.

1. Evaluation background and approach

1.1 The regional operating environment and the case project

1.1.1 East Africa

The transformation of journalism in Africa during the 1990s was significant, reflecting the embrace of political pluralism and economic liberalization across many African nations. The media sector, previously under state control, evolved to include private enterprises, leading to a surge in both broadcast and print media outlets throughout the continent.

The media landscape in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda has evolved over the years, featuring a dynamic mix of traditional and digital platforms. For long **Tanzania**, historically was dominated by state-owned entities, now boasts a diverse range of newspapers, radio stations, and television channels catering to various audiences¹. However, the current landscape showcases mainstream media focused on urban areas, with ownership highly centralized. Since 2015 there have been variations regarding media work regulations. The media environment was relatively open, marked by a degree of press freedom and a growing number of private media outlets but still radio continues to be the significant medium. However, there were still instances of government interference, such as suspending certain media outlets and enforcing restrictive media laws. Under John Magufuli (2015-2021), the media landscape became significantly more restrictive, characterized by crackdowns on independent journalism and increased censorship through stringent laws like the

¹ <https://sturmer.at/pdf/themediahistoryoftanzania.pdf>

Cybercrimes Act and the Media Services Act. Numerous newspapers and radio stations were shut down for sensitive reporting, and journalists faced harassment and intimidation, leading to widespread fear and self-censorship. Under Samia Suluhu (2021-present), the administration has shown signs of a more open approach to media, taking steps to ease repressive measures imposed by the previous regime. Efforts have been made to revive dialogue with media stakeholders, and some previously banned media houses have resumed operations. The country has seen the rise of **community radio stations** that serve as crucial information dissemination venues. Challenges such as regulatory constraints and press freedom issues persist but the media remains integral to Tanzania's socio-political discourse.

Kenya boasts a diverse and mostly unrestricted media landscape compared to its neighbouring countries². The major media houses in Kenya, including Nation Media Group (NMG) and Standard Group Limited, are privately owned and hold significant influence in both print and broadcast media³. The country has many **licensed radio stations**, television broadcasters, daily newspapers, and online publications. Regulation of the media industry is overseen by the Communications Authority of Kenya (CA) and the independent Media Council of Kenya, which sets standards and ensures compliance. Various professional bodies exist in Kenya's media industry, such as the Kenya Union of Journalists, Kenya Editors' Guild, and others. While Kenya's constitution guarantees media freedom in theory, in practice, the media operates under a complex framework of laws scattered throughout civil and criminal statutes, which sometimes contradict the constitutional principles of freedom of the press.

Uganda's media scene is diverse, embracing various platforms including print, broadcast, and digital media⁴. The press features newspapers and magazines in both English and local languages. Radio remains a significant medium, particularly in rural areas, while **digital media is gaining traction**. Community radio stations have emerged as vital public spheres, providing local news and educational content in local languages. They face challenges like funding limitations and regulatory hurdles but continue to serve as essential communication hubs for local communities. Community radio has carved out a significant niche within Uganda's broader media landscape. These stations, typically operating at a local level, play a crucial role in reaching isolated and rural populations. They provide a platform for community dialogue, local news, and educational programming, often in local languages, making them invaluable for community development and cohesion. Uganda has seen a proliferation of community radio stations since the late 1990s, driven by liberal media policies and the recognition of radio as a tool for grassroots communication. However, these stations face various constraints such as limited funding, regulatory hurdles, and occasionally, political interference. Despite these challenges, community radios in Uganda continue to thrive and serve as vital public spheres where local communities can engage, share information, and participate in the democratic process.

Recent developments concerning freedom of expression have raised concerns. Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya have experienced significant declines in the World Press Freedom Index: Tanzania dropped 45 positions since 2016, Uganda fell 23 positions, and Kenya also slipped five positions. These countries have introduced new laws and regulations that empower authorities to monitor and censor the media, imposing severe penalties for alleged violations. Journalists critical of the government have faced threats, attacks, and arrests in Tanzania and Uganda. Some newspapers have even been banned or faced threats of closure. The limited space for freedom of expression has not only impacted journalists but also opposition politicians, civil society organisations, human rights activists, lawyers, religious leaders, musicians, and cartoonists. While government actions have restricted freedom of expression in general, community media has remained unaffected thus far.

² https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4710087

³ <https://www.kas.de/documents/285576/285625/Media+and+the+pandemic+-+The+fight+for+survival.pdf/3aca44b4-f20e-22c4-a1ad-d704b0bc0236?version=1.0&t=1624356800394>

⁴ https://www.communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/Uganda-Media-Landscape-report_BBC-Media-Action_February-2019.pdf

In the East Africa Region, **the Vikes case-project titled “Empowering Rural Communities Through Media”** commenced in 2021 and it is foreseen was to ends in late 2024. However, since project funds have been saved in previous years and will be saved also 2024 the project is expected to continue throughout 2025. The intervention started in Tanzania and scaled up to Kenya and Uganda in 2021. The aim was to improve and increase the media reporting from rural communities and upcountry settings in general, thereby giving the voice also to the rural populations that have been largely neglected by mainstream media even though they represent most of the population in all three target countries of the project.

The project utilizes Vikes' extensive experience in internet training and community media support in Tanzania, with a particular focus on the development of a community radio online portal, a Finnish online media innovation for sharing news. This initiative includes a Finnish online media innovation used for sharing news and podcasts from rural communities, as well as live online streaming of local radio broadcasts. While the project expanded to Kenya and Uganda in 2021, it fully took off in 2022 following the end of Covid lockdowns in those countries. Partnerships with local organisations in Kenya and Uganda are still in their early stages, unlike the longer-standing relationships with partners in Tanzania.

In Tanzania, the objective is to ensure the new online platform becomes fully operational and sustainable through user training with community radio stations and marketing support. In Uganda, a similar community radio online platform was developed with the help of Vikes and a Finnish technical team, with the pilot version launched in late 2022. Activities **in Uganda** involve user training, local trainer development, and marketing support. **In Kenya**, the project focuses on training and mentoring young journalists in rural areas to produce high-quality stories. The trainees' radio programs are broadcast on Radio Baraza's online radio platform. Additionally, the project supports Jamii FM community radio in Mtwara, Tanzania, in creating quality radio programs covering various important topics such as women and girls, persons with disabilities, natural gas resource management, and climate change adaptation. Another project component involves East African project partners and trainers coming together to network and collaborate on rural reporting initiatives.

The East Africa Project partners include Tanzanian Development Information Organization (TADIO), which is an umbrella for over 40 community radios who promote access to information, training, and networking for radios stations. Mtukwao Community Media /Jamii FM was founded in 2002 to produce video and audio for rural areas of Mtwara and Lindi, Tanzania. Uganda has the Community Media Network (COMNETU), which is an umbrella of community radio stations launched in 2013 to advocate development of community radio stations across Uganda. Development Through Media (DTM) located in Kenya is a non-profit organisation established in 1996 to support independent media.

1.1.2 Central America

In Central America the complex social-political contest is a threat, and it challenges press freedom and freedom of expression. Journalists continue to receive stigmatising discourse, aggressions, abuse of state power, from the governments. A report published by Voces del Sur⁵ shows increased alerts toward journalists in Salvador, Costa Rica, and Guatemala in 2023 compared to 2022. Honduras was listed as the third countries with three journalist's murder; and Nicaragua continue to be submerged in a severe political crisis since 2018 when the government started repressive and intimidating actions against human rights organizations and independent media⁶.

Over the past five years, in **Nicaragua** regulations that came into effect have restricted freedom of association and expression. Journalists, media and human rights organisations have been subjected to smear campaigns, illegal interference and criminalization. According to the Observatory of Attacks on Press Freedom by Periodistas y Comunicadores Independientes de Nicaragua (PCIN), in 2023 a total of 83 cases of press

⁵Voces del Sur is a regional network of some 17 Latin American civil society organizations working in coordination, it aims to promote and defend press freedom, freedom of expression, access to information and the safety and protection of journalists

⁶<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/nicaragua-systematic-human-rights-violations-ortega-murillo/>

freedom violations were registered from Nicaraguan journalists among abusive use of state power and threats and intimidation. But the same report expresses that the most dramatic violations are banishment, unlawful revocation of nationality, confiscation of property, and forced exile⁷. Most of these abuses were committed by judicial and national police officials.

Amnesty International⁸ report that among recent methods employed by the Nicaraguan government for limiting the ability of civil society actors to act, points out the revocation of legal recognition, raids on offices, and seizure of property and equipment. The Office of the High Commissioner from United Nations Human Rights, reported in February 2024, that the situation in Nicaragua has deteriorated over the last year, the government is “*incapacitating any kind of opposition in the long term*”⁹, and it will take years and resources to establish a country rule by law and respect of human rights. The Department of Home Security in the USA has announced that nationals of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, and their immediate family members, may request to come to the United States in a safe and orderly way. Qualified beneficiaries who are outside the United States and lack U.S. entry documents may be considered, on a case-by-case basis, for advanced authorization to travel and a temporary period of parole for up to two years for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit.

Many journalists had to leave the country or temporarily stop their activities for fear of reprisals. In exile, not all the independent journalists could continue their profession and had to find resources for their livelihood and support their families. According to the Observatory of Attacks on Press Freedom by PCIN, a total of 218 journalists have fled into exile since 2018¹⁰. At least 50% of Nicaraguan exiled journalists living in Costa Rica, don't have an official migration document and this also makes it difficult to enter the labor market. Journalists living in Nicaragua were forced to find other ways of living.¹¹

“Three years later, exile is no longer a temporary condition, or an emergency that forces us to relocate to another country. It is a permanent, long-term condition that imposes immense challenges for the practice of journalism”.¹² Carlos Fernando Chamorro

Moreover, this lack of sustainability plus the constant siege, intimidation, aggressions, (to journalist and family), stigmatizing discourse, has caused many media to close or try to help journalists exiled in high-risk situations. In remote areas of Nicaragua where there are no independent media, the only information people could access is the government official information, which jeopardizes the freedom of information to the communities. A report from *Fundación por la Libertad de Expresión y Democracia* shows that in seven departments of Nicaragua: Carazo, Chontales, Jinotega, Madriz, Nueva Segovia, RACCS, and RACCN the isn't an independent media coverage¹³. In addition, the closing of universities that were not pro-governmental is strengthening only the government media and excludes the new generation from critical and free information.

In **El Salvador**, the regime of exception, as the state of emergency is called, has been in effect since the end of March 2022. The Salvadoran Congress approved the suspension of constitutional guarantees at the request of the government of Nayib Bukele after an escalation of murders. The regime also includes penalties for journalists who disseminate information about the activities of criminal gangs by “*reproducing content allegedly reproduces gang messages*”. Journalists in the Central American country have taken several measures to express their concern. El Faro launched a protest measure unprecedented, shutting down its website for an entire day in rejection of censorship. The “regime” has aggravated the relation with journalists

⁷ Informe de ataques a la libertad de prensa y expresión 2023.

⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr43/6679/2023/en/>

⁹ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/A_HRC_55_27_AdvanceUneditedVersion1_0.pdf

¹⁰ Informe de ataques a la libertad de prensa y expresión 2023.

¹¹ Voces del Sur, 2024.

¹² Carlos Fernando Chamorro speech in occasion of receiving the Golden Pen of Freedom Prize <https://confidencial.digital/opinion/la-prensa-en-el-exilio-bajo-dictadura-la-ultima-reserva-de-la-libertad/>

¹³ Fundación por la Libertad de Expresión y Democracia. 2024.

and media. According to Voces del Sur, in EL Salvador, media have lost income because of government reprisal (advertisement), women journalists have left the profession and the country because of gender harassment and El Faro had to move the administration and legal status to Costa Rica because of the constant harassment from the government. In addition, the country registers an increased stigmatisation discourse, in 2022 (391.5%) to 700% in 2023,¹⁴ a criminalization of human rights activists, journalists, and community leaders and young people considering that more than 50 % of the arrests that have occurred involve teenagers' people.

In **Guatemala**, the journalist José Ruben Zamora from elperiódico was condemned to six years of prison for "*money laundry*" in the autumn of 2022; this action was done by the Public Ministry and the Judiciary, and led to the closing of his newspapers and the exile of many of its journalists¹⁵. This situation has emphasised the lack of freedom of the press and expression also in this country of Central America. Defamation campaigns, police harassment, and physical and verbal attacks are the main abuses suffered by journalists during their work

Guatemala according to data from Reporters sans Frontières¹⁶ occupies the number 127 position in the world ranking of freedoms and where journalists are forced to live and work often under threat of death. And the situation has not changed during 2023 either: in the days immediately preceding the second round of elections on August 20th, two journalists - Edin Alonso and Hugo Gutiérrez - were barbarically murdered. During Alejandro Giammattei's presidential term (2020-2024) many journalists, as well as public officials and opponents, were forced to emigrate abroad for exposing corruption. The new government of Bernardo Arévalo is committed to developing a public policy for the protection of media professionals.

The Central American region report Voces del Sur underlines that violence toward women and the LGTBQ+ community is more severe compared to men. The aggression to women or gay individuals is extended to their families, also disabled people and indigenous are victims of several forms of verbal and physical violence.

Vikes and Free Press Unlimited organization from The Netherlands coordinate and fund journalists and media in Nicaragua. They shared a common outcome and interest and coordinated work. Important donors in the region supporting press advocacy are some governmental and private organizations such as USAID, NED, IREX, Internews. There is no synergy among donors with smaller organizations present in the fields.

In the Central America Region, **Vikes case-project titled "Independent Media Support Programme"**, phase 3 was executed in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras. Due to the political and social situation, the small amount of budget for the phase III and the high cost of monitoring the three countries, Vikes decided to exclude Honduras from the direct activities. The project aims to invest in the cultivation of independent, innovative, and financially viable media platforms to ensure communities stay informed about pertinent issues in their surroundings and society.

The Central America project partners include, Centro Humboldt, now Central American Association Humboldt Centre (CAHC), established in 2022 in Guatemala, its mission is to protect the environment to achieve a good habitat. Onda Local, in Nicaragua/Costa Rica was a radio programme created in 2000, but since 2014 it merges to a digital platform to promote citizen participation, women's rights, and environmental issues. El Faro based in El Salvador and Costa Rica (administration), was created in 1998, is the first digital newspaper in Latin-America. It investigates topics related to corruption, immigration, democracy, human rights, freedom of expression/press, violence, and so on. PCIN, is the independent journalist union established in 2018 in Nicaragua, after the social-political outbreak. It aims to protect journalists and communicators and advocate for press freedom. La Sala, is a media women network (13), Galeria News, La Lupa, Vidas Caribenas, etc. created in 2020, it aims to give women journalists access to funds and create content based on gender equality.

¹⁴ Voces del Sur, 2023.

¹⁵ Voces del Sur, 2023.

¹⁶ https://rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure?data_type=general&year=2024

The Central America case project experienced a relocation of partners to Costa Rica and Guatemala because of the political context in Nicaragua and El Salvador. For this reason, the evaluation team visited Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Honduras was not supported by Vikes in the third phases; thus, it was not visited.

1.2 Vikes Programme and Theory of change

Currently, Vikes is implementing its first development cooperation programme 2022–2025, funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA). Vikes programme is in a transition from project based to a stronger programmatic approach. The programme is built on the ongoing projects in Africa, Nepal, Central America, and Finland.

Vikes programme the long-term objective of the programme is: **Journalists and media organizations have the capacity and enabling environment to provide editorially independent, pluralistic and inclusive quality media content which improves citizen's access to information, strengthens freedom of expression and thereby contributes to a more equitable, democratic and sustainable development.** The main outcomes include reporting and quality journalism for reaching wider audiences and marginalized groups; gender equality in the policies and practices of media houses; Journalist unions, media associations and independent media have a strengthened role in civil society for successfully advocating for the freedom of expression; Vikes and Finnish media professionals supported by Vikes increase the understanding among the audience on freedom of expression.

Vikes programme is committed to the principles of Finland's development policy, which includes cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, non-discrimination toward ethnics' minorities and person with disabilities, climate resilience, and low emission development. In addition, **the programme pillar is based on human rights approach**, which main goal is to improve access to information and it also aligns with many of the United Nations (UN) Agenda Sustainable Development 2030 which addressed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Vikes' theory of change is based on the work of its project partners, who have improved their capacity to support their members and media professionals. They have a stronger role in society, interconnect the media sector, produce quality journalism that is pluralistic and inclusive, and successfully advocate for freedom of expression. Consequently, **they will enable an environment that expands and gives access to information to a wider audience, including vulnerable groups, who will contribute to more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development.**

1.3 Methodology and limitation of the study

This is the first programme evaluation of the Vikes Programme, as well as the East Africa project. The evaluation team visited three countries of East Africa and three countries in Central America aiming to obtain an unbiased assessment of the Vikes program's implementation and outcomes including exploring key lessons learned, best practices, and recommendations for future initiatives.

The priority objectives of the evaluation were:

- ⇒ to assess and evaluate the progress of Vikes programme and the case projects against programme and project objectives and provide recommendations on what could be changed to increase the likelihood that the programme reaches its objectives.
- ⇒ to assess the sustainability of the case projects and provide recommendations on how the programme strategies could be improved to strengthen the sustainability of the results.
- ⇒ to assess the validity of Vikes theory of change and provide recommendations for its improvement and for future interventions.

The following evaluation questions were answered according to the identified criteria:

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Questions
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the case projects relevant for the needs of the partners and journalists in East Africa and Central America? • To what extent is the Vikes theory of change and programme results framework consistent with the needs and priorities of the partners and beneficiaries? • How the cross-cutting objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination have been integrated into programme design and implementation?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the programme and the case projects achieved their intended outcomes and outputs? • Are the case projects contributing to the intended outcomes of Vikes programme? • Have the relevant risks been identified and appropriately managed at project and programme level?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How sustainable the results of the case projects are expected to be? • Are there relevant and appropriate strategies and plans to ensure sustainability of benefits?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the case projects contributing to the intended impact of Vikes programme?
Other questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the linkages in Vikes theory of change, especially between outcomes and impact, strong and valid? • How appropriate and usable the Vikes impact level indicators are, considering the theory of change and available resources for data collection and analysis?

The methodology of the evaluation exercise as presented in the inception report was based on the collection of both qualitative and quantitative information. Most of the qualitative information was gathered through key informants' interviews as journalists and Vikes partners, conducted during field visits or online. The quantitative information was gathered from documents reviewed and from project reports provided.

Case study approach. Country case studies were used to take a more intensive look at the relevance, effectiveness, and programme coherence. These case studies were not intended to be representative of the overall project's experience, given the diversity among territories. Instead, the country studies were considered important to provide a more in-depth and grounded understanding of the case projects and how Vikes program is relevant to and how effective activities were in producing results on-the-ground.

The respondents were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling strategy is chosen because in this kind of studies the sample needs to relate to the information sought. Therefore, in the context of the study, the respondent's selection was done considering their engagement to project as key partner, journalist, or community level beneficiary. To ensure a mix of urban and rural characteristics, respondents at the sub-country level were selected with the assistance of Vikes coordinators and country partners.

In addition, during the fieldwork partners shared their gender policy, google metric analysis of social media, and reports. These documents were significant to intertwine with the results obtained from the interviewees and FGDs. How the two methods were employed are discussed here under.

- Document reviews played a pivotal role in providing insights into programme and project designs, anticipated outcomes, achieved outputs, and their alignment with logical frameworks. The documents reviewed included the East African and Central America project document, annual reports, training reports from partners, and reports from Vikes to the donor and programme-level documents.
- The KII were conducted to complement information obtained from documents by exploring perceptions of the project's relevance, outcome achievements, implementation experiences, recommendations for improvement, and sustainability viewpoints. In East Africa, they also aimed to assess the projects' impact

on communities, journalists, and radio stations, as well as identify success stories within the specific local contexts of implementation. The interviews followed a set guide, with emerging issues incorporated for further exploration.

There is no rule of thumb for how qualitative data should be analyzed. For this study a framework approach by Ritchie and Spencer (1993) was used (Ritchie, 1994). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for studies that are: short-term, start deductively with pre-set aims and objectives, and have more structured data collection, which is the case in this study. The framework was used to analyze the KII. QDA miner software was used to ease the data organization and analysis.

In East Africa data collection process progressed smoothly during field visits, although challenging weather conditions, such as heavy rains and floods, hindered travel to rural areas in East Africa, posing risks. Initially, various qualitative data collection methods were planned, including document reviews, key informant interviews (KII), FGDs, online surveys, and observations. The language of the interviews was both English and Kiswahili. Analysis started in the field to get a feel of how the questions were answered, so that modifications can be made for subsequent interviews.

However, **data collection mainly focused on document reviews and Key Informant Interviews** after gaining a comprehensive understanding of the project's design and on-ground dynamics. Some issues suitable for FGDs would have been identified during Key Informant Interviews as well. Given this, after conducting 33 interviews, it was deemed unnecessary to proceed with FGDs as no major issues needing FGDs were emerging. Instead, issues requiring collective discussions among partners in the region would be addressed during the validation of findings with partners at the presentation of preliminary results and final report.

In East Africa a total of 33 key informants were reached and concluded after 31 interviews due to reaching saturation, with no new information emerging beyond the initial. The following table reports the numbers and category of respondents reached in East Africa.

Country	Main Partners				Community Radio Journalists	Independent Journalists	Editors/Mentors	Community members	Total
	TADIO	Jamii FM	DTM	COMNETU					
Tanzania	2	5			4	NA	1	4	16
Kenya			1		NA	7	1	0	9
Uganda				3	4	NA	0	0	7
Vikes coordinator	1								1
Total interviews conducted									33

In Central America data collection was carried out in three countries: Costa Rica (for Nicaraguan displaced journalists), El Salvador, and Nicaragua. The method to collect information were 1) key informant interviews (KII) individual and group interviews to partners and 2) FGDs discussions with the partners of the project. These interviews and FGDs were conducted face-to-face and online. Because of the context of Central America mentioned above, most of interviewees are exiled journalists from Nicaragua who are based in Costa Rica, United State of America, and Spain. A total of 9 individual interviews were conducted, 4 group interviews, and 1 FGDs. From the interviewee and FGDs; 10 were women, 8 men, and 4 are from LGBTQIA+ community. The interview and FGDs used a set questionnaire guide. The language for the data collection was Spanish.

Despite the complex context in CA, the team collected the data smoothly during the field visit. However, the evaluation process had its limitations. A first limitation is referent to FGDs participation. It was planned to conduct two FGDs discussions (partners and journalists) but only a FGDs with partners representative was carried out. It was not possible to get one of the journalists. The reason was that journalists didn't follow

through with communication, one in Nicaragua manifested to be afraid because of reprisal and aggression from the government toward her and family. Second, the youth environmental trainees from the communities where CAHC worked, were scheduled to be interviewed. However, it was not possible to conduct these interviews because several trainees have fled the country, and those who remain have limited or no internet access. Third, a person listed to be interviewed was unavailable for difficulty in timing the interview.

In Central America a total of 18 key informants were reached. Numbers and category of respondents reached in the next table.

Countries	Main Partners individual interview	Main Partners Group Interview				Independent Journalists	Editors/Mentors/Experts	Participants for FGDs
		La Sala	PCIN	Onda Local	CAHC			
Nicaragua/Costa Rica	1	1		1		3	2	1
El Salvador	1				1			1
Nicaragua	1							1
Vikes coordinator	1							
Total of interviews and FDG	4	4				3	2	4

As stated in the inception report the field exercise with interview and FGDs followed the **Ethical Considerations** presented.

In **East Africa** all partners were notified about the evaluation by the regional coordinator. In addition, there was a kick-off meeting that aimed at explaining the requirements and needed support on the ground. This meeting proved helpful and smoothed the overall fieldwork. Identification of respondents was done through the coordinator and country partners. The list of key informants was prepared prior to the start of the fieldwork and further updated during the fieldwork.

While in **Central America**, the project coordinator suggested the main KI and many of them helped to get in touch with other displaced partner's staff. The evaluation team requested a letter of introduction from Vikes representatives and scheduled appointments for interviews after identifying 20 respondents. These appointments were facilitated by partners at the country level.

For both regions, all necessary permissions were managed by the project prior to interviews, all participants were briefed on the purpose and objectives of the evaluation, the nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality of their information. An information sheet outlining these details was provided, along with a consent form for participants to sign voluntarily. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the evaluation at any time without consequences.

Confidentiality of information shared by participants was prioritized throughout the evaluation process. Personal identifiers were carefully handled to prevent disclosure of sensitive information. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses at the beginning and end of each interview. To safeguard personal data, the evaluation team stored information securely. Interview transcripts were annotated with identifiers rather than names to protect anonymity. Files linking identifiers to names were securely stored and will be destroyed at the evaluation's conclusion. The evaluation adhered to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines set by the European Union to uphold data privacy, confidentiality, and ethical standards. Additionally, the evaluation team followed the ethical code of conduct outlined by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), as stipulated in the agreement signed by the team.

2. Evaluation Results

The results of the evaluation in this chapter are presented in accordance with the evaluation questions and criteria. For each question it will be a core analysis for each region of study some conclusions and some recommendations.

2.1 Relevance

2.1.1 Are the case projects relevant for the needs of the partners and journalists in East Africa and Central America?

EAST AFRICA: The evaluation found the project is relevant to East African partners and is relevant to the needs of journalists in the three countries.

All partners mentioned that Empowering Rural Communities Through Media Project has made a **significant impact by reaching segments of society that have been traditionally overlooked by mainstream media**. This outcome **aligns with the core missions of the local partners, particularly addressing the exclusion of rural communities**, the project has successfully targeted an underserved audience that forms a substantial part of the beneficiary population for civil society organizations and development programs in East Africa.

Additionally, the project's focus on consolidating social media, internet, and ICT has not only met the digital demands of rural journalists and community radios but **has also enhanced their online presence and programming quality**, enabling them to compete with commercial radios on a national scale.

Furthermore, by empowering rural journalists with essential skills and improving user interactions, the project has **facilitated a stronger connection between the audience and radio stations, leading to increased listener engagement and interest in programs**, particularly those related to climate change and agriculture. Lastly, the project's introduction of an online portal has not only connected remote communities within Uganda but has also **expanded global outreach, enabling diaspora communities to engage with and communicate through the radio stations**, thereby elevating the stations' reputation and influence both locally and internationally.

The project introduced an online portal for community radios, enabling individuals who relocated from regions like Western Uganda or Eastern Northern Uganda to urban areas such as Kampala to stay connected with their communities through radio broadcasts. **This online connection bridges physical distances, fostering a sense of community and belonging**. Additionally, it enhanced global outreach by facilitating communication with individuals in places like Sudan, Europe, and the United States of America. By engaging with diaspora communities and receiving messages from afar, the radio stations established a platform for global interaction, boosting their reputation and influence. **This extended reach transformed the stations from local entities to globally recognized players**, elevating their impact and positioning within the community and strengthening their branding and relevance beyond their immediate regions.

The evaluation found in the three countries of East Africa **the project design was participatory and was agreed upon by stakeholders**. For example, in Uganda it was mentioned that the project design involved active participation with the community radio stations, where the secretariat collaborated on developing proposals and presenting them to Vikes for approval. The same was true for TADIO, DTM, and Jamii FM. One of **the lessons learned** was that while the design aimed for universal benefits, it overlooked the diverse requirements of different stations, such as varied data connectivity issues and financial constraints. As a result, **some stations were more advanced than others**. The evaluation also noted that in each training recommendations for improvement were made.

Overall, **the project's impact on journalists** has been instrumental in **enhancing their skills, promoting development-oriented journalism, emphasizing a problem-solving approach, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement**.

The project has significantly enhanced the skills of journalists, promoting development-oriented journalism and a problem-solving approach while fostering continuous learning and improvement. It has helped journalists adapt to the digital age, boosting their confidence, productivity, and competitiveness in the labor market. Journalists from Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania have benefited greatly, expanding their digital literacy and capabilities to function in diverse digital environments.

In Kenya, the project improved journalists' ability to produce detailed and research-intensive stories, distinguishing credible information from falsehoods. It also enabled them to handle sensitive topics like sexual abuse with professionalism and sensitivity. Tanzanian journalists reported that the training positively impacted their writing skills, ethical considerations, and overall journalistic quality. The inclusion of a real-time editor who mentored and improved stories continuously emphasized iterative learning and enhancement.

Lastly, the project encouraged journalists to focus on developmental issues and grassroots journalism, highlighting the importance of serving community needs and bringing forward marginalized voices. The problem-solving approach taught journalists to identify community issues and seek solutions, promoting positive change through their stories. Peer learning across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda boosted productivity and innovation. Future improvements to the project could address training challenges through better management, training methods, equipment, and funding to enhance outcomes and impact.

Conclusions

The evaluation concludes that the Empowering Rural Communities Through Media Project has significantly **impacted East African partners by effectively addressing the exclusion of rural communities and enhancing their media presence**. By integrating social media, internet, and ICT, the project has **improved the digital capabilities and programming** quality of rural journalists and community radios, fostered stronger audience engagement and facilitated global outreach. This has **strengthened the connection between audiences and radio stations**, particularly benefiting programs on climate change and agriculture, and has elevated the reputation and influence of these stations both locally and internationally.

The evaluation concludes that **the project has significantly enhanced the skills and capabilities of journalists** across three countries, enabling them to effectively integrate digital technologies, produce high-quality, balanced stories, and adopt a development-oriented and problem-solving approach. This has not only broadened their professional repertoire and improved their institutional operations but has also fostered a culture of continuous learning, increased confidence, and competitiveness in the media landscape.

Recommendations

Enhance Advertising and Digital Skills: Local partners noted the potential for online platforms to generate revenue through advertisements. It is recommended that the project to continue to provide more comprehensive training on utilizing digital portals for advertisement including content monetization.

Continue to train journalist on recording techniques and scriptwriting to enhance the quality of their reports. Also, recommended additional training on professional recording methods.

It is recommended that for the remaining period of the project **Vikes to concentrate on partner capacity building to enabled them to institutionalize key project activities** including improving their capacity in resource mobilization

CENTRAL AMERICA: The evaluation found the project is relevant to Central American partners priorities despite the worsening of the political situation and found the project is relevant to Central American journalists but demands to be adapted to the independent press workings from exile.

The premise of the evaluation exercise is that 2021 **has been a year that has impacted the development of the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran press**. It has been a year that has decreed the total aggravation of the relationship between the independent press and government authorities. Consequently, the definitive exile of most of Nicaragua's independent journalists as well as the displacement of other Salvadorean journalists and media, especially after the declaration in 2022 of the *“regimes of exception”* by President Bukele. These

events have had a significant impact on the development of the case-project in Central America, forcing **Vikes and its partners to adapt the project activities to the new scenarios.**

Following the evaluation matrix in the information needs to respond to the evaluation questions, the exercise found:

The case project in Central America incorporates the needs and priorities of Vikes's partners in the region.

There is a common agreement among Vikes's partners to **work on the axes that were identified in the framework of the case-project** in Central America and that resulted in the project outcomes as it follows:

- **Institutional strengthening and economic and financial media self-sufficiency (outcome1):** all partners consider a priority their institutional strengthening and financial sustainability with emphasis on revenue diversification, that would include non-only advertisement (as it was in the past) but also subscriptions, online video, pay per views) and new funding patterns through international donations, audience donations and the “monetization”¹⁷ of the social network.
- **Coordination and collaboration at local and regional level (outcome2):** interacting at regional level, promoting the collaboration among journalists and media in telling stories that transcend national peculiarities, encouraging the “*collaborative journalism*” that is not disregarding virtual framework, and interacting also directly with the audience. Moreover, quite all the respondents firmly agreed on the necessity to reaffirm physical and cyber security.
“There is still no formal change but an advance towards collaborative journalism. The relationship established with Vikes in a horizontal, supportive, and non-vertical way is a push towards collaborative journalism”. “Vikes is an historical actor with human relationship”.
- **Continuous training and coaching for reaching wider audience (outcome 3):** many respondents expressed some necessities coming exactly from the changing in the political and social situation of the last years: 1) the pandemic and the advance of digital media to the detriment of printed press and radio 2) forced displacement. It was highlighted the need to continue the process started for reaching diverse and wider audience through trainings and coaching direct to strengthening the organization internally (security plans, cyber security and digital trainings) allowing to work in different sensitive and divers topics (different ability, gender, environment)

Vikes provided support to partners for their organization in exile reflecting the need for institutionalization or re-institutionalization of partner organizations. They often affirmed the need to formalize an institutional situation of their living and working day by day in a host country.

The **participation of stakeholders in designing the project** needs some reflection. Members of the partners such as Onda Local, El Faro, and Central American Association Humboldt Centre declared to have participated in project design as well as in the definition of the indicators and have been moving forward with clear objectives. Moreover, the project case incorporates, in its phase 3, **recommendations and lessons learned coming from the Central America project evaluation in 2020.** Because of the good results reached by the previous Central America project phases¹⁸, it was mostly recommended to maintain the main components: continue improving partners' administrative and financial management, journalists networking, training, quality reporting, and investigative journalism. It was recommended to use flexibility in the planning process, because although many journalists were already in exile in 2020, there was a sense that the landscape would drastically deteriorate there and then.

The 2020 evaluation report highly recommended **taking care of the safety of journalists especially in security training.** In this regard, Vikes in Central America has been supporting journalists in managing their safety in exile and the impact of the importance of personal, and data security has been found.

On these premises, three **elements of change emerge from the field work that must be considered:**

¹⁷ It refers to a social media marketing strategy for income generating from the audience of the social channels. It can be based on digital products promoted (display ads) and/or exclusive content offered (such as online courses).

¹⁸ Evaluation of the Regional Independent Media Support Programme NICARAGUA, EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS, 2017–2019

- a change of strategy inside Vikes (project vs programme) that is not reflected in the field and thus did not allow to follow the progress of the indicators toward outputs and outcomes in a coherent way. There is a perceived disorientation among partners in the reporting process.
- a change of strategy inside partners for having to rethink the work in exile and abandon some activities carried out in their home country (especially Nicaragua). This has even resulted in a change of audience and communication strategy that requires a reflection on the new partners' priorities.
- a change in the major sources of funding coming from international cooperation, especially from the United States of America, which has been directed mainly to support more consolidated media with more years of experience or notoriety at the expense of independent media.

Conclusions

In Central America, despite the political situation, the case project is relevant to journalists and partners priorities, **with a high demand to be adapted to the independent press workings in exile**. For facing new challenges and for strengthening their role of independent information working from a foreign country it needs: to restore media organization structures; increase the mutual support and collaboration with other actors at regional level; and improve skills in economic and financial management.

Partners shared the importance of enhancing journalists' skills and continuous learning on digital environment, platform, online audience, social media and live streaming. These are clear signs of the growing importance of digital literacy and the need for media professionals (especially independent journalists and media) to adapt to and integrate new technologies in their work.

Recommendations

Is highly recommended to continue the support to partners hosted by neighbouring countries in:

- **Strengthening the main axes of work:** capacity building of their organizations in exile, oriented to financial and economic efficiency management; coordination and collaboration at Central America level as a joint voice toward the international community of donors; quality journalism and diversity inclusion
- **Coaching in strategic planning** and in new online technologies, social management and services in the cloud would be highly desirable.
- **Enhance advertising and digital skills:** providing more comprehensive training and coaching on utilizing digital portals for advertising and content monetization.
- **Include them in the next Vikes programme planning intended to have a clear vision** of the outcome and indicators designing and improving reporting system

2.1.2 To what extent is the Vikes theory of change and programme results framework consistent with the needs and priorities of the partners and beneficiaries?

EAST AFRICA: The evaluation found that about two third of the assumptions in Vikes theory of change and programme results framework are consistent with the needs and priorities of the partners and beneficiaries in East Africa Countries.

It was found that the political situation in East Africa has been stable not having adverse impact to the industry although selective story coverage has been prevailing especially when the stories are critical to the regime. Generally, there are assumptions that have been consistent with needs and priorities of the partners with **certain degree of practical limitation**. A detailed analysis of the following assumptions is presented below.

Assumption 1: Partners commit to common goals: The assumption 1 aligns with partners vision and purpose of addressing the media representation gap for rural communities. By targeting the underserved rural population, which constitutes a significant portion of civil society beneficiaries and development program focus, the organization demonstrates its commitment to a shared objective of inclusivity and equitable media coverage for all societal segments.

Assumption 2: Training, capacity building, and awareness lead to high-quality and diverse media that reaches vulnerable groups. The assumption aligns with the needs and priorities of partners and beneficiaries,

as training and capacity building have indeed led to diverse media reaching underserved communities through community radios and digital portals.

Assumption 3: *Pluralistic media ensures various voices are heard.* While generally successful, there may be challenges as journalists sometimes struggle to prompt relevant authorities' reactions to stories, hindering solutions.

Assumption 4: *Programme countries operate democratically* and respect freedom of expression and human rights. Constitutionally, this holds true; however, practical validation of information is necessary, suggesting room for improvement in implementation.

Assumption 5: *In restricted environments, media and civil society have the capacity to act courageously.* While the assumption is affirmed, the road towards acting despite restrictions remains long and challenging. The findings highlight several challenges faced by journalists this is discussed in detail in the effectiveness findings.

Assumption 6: Democracy is strengthened when people have access to information for decision-making and accountability. While there's a general positive trend, challenges persist, particularly for women facing barriers to access and participation due to lack of information and gender-related obstacles.

Conclusion

The findings affirm the alignment of assumptions with partners' visions and priorities in addressing media representation gaps for rural communities through **inclusive and equitable coverage**. Although training and capacity-building efforts have led to diverse and high-quality media reaching vulnerable groups, challenges exist in prompting relevant authorities to respond effectively to stories, **suggesting the need for continued improvement in implementation to ensure the strengthening of democracy** and access to information for all, especially for marginalized groups like women facing barriers to participation.

Recommendation

In the remaining period of the project, **it is recommended that to continuous training programs for rural journalists and community radio staff, focusing not only on digital skills** but also on gender-sensitive reporting. This will empower journalists to cover issues affecting marginalized groups more effectively.

CENTRAL AMERICA: The evaluation found that Vikes' theory of change and programme results framework are consistent with the needs and priorities of the partners and beneficiaries, but it urgently needs to face new challenges for independent journalism, still living a forced exile with no short-term prospects for improving their situation.

Vikes partners have recently begun institutional planning efforts. Partners are at different stages of strategic planning: for some of them the planning exercise is going underway while others have more consolidated working structures. **Even though partners are not familiar with Vikes programme, it's worth to say that, during the interviews, they have expressed consistency and coherence to Vikes programme outcomes** especially in the directions that they want their strategic planning to undertake. Institutional strengthening, coordination and collaboration among journalists in the region, deeper and continuous training are central pillars for their future institutional planning in the host countries.

Although Vikes' theory of change is based on some assumptions that allow to consider dynamics related to social and political scenarios such as those taking place at the present in Central America, (*In restricted environments, media and civil society have the capacity to act courageously or partners commit to a common goals or training, capacity building, and awareness lead to high-quality and diverse media that reaches vulnerable groups*) **it is necessary to consider new orientations and new assumption are requested when operating with independent journalism under repression**, such as a journalist friendly environment on exile and lessons learned from the previous experiences in activating contingency and security plans

The reaction of Vikes to the political and social emergency has been punctual and efficient, it has supported its partners in terms of security and in facing the contingency of the exile. In picturing the future, independent journalists visualize themselves in a kind of diaspora of journalists, in repositioning them between profession

and self-subsistence, in a professional relationship more and more virtual although more collaborative and conscious of the necessity to remain organized for increase their fundraising potential to survive as journalist in a new country as it was highlighted in. It's worth to say that these changes have not mostly affected the relevance of the case project in Central America and nor the connection at programme level that is still coherent and complementary in the region.

Conclusions

Vikes programme outcomes are consistent with the strategic and annual plan of project partners where they exist. Interviews to journalist and organization revealed a coordination and synergy with Vikes programme outcome in sharing priorities.

Assumptions of Vikes' theory of change need to be updated in the current social and political scenarios in Central America, and face to the new situation in exile and economic and financial difficulties. Changes in the political and social situation have created new needs and changes in local partners strategies

Recommendations

It is highly recommended to involve Vikes partners in the design of the new programme where they can express the priorities, needs and the difficulties they are going through to give direct voice to the changes needed to achieve an impact on society and a voice to the sensitive part of society that journalists represent. Vikes a demonstrated readiness to seek quick and efficient solutions to an emergency through their years in the region. **This wealth of experience should be valued and continue in shaping the next program of action**

2.1.3 How the cross-cutting objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination have been integrated into programme design and implementation?

EAST AFRICA: The evaluation found that for East Africa there were clearly earmarked deliverables calling for integration of cross cutting issues but the extent to which there are institutionalized and will last is questionable.

The crosscutting objectives (gender equality, non-discrimination, climate resilience and low emission development) are defined in Finland's development policy. To integrate this requirement at project level, the project developed deliberate thematic areas for journalists to focus on, aiming to encompass a variety of crucial topics. **Recognizing the importance of diversity and inclusion**, there were a specific drive to employ women and individuals with disabilities in journalism roles, fostering representation and diverse perspectives within the media landscape. Furthermore, the initiative **highlighted the critical need for reporting on essential issues such as the climate change, environment, disabilities, women's rights, and children's welfare**. These thematic areas were not only identified but also intended to be institutionalized, ensuring a sustained and structured approach to reporting on these significant matters from the remote rural communities. By embedding these themes into the fabric of media practices, the aim was for them to become intrinsic components of media coverage, ultimately leading to a more inclusive, representative, and impactful community media environment. The evaluation found several examples of integration and value addition of these thematic areas as presented in the following paragraphs.

In Tanzania for example it was demonstrated that there is strong commitment to integrating cross-cutting issues, specifically focusing on **people with disabilities**. The organization's approach to running a special program, "Wao ni Sisi," meaning "They are Us" weekly for people with disabilities shows a sustained and prioritized effort to provide visibility and voice to this marginalized group beyond just the occasional recognition during events like World Disability Day. Additionally, by collaborating with international partners, such as NGOs and individuals from Finland, and involving disabled artists, the project fostered a meaningful exchange of ideas and skills, thereby enriching the content and impact of the program. **This cooperation not only helped highlight the abilities and talents of people with disabilities but also created a bridge of support** and mutual assistance between local communities and international partners.

The negative effect for the case of Tanzania for example is related to the frequencies of airing the cross-cutting issues. **Despite the positive aspects, shifting from a weekly live program to a monthly documentary**

may have reduced audience engagement and immediate interaction. Live programs offer timely discussions and regular visibility, which might be diminished with less frequent documentaries, potentially lowering community involvement and ongoing interest

In Kenya for example the evaluation learned there are challenges, especially concerning its impact on **prevailing gender inequalities and discrimination within the socio-political context.** It has been observed that as stories are unveiled within communities, there is a gradual shift in societal norms, discriminatory laws, and unequal power structures, favouring disadvantaged groups. For instance, in Kisi County, society historically restricted women from seeking leadership roles meant for men, a groundbreaking moment occurred with the election of the county's first female leader. By shedding light on the barriers women face in leadership aspirations, the stories produced by the development reporter received significant praise for challenging entrenched power dynamics and traditional beliefs, thus **fostering progress towards gender equality.**

It was found that these thematic areas encompass technical aspects that require journalists to have a grasp of fundamental concepts. Moreover, due to their nature, they **demand proficiency in recording and the ability to conduct investigative journalism.** The project noted that a **significant number of participating journalists lacked this essential background,** resulting in weaker stories that necessitated multiple interactions with editors or mentors before being deemed suitable for broadcast.

Conclusions

The evaluation concludes that the **inclusion of cross-cutting issues was a useful component, as it expanded the story mix and stimulated investigative journalism with a rural focus.** This approach has enriched content and emphasized important societal themes, enhancing the overall impact of the media. Additionally, it concludes that storytelling and community engagement are powerful tools to illuminate the barriers faced by disadvantaged groups and stimulate actions against inequalities, discriminations, inequity, emerging community insecurity and poor accountability of the duty bearers.

Recommendations

Based on the field finding and conclusions it is highly recommended to

Expand Training Modules: Enhance training programs to include in-depth modules on investigating and reporting cross-cutting issues such as climate change, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and human rights. Equip journalists with the skills to uncover and report on these complex topics effectively.

Organize Specialized Workshops: Conduct specialized workshops focusing on investigative techniques specific to cross-cutting issues. These workshops should provide practical tools and methodologies for thorough and impactful reporting.

CENTRAL AMERICA: The evaluation found that for Central America cross cutting issues were well integrated in the programme results and consolidated at regional level among partners.

Cross-cutting issues defined in Vikes programme (gender equality, non-discrimination, climate resilience and low emission development) are well integrated in the programme outcomes but not all at case-project level in Central America.

Gender approach was validly incorporated in the Central America case project only in 2022 with an initiative already formulated by a group of women journalists and set up with Vikes support. The constitution of LA SALA, a network for media led by women, has opened the way to a new path for women journalists and communicators. With their own network, **female journalists are becoming aware of the role they play in a sphere dominated by male journalists.** The set up has not been simple and without conflict, but it has certainly **constituted a first experiment in the region of women journalists and communicators with their own space and** opened a new path of confrontation, at regional levels on gender and media topics.

The support to a platform of women journalists is a good start **to propose a gender approach mainstreamed** in several steps **following the UNIDO checklist tools**¹⁹: a context analysis of the project that examines the different situations of women and men and the impacts on the project on different groups; outcomes, outputs and activities designed to meet the different needs and priorities of women and men, consulting with gender organizations and also gender responsive indicators measuring gender-related changes over time.

It is worth to say that at project level Vikes' partner organizations all together cover all the cross-cutting issues. As expressed by many interviewed, **a consolidation of different skills and themes is certainly a good basis for collaborative journalism** that all partners consider a fundamental element for the achievement of their mission. For example, a journalistic production could be carried out using a cross-cutting approach involving various entities: journalists, media, social professionals and other organizations that are not merely journalistic (such as Central American Humboldt Centre), that work together for reporting, collecting, sharing data, and engaging the public in shared goal while allowing for process economies and resource savings.

We already approached gender issues with the LA SALA network. With Central American Humboldt Centre and Onda Local the **environmental issues** have been part of the media production and continues to be an essential axis of reference for the region also in the changes that have taken place in relation to the political conflicts connected at the beginning of the crises with environmental events. With Onda Local the experience of giving a **voice to marginalized groups** has been a key element of their media production even in a changing contest, while **El Faro has a fundamental role at the regional coordination level** with a consolidated structure. Especially the ForoCAP event organized by El Faro that has become an annual point of reference, and, above all, it also represents a platform for education, training, and networking.

Conclusions

Cross cutting issues are well integrated into Vikes programme design. Gender equality has an assigned outcome, also inclusive reporting especially towards marginalized groups are integrated in a specific outcome. Environmental issues are part of the same outcome under the umbrella of quality journalism.

Central America case projects gave a good example of how cross cutting issues could come from a consolidation of different efforts and **connection in a coordination among partners through a "collaborative journalism"** where the women journalist network could empower gender approach in mainstreaming gender issues and where the interchange with an environmental organization can contribute to raise significant and pressing environmental issues.

Recommendations

Also, for crosscutting issues it is highly recommended **to include partners representatives from Central America in their specification and fulfilment during Vikes programme planning.** Especially in a regional collaborative contest like Central America, working with cross cutting issues checklists with partners will allow to adopt measures that are adaptable to different contexts and will concretize positive effects of change and reduce any negative effects in programme planning.

An interchange among different region partners (Central America and East Africa) is also recommended especially in pear-to-pear interchange where partners working together will share their expertise and knowledge to learn a new skill, concept, or process. A follow up collaboration among partners in the same region in cross-cutting issues identification and dynamics is a constant updating process that need training and guidance.

2.2 Effectiveness

¹⁹See the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist for Projects produced by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

2.2.1 To what extent have the programme and the case projects achieved their intended outcomes and outputs?

EAST AFRICA: The evaluation found that generally all the three countries have achieved the intended outputs with slight variation in one or two.

The project has generally met its expected outputs despite delays caused by the pandemic, with all partners affirming that progress is on track. Key achievements include training, improving technical capacities, and fostering gender balance. See annex 3 for detailed confirmation.

In Tanzania, the project significantly empowered community radio producers with new portals and live streaming tools. The goal of training 80 producers by 2024 was surpassed, with 252 personnel trained in 2022 and 2023, and 41 stations receiving in-house training to enhance technical skills and online reach. Gender balance was promoted, achieving 40% female staff at TADIO member stations. The establishment of an editorial team in 2022 supported quality programming, marketing, and fundraising, demonstrating considerable growth and resourcefulness in community radio capacities.

In Uganda, the primary focus was developing a community radio portal, training 190 journalists, surpassing the initial target of 60 by 2024, thereby significantly boosting digital literacy. A new website for COMNETU was established, enhancing online presence and facilitating content dissemination. The formation of editorial and marketing teams indicated sustainability efforts, while ongoing training and recruitment programs aimed to maintain platform functionality. The successful launch of the portal marked a milestone in enhancing online news dissemination and access.

Kenya's focus was on improving rural reporting skills and storytelling processes. Although the target of training 80 journalists by 2024 has not been met, with 52 journalists trained by the end of 2023, there were positive strides in content creation and community engagement. Radio Baraza made progress in publishing regular programs from rural communities online despite challenges like the pandemic. The initiative fostered knowledge exchange and collaboration among East African project partners, enhancing regional impact and sustainability.

Various networking avenues were highlighted, showing both intra-country and inter-country connections. Two out of four planned meetings were held in Uganda and Tanzania in 2023, with the third meeting scheduled for September 2024. Journalists have expanded their networks, reported increased engagements, and supported each other through technical peer learning via WhatsApp groups. More information in annex 4.

Conclusions

All the three countries are on track in terms of achievement of planned outputs and outcomes. The factors that led to successful implementation of the project included having partners who are well established on the ground and with strong networks. Availability of resources to implement, continued capacity building by Vikes and the relevance of the project model.

Recommendations

It is recommended Vikes to: **Document this project model for integration into the relevant ministries strategies** to support development journalism that is rural focused and that address diversity within societies; **to embed a clear learning agenda in its monitoring to capture the overall journey of empowering rural communities through media** to add to the body of knowledge in the industry

CENTRAL AMERICA The evaluation confirms that in case project two outcomes and its outputs were accomplished significantly. On the other hand, outcome one was partially achieved because of the crisis context in the region, Nicaraguan partners in exile, and media management reorganization. Despite these difficulties Vikes and its partners were focused to achieve their plan and adapt it to the new environment.

For the outcome on financial sustainability of Vikes partners: **Independent media, journalists' unions and CSOs have increased funding and improved administrative and financial management** the situation in Central America countries is the following:

Nicaragua

Outcome was achieved partially because not all partners were able to have continuity over the years in improving their funds, introduce a new way of income, receive training on management, and establish administration and operational structure. However, at least two partners Onda Local and CAHC are more stable, and La Sala is strengthening its media/organizational management (see details in annexes 3 and 4). This outcome was the most challenging, because partners were relocated, they had to change their operation by starting all over or adapting, they had not fully explored new income generating ways in the host country and they could not be dedicated full time to administration and management. Regardless, Vikes partners in exile have learned to be resilient and to be aware about the need to strengthen their media/organization.

It's worth to mention that not all Nicaraguan Vikes partners have the same years of journalism trajectory, some of them were founded and operating in Nicaragua just before going into exile. Thus, their administration and management skills vary among them, and not all are ready to be fully auto financial or to capable to diversify their income.

El Salvador

El Faro experienced a **gradual decrease in their advertainment revenues** since the Salvadorian government started the online defamation campaign against the media. For example, a bank retreats their advertainment with El Faro after president Bukele mentioned on X (formerly Twitter) that that El Faro was against the use of Bitcoin. However, this experience did not stop them from trying new ways to generate income as is listed in annexes 4 and 5. The evaluation exercise allowed to validate that El Faro is the only partner that has an audience /subscribers name *Escabadores*, who contribute to the media income and give direct feedback about their journalistic productions.

In both countries, the main funding for all Vikes partners is coming from international cooperation. The evaluation found that all **partners had to struggle to accomplish this outcome.** They expressed that without this support independent media (even the consolidated ones) are threat to disappear and journalists must leave the profession for another job. The journalism in the region is facing a crucial moment because also renown donors don't want to support small independent media in the region.

"There are journalists who are delivering food and I think that it will be the trend because they have families".

"I think, that currently, it is no longer a priority to work on security, legal support, or international advocacy, we can continue working on these points, but we must focus on sustainability and weakness, we must guarantee a decent income to journalists, so they don't leave the profession. I think the best way to tackle this problem is through collaboration between media".

About the outcome on media networking **CSOs, journalists and independent media are well interconnected, sharing knowledge and experiences to strengthen their work** the situation in Central America countries is the following:

Nicaragua and El Salvador

ForoCap and other events **are spaces that strengthen and reinforce partners' knowledge and network at a regional level.** All partners have interacted at ForoCap during the past years. They stress the importance to have a place to embrace collaboration among journalists, to present their project to organizations who could support their media. One clear success occurred in 2023 to PCIN when got support from an organization who was present at the event.

Women from La Sala had the opportunity to **interchange their experience as women** network with Guatemalan women journalists, experiences that need to follow-up but can start a collaboration with other same realities and be women media reference in the region.

"ForoCap is invaluable, it's what every journalist looks forward to at the end of the year. Vikes has played an important role in this event".

"ForoCap it's a moment for training. At Cap Forum I learned about Bitcoin, this was new for me".

Additionally, La Sala also organized workshops, and a mentoring programme titled *Tanque de pensamiento* for women directors, which has helped to improve their works, especially those related to financial management.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to read any document to have more detailed information about the events or means of indicator verification as well as with the journalists who have participated in the ForoCap in 2021-2022, 2023, number of trainings, and the percentage disaggregated by gender and sexual orientation.

About the outcome on media production: **Independent media and CSOs provide quality information that reach a wider audience, including marginalized groups**. The outcome was **overachieved among partners**, see annexes 3 and 4. A factor that facilitated this success was **a budget and skills to dedicate to quality journalism**. All partners increased their audiences by implementing new narratives on new platforms and developing diverse and inclusive topics. Improving of journalistic works quality was verified by prizes received, good communication developed with online audience, and metric analysis online. (more information on annexes 3 and 4). The situation in Central America countries is the following:

El Salvador

El Faro has a long journalistic journey and their policy regarding investigative journalism is very severe. The fact-checking of each article is a way to measure the quality of the works and a principle of the media. For example, one of the investigative journalism that uncovered government corruption, such as their reporting on negotiations between the government and leaders of the Mara-Salvatrucha 13 gang, was rated the #4 video most watched on Tik Tok platform²⁰.

"Our investigative journalism is rigid is the principle that can be violated. We do not yield that the likes indicate that it is the best. I think a quite concrete fact is that during these 5 years of this government (Bukele), all the investigations that we have done have been perfectly documented, have had rigor and important detail that not even the government itself has managed to deny us in any of them, I think that this shows that you are doing everything right".

El Faro implemented renovate its communication with new narrative on TikTok social media platform to engage with a new audience e.g. young people aged 18-35 by explaining complex topics in a simpler way, but without losing journalism objectivity and credibility.

"The TikTok account has a position as one of the top five. (...) We create very serious, investigative and in-depth content adapted to new narratives and combine it. The one that has more view for example, is short video about the relationship between El Salvador and the USA".

Nicaragua

Despite the complicated political landscape and being in exile **independent media and organization didn't stop producing content for their media**. On the contrary, almost all partners double the production by managing the resources. For example, Onda Local **audience changed**; from rural to urban. All partners have **added new countries** where Nicaraguan diaspora live e.g. Spain, the USA, and Costa Rica; but they also maintain their audience in Nicaragua. Also, at least three partners have **introduced new narrative** to develop reportages.

"Last year we won two prizes with its production. A reportage about bio climate won first place and one based impact of chronic renal failure obtained third place at the national level. At the international level we won a prize from the SIP (International Press System) with a reportage about illegal catling. Also, we are constantly invited to collaborate with regional media such as Connectas y Otras Mirada".

Producing investigative journalism, campaigns or reportage is necessary to achieve interaction with civil society and give access to information, **however lacking funds was a limitation to produce and disseminate the information** to a wider audience. For instance, the campaign peacebuilders by La Sala were a great collaboration among the women directors but they expressed:

"One of the fallbacks of this campaign is that we didn't have enough funds to broadcast it on other platforms, thus it didn't have the impact we wanted".

²⁰ El Faro. Videos de Tik Tok más vistos y con mayor alcance agosto 2023-mayo 2024.

Conclusions

The project activities were carried out with some adaptations because of the forced exile of project partners; however, three partners **have striven positively to extend their diversification income** during the project execution by introducing two new sources of income during the years. The other two partners are working **toward the financial self-sufficiency and management strategy**. A lesson learned from partners is that managing administration and journalism simultaneously is challenging. Therefore, it is necessary to separate media journalism work from administration.

ForoCAP annual event is a valuable space for Central American journalists; It is recognized by all the journalist community as a valuable occasion to continue learning, networking, and strengthening journalists engagement throughout sharing knowledge and experiences.

In central America **countries partners learned that it is necessary to have constancy in journalistic production to keeps the current audience, to increase audience, and to attracts donors**. In this direction is important to deep or extend investigation topics and increase the journalistic collaboration as an essential tool for exiled journalists.

Recommendations

It is highly recommended supporting organization/media partners in restoring activities in legal and operative terms even contributing to their payroll and fees. Also, to strengthen partners' income diversification, it is recommended to provide support for setting up administrative division of the media with personnel with defined tasks. Moreover, in a vision of reducing costs and increasing work efficiency it is recommended to promote a mutual collaboration in sharing project activities and recourses with other media, journalists, and CSOs.

In this direction **is highly recommended to foster coordination and collaboration among partners** at the regional level by supporting El Faro in organizing ForoCAP's next editions. Also, it is recommended to create a participation registration form to record the intervention and activities, as well as the participants and their involvement (disaggregated by gender or sexual orientation) as well as a record of training and lecturers.

At the same time, it is also recommended **to develop, in a participative approach, formats and tools for project reporting** that will help to maintain a detail record of the activities and results and be aligned with Vikes programme and theory of change for measuring changes achieved during the implementation of the project.

2.2.2 Are the case projects contributing to the intended outcomes of Vikes programme?

EAST AFRICA The evaluation found that generally all the three countries are contributing to the Vikes program intended outcomes but challenges in some outcomes.

Programme Outcome 1: Media organizations provide diverse and inclusive reporting and quality journalism that reach wider audiences, including marginalized groups.

The expected outcome of the Vikes program is to ensure that media organizations deliver diverse, inclusive reporting, and high-quality journalism that effectively reaches broader audiences, including marginalized groups. The key metrics to assess this outcome include tracking the number and nature of media content produced, categorized by different themes, with a specific focus on disability-related topics. The findings indicate that there is inclusivity in reporting including coverage of specialized topics. In 2022, Jamii FM demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusivity and addressing societal issues through special programs. They achieved 83.3% for Natural Gas and the Environment, 100% for Women and Girls programs, and 100% for People with Disabilities initiatives for the year. These consistent efforts underscore Jamii FM's dedication to promoting inclusivity and addressing critical issues in society through their programming: Follow a table with the number of Special programs aired by Jamii FM in 2022 and 2023.

Special Programs	2022				%	Total	2023				Total	%
	Q*1	Q 2	Q3	Q4			Q 1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
Natural Gas & Environ.	3	2	2	1	66%	8	2	2	3	3	10	83.3%
Women & Girls	2	3	2	3	83%	10	3	3	3	3	12	100%
People with Disabilities	1	3	1	2	58%	7	3	3	3	3	12	100%

*Quater

By covering a variety of topics such as health, environment, and agriculture, journalists were able to attract a wider readership and engage diverse interests. This inclusive strategy allows all audience members to find relevant content, enhancing reader engagement and providing comprehensive coverage of various informational needs.

Additionally, an evaluation of audience reach indicated that the Tanzanian portal had approximately 3,000 weekly users in October 2023, which grew to 11,500 by May 2024, totaling 131,000 users since October. Among these users, 85% are from Tanzania, with the rest coming from countries including the Netherlands, Norway, the United States, Canada, Kenya, and 130 other nations.

Programme Outcome 3. Partners (e.g. media organizations and journalist unions) have strengthened self-sufficiency and effectively advocate for the freedom of expression and protect the interests of their members.

The outcomes related to freedom of expression among partner organizations in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya are not satisfactory due to various external issues. Although these organizations have received support for training and content creation, there have been no significant actions at the program level to improve the situation. While the organizations advocate for freedom of expression, their effectiveness differs, and journalists face ongoing challenges in obtaining information from government officials, which limits their ability to report fully.

In Kenya and Tanzania, journalists struggle to interview government officials, as many are hesitant to engage with the media. They often face a hostile environment filled with intimidation and harassment, making it difficult to obtain key information. In Uganda, despite some successes in exposing corruption, concerns about press freedom persist, and journalists fear retaliation when reporting on sensitive issues. In Tanzania, bureaucratic obstacles make it hard to access information from government agencies, with lengthy processes that hinder timely responses. Overall, these issues highlight the need for better press freedom and safer reporting conditions for journalists across these countries.

NB: Programme Outcome 2 was not applicable for east African project.

Conclusions

In conclusion, **the findings reveal major challenges for partner organizations in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya concerning freedom of expression, primarily due to external factors and bureaucratic obstacles.** While there is support for training and content creation, advocacy for press freedom is inconsistent, making it difficult for journalists to access important information from government sources. Additionally, the hostile environment around political reporting presents significant risks, with journalists frequently encountering intimidation and threats when addressing sensitive issues.

Recommendations

It is recommended that **partners to collaboratively work with the government towards establishing better protocols for journalists to access information** from government sources. This may include advocating for clear guidelines on information sharing and reducing bureaucratic barriers to facilitate

timely responses. It is also recommended **to strengthen editorial work to save journalists from making avoidable mistakes.**

CENTRAL AMERICA: Evaluation desk study and field work confirm that in the Central America, the case project is fully contributing to the intended outcomes of Vikes programme, even though the press freedom and freedom of expression of journalists and CSOs are under threats.

Programme Outcome 1: Media organizations provide diverse and inclusive reporting and quality journalism that reach wider audiences, including marginalized groups.

The results show that the project case is intertwined with the Vikes program's first outcome. **Findings revealed that partners over-produced (93) articles**, investigative journalism, and reportages that covered a variety of topics such as human rights, gender equality, violence, gangs, corruption, freedom of expression, climate change, elections, and so on. These topics were developed at local, national, and regional levels. The audience of these works varies. But is also **important to mentioned that they engaged with new audience**, in age and by country. In addition, the evaluation validated that marginalized groups are part of the target audience e.g. indigenous, afro and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Regardless of the hostile environment where partners are living, it is significant to emphasize that **journalists continue to have a good communication and confidence** with their audience, with is fundamental for them to improve and develop quality and divers journalistic works. A clear example is Onda Local that it was reach out by the Rama Creole community requesting them to investigate indigenous topics.

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

Although gender approach was not part of the initial Central America project design, in 2022, the women journalist initiative La Sala gave the occasion to contribute to gender program's outcome. Despite complying with the programme outcome and addressing the needs of Vikes' partners in the field, as well as the cross-cutting issues related to gender policy, there is a lack of clarity among partners and country advisers since it is not part of the original project framework. Nevertheless, it's important to highlight that Vikes' inclusion of the female journalist network in exile, La Sala, **turned a potential weakness into a significant opportunity for both the project and the programme.**

"I asked what happened to the La Sala project. Vikes suggested adapting it to the new Costa Rican context, but with the condition to adjust the budget because Vikes didn't have that much funding. One of the reasons trying to work with women journalists is to synchronise it with the Vikes programme matrix".

"Our proposal to Vikes consisted of a series of workshops on the culture of peace, because we are journalists from a country in conflict and constantly changing (...) the role of media is to educate. The second is to create a think tank where we generate conversation about money. And the third point was the production of journalistic work."

Furthermore, field work also **revealed that 60% of partners have a gender policy in their institution** and reporting system in use like El Faro, Onda Local, while CAHC gender polity is under review and in PCIN is under construction. In addition, even though La Sala doesn't have a gender policy, one of the media of the network, La Lupa, has a pocket manual: How to do journalism with a gender perspective? ²¹

Regarding the second indicator of the gender outcome *"reported change by journalists, gatekeepers and media managers in information, attitudes and abilities to act against gender discrimination and sexual harassment"*, the evaluation could not find any documents to validate this, however an interviewee expressed:

"There are aggressive men journalists in the PCIN WhatsApp group, thus I left the group because I don't feel safe. I think is necessary to talk with men about masculinity, this should be a priority of the union".

Outcome 3. Partners (e.g. media organizations and journalist unions) have strengthened self-sufficiency and effectively advocate for the freedom of expression and protect the interests of their members.

²¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D-7Zz3T2D7yDz79XQVSDV7jCZXN-m0fg/view>

As it was mentioned above, three of the Vikes partners slightly improved their financial income and incorporated at least 2 new ways of revenue despite the difficulties they faced. On the other hand, two partners are aware that they need to diversify and improve their financial management to manage their organization. Overall, partners in both countries agreed that because of the **challenging political landscape in the region independent media and organizations are mainly reliant of cooperation funds**.

Findings show that partners are actively engaging in and advocating for freedom of expression while protecting their members. This is achieved through their journalistic work, collaborations with other regional media, and connections with human rights organizations in the region. They also share security information among partners and **have created an observatory for press freedom violations, which collects and reports journalists' complaints**.

During the field visit, the evaluation team observed that although partners are building capacity for freedom of expression and advocacy, **the context remains unsafe and unfriendly. Additionally, there are notable restrictions on accessing information for investigative journalism** and a complete lack of cooperation from authorities in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Journalists are also experiencing state abuse of power. For example, just a month before the field visit, a journalist from a partner media outlet was denied entry into Nicaragua after visiting a neighboring country.

"We have taken actions from our own side by not saying that we are journalists when we leave the country, saying that I am a social network consultant and not posting anything on social network platforms. We know that there is surveillance".

Additionally, **journalists commented that reprisals against women journalists** are more severe compared to those against men because they affect women differently. Attacks on women journalists often go beyond their professional role, targeting their relatives or their physical appearance.

"Most of the journalists who have left (...) their careers are women (...) when it comes to sexual violence, the pressure towards family members is not the same for women as it is for men, and that is why they have left the profession".

The situation in El Salvador bears some similarities to Nicaragua, although with some less negative aspects. For instance, El Faro continues to operate openly in the country in terms of editorial and journalistic activities, although its administrative functions were moved to Costa Rica in 2022.

"Two things are happening in independent journalism in El Salvador that seem to be opposing but are not. First, independent journalism is being exercised in one of the most complicated contexts in decades, but at the same time there is an incipient group of journalists and journalistic projects more articulated than ever, 10 years ago it was El Faro and a few others, but today there are 6 to 7 that are strong. El Salvador Journalism Association (APES) is also more connected to articulated journalism".

Conclusions

The evaluation exercise highlights that independent media productions are extremely important for the region due to the polarization implemented by government-controlled media. **Access to information from independent exile media is crucial for citizens living in areas where independent media could not operate**. Additionally, these media productions are the primary source of information for diaspora individuals, providing an alternative perspective to government media on what is occurring in their home country. In this direction the accomplishments lead by Vikes **and Vikes partners in Central America are in lines with Vikes programme outcomes in providing support to independent media journalism**. In all three countries of Central America, including the host country of Costa Rica, journalists are actively **exercising freedom of expression and advocating for their colleagues** despite operating in risky environments. Additionally, media organizations have made efforts to strengthen their capacities, although they face challenges such as operating in exile.

In pursuing Vikes **programme gender outcome**, the support gave to La Sala women journalists platform was **an activity whose impact**, if handled in a long-term perspective, **could be extended to regional level** and promote the adoption of a gender policy at institutional level of media organization.

Recommendations

The current Central American context could seriously worsen in the coming year for independent media and organizations, regarding freedom of expression. **It is recommended to continue to support media organization and independent journalist in Central America** guaranteeing funds for production for all

partners and strengthen the collaboration of content creation among partners in the region in designing new phase of Vikes programme approach. Moreover, **it is highly recommended to involve women representative in planning gender outcome** in the future moving from their experiences and preserving their practices for programme to be executed smoothly at the ground level (see more in the case study in chapter 3).

In this regard **programme indicators should be simplified and adapted to measure results effectively at the ground level**. For example, report forms should be designed as verification sources in collaboration with partners, so they become familiar with them and with the programme outcome.

2.2.3 Have the relevant risks been identified and appropriately managed at project and programme level?

EAST AFRICA The evaluation found there was updated risk matrix with some risks which were considered being down rated to low and medium. Indicating a stabilizing implementation environment

It was reported that during the project partners meeting in Entebbe in May 2023, the project risk matrix was revised with ten total changes. Seven of these changes pertained to the seriousness of the risk, while three concerned the probability of occurrence. The revisions related to gravity unanimously reflected a greater severity than initially assessed. Specifically, **five risks escalated from a medium to a high gravity level, and two shifted from low to high seriousness**. Regarding likelihood, two risks were downgraded in terms of probability, while one was judged to be more probable. **Consequently, the current understanding is that the risks have intensified.**

The project is actively addressing external risks, particularly physical and security concerns stemming from previous terrorist incidents in Nairobi and Kampala. High-security measures are in place, including avoiding volatile areas, collaborating with local stakeholders for continuous security monitoring, and insuring trainers in remote areas for added protection. Even though attacks against journalists have been reported in Tanzania and Uganda, community media remains unaffected and continues to uphold professional ethics. To further enhance safety at Jamii FM, a comprehensive approach is implemented involving security guards, community monitoring, and CCTV surveillance, complemented by fire safety measures and insurance coverage for potential damages. Risks related to road traffic accidents are addressed through meticulous travel planning, the use of helmets, and medical insurance coverage to mitigate any unforeseen incidents.

Internal risks are managed through robust strategies designed to enhance both institutional and financial sustainability. The project provides funds for local coordination and capacity building. To pre-empt issues with project arrangements and reporting, meticulous planning, clear communication, and flexible scheduling are prioritized. Partner enthusiasm helps combat any lack of motivation, ensuring that core functions are sustained, and local ownership is promoted. Technical challenges related to skill shortages for new online platforms are addressed through tailored training, alongside stringent financial monitoring and the inclusion of anti-corruption clauses in partnership agreements to prevent fraud and misappropriation. A zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment is implemented with awareness campaigns and support systems.

Conclusion

The project demonstrates positive risk management practices that contribute significantly to its overall efficacy and resilience.

Recommendations

It is recommended **to enhance the project's risk management and sustainability**, improving the financial stability of partners is suggested by helping them develop resource mobilization strategies. This involves **training them in proposal writing, advertising, and cost-saving measures to seek diverse funding sources**. Additionally, the evaluation commends updating the risk matrix and recommends boosting partners' capacity to review it regularly, **ensuring they adapt to evolving risk factors for effective risk management**.

CENTRAL AMERICA The evaluation found that there is an updated risk matrix range from medium to high, which means that the security of the project was seriously considered.

The evaluation results indicate that journalists and media organizations are actively aligning with the elements mentioned by journalists in the field concerning the risks they face, particularly in response to the situation in Nicaragua. For example, **Vikes and its partners** (Onda Local and CAHC) **effectively implemented contingency plans, including security measures, relocation arrangements, and monitoring protocols**. This proactive approach became crucial when Nicaraguan authorities dismantled media outlets and organizations, forcing journalists to leave the country.

Additionally, **Vikes demonstrated flexibility in implementing action plans to adapt to new restrictions**. The project provided crucial support in strengthening the organizational structure of PCIN and Onda Local in the host country, ensuring assistance to two journalists from the coordinating commission and covering legal expenses. **Responding to emergencies was highly valued by partners and journalists alike**. These adjustments have underscored the importance of prioritizing security, including cybernetic, physical, and mental health, as well as the safety of their relatives still residing in Nicaragua.

“As PCIN we created two version of security guide for journalist. One is the popular version and the longer one for members. This have helps us to interact with human rights organizations”.

“Vikes have been very flexible with us; the adviser understands the context in Nicaragua. The fact that Vikes agreed Centro Humboldt to continue working from Guatemala shows the flexibility”.

Costa Rica journalists report Nicaraguan surveillance intelligence service personnel. During the field visit journalists mentioned that they do not feel secure because the government had display surveillance as a way of intimidation toward them, thus they don't cover manifestations that Nicaraguans organize in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Conclusions

Vikes and its partners successfully created a contingency strategy (security, displacement arrangements, monitoring, etc.), before the media and organization were dismantled by Nicaraguan authorities. In addition, Vikes was flexible in modify project budget for carrying out an action plan for coping with new restrictions. Journalists have learned the importance of their security (physical, mental and material) especially women journalists and the importance to have a contingency plan for the safety of the profession and their physical, mental and material security in the homeland and in exile.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Vikes **continue to follow the situation of the region by having constant contact with partners, expert journalists, or other donor organizations** in the region for support media protection helping to maintain updated their contingency plans with a special focus about women journalists.

2.3 Sustainability

2.3.1 How sustainable the results of the case projects are expected to be?

EAST AFRICA: The evaluation found that the likelihood of the results to be sustained vary.

The evaluation found that by default the design focused on sustainability. The evaluation found **various mechanisms are established to ensure sustainability and continuity of results** beyond the project's conclusion. The project focuses on building the capacity of partners and engaging stakeholders to ensure long-term success and lasting impacts post-completion. Additionally, it includes market training for community radios, enabling them to generate income through advertising, leading to earnings beyond their initial audiences.

The evaluation found that **the potential to sustain results exists** because the beneficiaries have acquired skills. **The capacity-building initiatives are seen as crucial** sustainable results with potential of fostering increased self-reliance, potentially enabling autonomous operation in the future through continuous learning and knowledge acquisition. **There is a strong commitment to the long-term significance of the project**, with an emphasis on sustaining its impact even beyond the potential phase-out. The readiness to continue with the initiative demonstrates a dedication to maintaining the project's operations and **exploring avenues for future support to ensure its ongoing success**.

The potential for the project's impact to continue is encouraging; however, securing an operational budget to sustain engagement with radio stations and development reporters after Vikes support ends remains a challenge. Regarding technical sustainability, the availability of local technicians holds promise for the ongoing maintenance of the project's technical components. However, challenges related to the costs of portal management need is a concern. Additionally, there is a disparity in the capacity of the radio stations to continue various forms of reporting, including thematic reporting and live streaming, with some stations encountering significant difficulties. The challenge arises on managing the portal post-implementation since all critical functions are hosted in Finland

Conclusion

The evaluation of the project highlighted its strong emphasis on sustainability through several strategic mechanisms designed to maintain results after its completion.

Recommendations

It is recommended **to increased engagement with radio owners** that is essential to illustrate the value added by the online portal and foster a willingness to invest is recommended; **to improve clarity regarding portal costs** is essential for the country partners, as it will help them understand the financial implications of maintaining the portal; **to strengthen its communication to increase project visibility** that promote uptake of the project and scalability to other areas with similar context. In tandem to this it is recommended that **the project to also include costing component in the project decision to scale up** the project; it is important to continue editorial work to uphold journalistic standards and integrity.

Through these recommendations, the project can enhance its sustainability and overall effectiveness, thereby ensuring lasting benefits within the targeted communities.

CENTRAL AMERICA The evaluation found that the sustainability of the results is highly connected to new funding due to journalists and media need to face a new scenarios and challenges of exile journalism and is linked to the journalism community internal and international capacity to support their recovery.

Project components cover a spectrum of activities that local counterparts consider necessary to ensure the sustainability of independent journalists and media in Central America. There is a common view among the partners and journalists interviewed that **sustainability for exiled journalist but also for colleagues that are still living in their own country is based on the:**

Diversification of income and funding sources: interviewed journalists and the same partner organizations to which they belong are a category of independent journalism that in their country was devoted to specific issues or public (mainly rural) giving voice to local audiences. In exile, they have had to restructure and rethink themselves, this situation if on the one hand is felt as frustrating on the other hand, it opens to new hope. The possibility of a diversification of income and funding sources is closely linked to their ability to organize a strategic planning that will allow them to benefit from different sources of funding.

Collaboration and cooperation at different levels both in terms of capacities and cost sharing: "*collaborative journalism*" was one of the most recurring sentences used by the respondent during the interviews. This collaboration definitively grants synergy among the press union and avoids overlapping and competition. This form of collaborative journalism should be widely encouraged especially in one of the most valued and funded by Vikes events for central American journalists like ForoCAP.

Development of revenue generation tools based on virtual networks and a deeper knowledge of the audience and their needs of information. For the respondents it is considered the activity that could create a bridge with their colleagues and audience back home. The ability to develop capacities and virtual networking tools would allow not only to increase income "*monetizing our platform*" but also to give a voice to those left behind in the homeland and interact with their audience. For the respondent, virtual networking is the key for future sustainability, livelihood, and carry-over in their profession.

Legalization and institutionalization moving from informal groups to recognized institutions (thanks to Vikes support) **is a first step for journalists to feel recognized even while being exiled.** Local partners have a clear idea for the future of their organization in exile, with an internal division of labor allowing to improve

efficiency of the strategic plan in implementing both journalistic and fundraising tasks. **Separation of roles between the professional and administrative components is a crucial point** for achieving economic and financial sustainability.

The political and social situation that local partners and journalists have faced in Central America has somehow **created awareness among them of the necessity to have a more dynamic vision of their profession**. The feeling is that journalists, especially Nicaraguans, have left a local comfort zone to face a virtual reality in constant movement. The need to remain active and thus to recreate their means of living or to survive in a foreign place **is in developing more global and not only local skills** (u-tube versus local advertising).

Potentially, the sustainability of these organizations and hence of the sustainability of the project results and actions resides in **the capacity of renewal and relocation that must be supported externally** to avoid slip into a depressive spiral like the one experienced by many of their journalist members.

Conclusions

Case project design had a devoted outcome aiming to increase partners fund raising capacities and administrative and financial management with trainings and tools. Partners identified activities to ensure the results could be maintained in exiles as described before (diversification of income and funding sources; collaboration and cooperation at different levels both in terms of capacities and cost sharing; development of revenue generation tools based on virtual networks, legalization). As highlighted in the analysis **the potentiality to put in place the strategies identified resides in partners capacity to re-institutionalize their profession and to rely on external support**.

Recommendations

It's highly recommended to finalize, consolidate, and operationalize partner proposals with a planning process that ends into a cohesive plan specifying action, timelines, and responsibilities to guide its implementation

Sustainability plan will serve as a fundamental document to secure long-term commitment, resources, and support **for orienting the future organization path in a new contest**, resulting in actions that will allow to overcome obstacles not only in exile but also during future developments of independent journalism.

2.3.2 Are there relevant and appropriate strategies and plans to ensure sustainability of benefits?

EAST AFRICA The evaluation found there no concrete written strategy for sustainability but rather plans on integration of activities.

In all three countries **there was not any written strategy for sustainability**. Except think of integrating the current project activities into other ongoing activities and building capacity of radios on marketing for them to gain money through advertising.

In Uganda the evaluation also found thinking about what can be done to sustain. It was mentioned that ensuring sustainability of the project involves **encouraging members to engage in online marketing and resource sharing** when necessary, addressing the notion of economic and personnel sustainability.

The approach towards sustainability also encompasses **the involvement of trained individuals in the platform's operational aspects**, where multiple staff engage in the content production process, highlighting a collaborative effort for prolonged project sustainability. Additionally, a key element in sustaining the project involves an inclusive approach adopted by COMNETU, wherein the management of radio stations is actively involved in project activities, demonstrating a commitment to ensuring continuous participation and knowledge dissemination. The identification and utilization of diverse funding sources further fortify the project's ongoing operations, **fostering a collaborative environment and leveraging volunteer support** for project continuity and success.

In Kenya it was noted that the **potential for sustainability is not clearly seen in this project**. It is something that would need a transition period and a preparation. For example, in Kenya it was mentioned that while

operating as a nonprofit organization, **there is a recognition of the potential to generate income that can be reinvested into the program.**

Similarly **in Tanzania**, one of the key initiatives is focused on maintaining the platform's vitality and user engagement. **The partner underscores the importance of a payment subscription** system allowing users to access the platform effectively. This implementation will ensure sustainability through financial contributions that support the editorial process. Additionally, while local frequencies limit national coverage, streaming services now facilitate broader reach, attracting advertisers and boosting revenue for radio stations. The evaluation learned that there are existing advertisement slots on the portals, with plans to introduce more in the future. Advertising is seen as a crucial form of immediate support, with the anticipation that NGOs, government entities, and commercial organizations would utilize the platforms to engage with rural communities. Already radios in Uganda and Tanzania have received advertisements from NGOs, government and commercial companies. Furthermore, it was learned that collaboration between TADIO and COMNETU is envisioned to coordinate these advertising efforts and tailor solutions for potential new partners.

Conclusion

While a few proposals have been identified in both regions, they remain in the preliminary stages and need to be developed and formalized to achieve effectiveness

Recommendations

It is recommended Vikes to support partners to consolidate and refine existing undocumented proposals on sustainability into a plan; **to prioritize the retention of an active editorial team**, as this is essential for ensuring both the longevity of the platform and the quality of its content; **to build capacity in resource mobilization** including strengthening the advertisement; **to prepare a transitioning plan** that aim at strengthening the capacity of the partners to effectively institutionalise the relevant project interventions.

CENTRAL AMERICA The evaluation found a that local partners are keenly searching to restart their activities including lessons learned and new challenges but not all partners have concretized written plans.

Inputs for sustainability strategies coming from the field findings are aiming a **future process of strategic planning**:

- Transparency in accounting.
- Work division in managing the media and journalism.
- Continue to inform the local audience in the homeland reaching also rural areas.
- Continue to cooperate among the media in the country of living (origin or host) and strengthen the network and training at ForoCap (is out loud considered fundamental).

A process is started toward the strategic planning but often, during the field interviews, **it is perceived a confusion between donors**, especially considering the typical projects that characterize these organizations, i.e., small grant, short term and no administrative cost covering.

A fundamental aspect to mention is that the organization's partners depend on international cooperation funding. **In recent years they have realized the need for a funding plan to co-financing their activities and to cover all their needs.** Mainly donor organizations, in the last years, were more interested in financing media institutionally better structured and widely recognized at international level.

"We all partners, including Vikes, should do more advocacy in Europe at the level of donor organizations so that there would also be more belligerent donors in the region and especially for this type of journalism".

Conclusions

The sustainability of the project's achievements **is deeply rooted in the engagement of the local partners** and journalists in following their "mission" as journalists in exile. Due to the not simple and unknown working environment **they are forced to struggle, they need substantial external economic support and a continued collaboration with local, regional, and international media.** Efforts are still needed to ensure the case projects sustainability with a strategic plan and re-institutionalization. **There is strong involvement and willingness but limited evidence of a rapid exit strategy.**

Recommendations

Institutionalization and strategic planning, once underway, will need the long-term support that the partners themselves are seeking. **Long-term support requires a new support program** that is highly recommended to have **a participatory approach involving all the partners and other stakeholders**. That is fundamental facing the situation in Central America.

To guarantee the sustainability of the results, the international donor community is fundamental and needs to be coordinated. **A dialogue among donors is necessary to avoid duplication of efforts and fund overlapping.**

2.4 Impact

2.4.1 Are the case projects contributing to the intended impact of Vikes programme?

The evaluation indicates that the project is making significant contributions to the Vikes programme's intended impact of strengthening journalists' and media organizations' roles in civil society.

The Vikes theory of change is built on the premise that **collaboration with partners to enhance the skills, networks, and capacity of media professionals and organizations, create quality, inclusive content, raise awareness on sustainable development, and advocate for gender equality and freedom of expression** results in a cascading impact. This collaborative approach leads to partners playing a more pivotal role in civil society, fostering connectivity within the media sector, uplifting journalism standards, and advocating for freedom of expression. Consequently, media organizations refine their ability to produce diverse, inclusive reporting, offering fresh perspectives on sustainable development and promoting gender equality in media. This progress garners increased backing for free media and expression. Ultimately, empowered journalists and media organizations deliver independent, pluralistic, and high-quality journalism to a broad audience, including vulnerable groups, thereby improving information access, strengthening freedom of expression, and contributing to a more just, democratic, and sustainable development environment.

In line with this theory, the evaluation of the Empowering Rural Communities Through Media Project in East Africa underscores its substantial contribution to the **Vikes program's intended impact of reinforcing journalists' and media organizations' roles in civil society**. The project's focus on training, networking, and capacity building has resulted in empowering media professionals, fostering a problem-solving approach in reporting, and elevating journalism oriented towards development. **The project's effectiveness in reaching underserved rural communities and enriching digital presence aligns with the collaborative and capacity-building framework of the Vikes Theory of Change**. By empowering media professionals and enhancing media organizations' capabilities, the project supports the core goals of promoting quality, inclusive content, advocating for gender equality and freedom of expression, and raising awareness on sustainable development; effectively contributing to the Vikes program's objectives.

Also, in **Central America** the case project ***Independent Media Support Programme in Central America*** that reach its *phase 3*, Vikes' work in the field had improved citizens' access to editorially independent information and enhances diversity and gender-sensitivity within the media sector (improved in the third year with the women media platform La Sala. This progress aligns with the goal of fortified freedom of expression and supports more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development. However, addressing practical limitations and ensuring the project's sustainability are critical next steps to solidify and extend these contributions.

In Central America partners had strengthened their capacity as actor in the society by provided information to citizen referent to different topics and media format, however, **is questionable if this can be concretized to a democratic, equitable, and sustainable environment since the context of the region jeopardize the liberty to act toward these rights as citizen.**

Conclusions

Case projects, in both Central America and East Africa regions, are making significant contributions to the Vikes program's intended impact of strengthening journalists' and media organizations' roles in civil society. It improves citizens' access to editorially independent information and enhances diversity and gender-sensitivity within the media sector. **This progress aligns with the goal of fortified freedom of expression and supports more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development.** However, addressing practical limitations and ensuring the project's sustainability are critical next steps to solidify and extend these contributions. The political and social situation that local partners and journalists have faced in Central America has somehow created awareness among them on the necessity to have a more dynamic vision of their profession. The feeling is that journalists, especially Nicaraguans, have left a local comfort zone to face a virtual reality in constant movement. The need to remain active and thus to recreate their means of living or to survive in a foreign place is in developing more global of and not only local skills.

Recommendations

Progresses made by both case projects in the two regions, aligns with the goal of fortified freedom of expression and supports more equitable, democratic, and sustainable development. **However, addressing practical limitations and ensuring the project's sustainability are critical next steps to solidify and extend these contributions and above all amplify the positive impacts.**

Both case projects, although in different ways, include programme axes in the three dimensions discussed above, mainly because programme was built based on existing projects case. **For the next future to continue being in line with the partners needs at strategical and field level is highly recommended to include partners in the design, implementing and monitoring structure process, event in the phase of building indicators and activities and implementing format at field level.**

2.5 Other Questions

2.5.1 Are the linkages in Vikes theory of change, especially between outcomes and impact, strong and valid?

The theory of change is valid and the logical links between assumptions, output and outcomes are coherent.

During the evaluation, the exercise of collecting qualitative and quantitative data as well as direct observation in the target region of Vikes case-projects **was able to validate the consistency of the links between assumptions, outputs, and outcomes in Vikes' theory of change.** In particular:

The outcome related to gender equality included in the Vikes theory of change (that was not present in the case-project framework) goes in that direction of coherency. Media coverage is critical in achievement awareness of issues related to gender equality and inequality in a professional world, for eliminating of violence against women journalists, and overcoming the limited representation of women in decision-making roles. The insertion Gender equality requires the creation of an enabling social environment where the cultural relations that create gender inequality are addressed

Back a regional level, it's worth to say that the **situation of the Central America Region** led to reconsidering the assumptions in a context of exile. For example, the assumptions related to context like Central America that are well stated in Vikes theory of change: *"the programme countries operate democratically and respect the freedom of expression in human right"* and *"in case the operation environment is restricted, media and civil society have the capacity and courage to act nonetheless"* did not significantly affected the outcomes stated because it was possible to continues to carry out the activities in exile. Journalists and civil society organization from Nicaragua and El Salvador were danger of death, had to leave their countries and taking refuge in neighbouring countries where they were able to make their voices equally heard by organizing them and maintaining ties with colleagues back home.

Vikes support in exile was able to assist partners in their need of re-establishing their organization and continue to make their voices heard in support to freedom of expression and access to the independent information reinforcing synergies at regional level with a “*collaborative journalism*” approach highly advocated by multiple partners.

If in Central America, the goal of the project of “*improved the access to information and freedom of expression of citizens by strengthening role of independent media and civil society*” is valid and actionable even in a particular context of exile, however, Vikes theory of change in this region is far from make “*duty bearer understand the importance of freedom of expression and pluralistic media and commit to ensuring it*”.

In this direction a door is open with the outcome 4 of Vikes programme “*Vikes and Finnish media professional supported by Vikes have increased the commitment of duty bearers and the understanding among wide public on freedom of expression, sustainable development and issues of media representation in global and national contests*”. **Advocacy by media toward European government could at least bring to the attention of the European public the situation in Central America.** As one of the respondents said:

“Do more advocacy in Europe at the level of donor organizations so that there is more belligerence donor in the region and especially for the independent journalism”.

Also, in East Africa the outcomes observed in **Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya illustrate a strong alignment with the underlying Theory of Change** guiding the community radio programs. In Tanzania, the emphasis on improving sustainability through expanding reach and airing content on a new online platform resonates with the Theory's focus on training and capacity building to enhance the quality and diversity of media that can reach vulnerable groups. In Tanzania the active engagement of over 40 radios, participation in projects with civil society organizations, and increased fundraising efforts demonstrate a tangible connection to the Theory's goal of promoting **pluralistic media to amplify various voices and perspectives.**

Similarly, in Uganda, the initiative to enhance coverage of community radio programs through a new online platform **reflects a commitment to democratic principles and freedom of expression.** By broadening their reach to a national audience and potential partners beyond local boundaries, the radio stations in Uganda are embodying the Theory's assumption that operating countries respect fundamental rights and values. The increased engagement with diverse audiences and active participation in airing content online signify **progress towards creating a platform where multiple voices can be heard and valued.**

In Kenya, the focus on increased and improved reporting from rural communities through Radio Baraza aligns with the Theory of Change's objective of strengthening democracy by providing adequate information for decision-making and accountability. The radio station's role in facilitating communication between rural communities, civil society organizations, and urban decision-makers underscores the importance of information dissemination **in promoting transparency and citizen engagement.** By striving to enhance the quality of radio features and expand coverage, Radio Baraza is actively contributing to the Theory's vision of empowering communities through access to reliable and diverse media sources.

Conclusions

In Central America, despite threats to journalists and civil society organizations, Vikes projects successfully operated in exile. **Vikes' support allowed these groups to re-establish and continue advocating for freedom of expression and access to independent information,** demonstrating resilience in accordance with the theory of change's assumptions about media and civil society's capacity to act in restrictive environments.

Similarly for East Africa the evaluation revealed **a logical link between the project assumptions, output and outcomes are coherent. It further realized that the overall program document is consolidation of the existed project.** Additionally, there is confirmed evidence that the project has contributed to enhancing their skills, promoting development-oriented journalism, emphasizing a problem-solving approach, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement. However, it seems hard to achieve the freedom expression.

Recommendation

In the remaining period it is recommended that the project **to increase support to local partners to address the issue of promoting freedom of expressions through training and advocacy capacity building.**

Continue and expand **support for journalists and civil society organizations operating in exile** to ensure they can effectively **advocate for freedom of expression and access to independent information.**

2.5.2 How appropriate and usable the Vikes impact level indicators are, considering the theory of change and available resources for data collection and analysis?

The evaluation found the Vikes impact level indicators are appropriate and usable, considering the theory of change and available resources for data collection and analysis.

Overall, these impact level indicators are well-aligned with the Theory of Change assumptions, as they focus on key aspects such as capacity building, diversity in media, freedom of expression, and democratic values. By evaluating these indicators, it is possible to assess the effectiveness of initiatives in achieving the desired outcomes outlined in the Theory of Change.

Number and percentage of partners widening their sphere of influence in civil society: This indicator directly supports the theory's assumption that training and capacity building lead to high-quality and diverse media that can reach vulnerable groups. Partners widening their influence within civil society suggests an increase in the diversity of voices being heard, potentially contributing to pluralistic media and ensuring that a variety of perspectives are represented. Strengthening the role of journalists and media organizations in civil society aligns with the goal of promoting democratic principles and enhancing the quality of media content.

Demonstrated changes in access to editorially independent information: This indicator is crucial for assessing the Theory of Change's aim to improve citizens' access to independent information. By measuring changes in access to editorially independent information in program countries, the impact can be evaluated in terms of enhancing the quality and reliability of media content. This aligns well with the theory's emphasis on training and capacity building to ensure that media outlets provide high-quality information that contributes to democratic decision-making processes.

Change in the diversity and gender-sensitivity of media content: Examining changes in the diversity and gender-sensitivity of media content is directly linked to the Theory of Change's focus on promoting pluralistic media and amplifying diverse voices. The indicator reflects efforts to enhance the representation of different perspectives and ensure gender balance within the media sector. By assessing this change, the impact of initiatives aimed at improving media content quality and diversity can be evaluated, contributing to the broader goals of strengthening freedom of expression and promoting equitable and sustainable development.

Conclusions

The evaluation confirms that **Vikes' impact level indicators are well-aligned with its Theory of Change**, effectively focusing on essential areas such as capacity building, media diversity, freedom of expression, and democratic values.

Recommendations

To further enhance clarity and effectiveness, **the project needs to differentiate and unpack outcomes according to the roles and influence of various actors**, as these actors operate in different capacities and environments.

3. Lessons learned and Case studies

In this section it will be reported some examples of lessons learned coming from the interviews and a couple of case studies supporting both methods and evidence of findings and conclusions. The main **lessons learned** are pointed out after processing the interviews in Central America and East Africa.

Lessons learned from East African project are as follows

1. Project design:

- The model used in East Africa provides two different kinds of modalities to engage the rural community with media. It has demonstrated that journalists are integral part to address media access gaps and ensuring the voices are heard.
 - Online portal expanded the reach beyond the catchment areas.
 - Identifying and engaging all stakeholder at inception of the project and at mid-term is important.
2. Content creation
 - The combination of in-house training and editorial work proved to be key interventions for enhance quality contents.
 - Having specific thematic area to address crosscutting issues expand journalists knowledge to deal with pertinent societal matters and expand their horizons to contribute to development and investigative journalist.
 - As majority of people continue visit the portal the need for robust quality assurance emerges, sustaining mentorship and editorial support is paramount.
 - It was learnt that the Vikes training package is attractive to potential users and sometime and provide a hands-on opportunity.
 3. Project implementation:
 - It was learned that the portal is one of the most crucial components driving the revolution in rural journalism, significantly enhancing the relevance of community radio.
 - Project will benefit more if it invests in engaging the owners of the radio stations.
 - Since development reporting is a reformation of journalism to enhance its responsiveness to communities they serve, building partnership with government is needed.
 - There is a need to strengthen project communication to increase its visibility.
 4. Sustainability
 - Mainstreaming project into routine work of partner contributed a lot to project success.
 - Potential to sustain the project financially is possible due to the advantage the portal has expanded the reach this benefit will be realized.
 - It is necessary to have sustainability strategy.

Lessons learned from Central America project are as follows

1. **On communication among partners and Vikes**
 - Vikes push us to be in contact with other partners: It is important that each partner tries to learn and collaborate with another partner.
 - Do not make comparison among partners.
 - The communication in the projects needs to be from both sides, partners toward Vikes and vice versa.
2. **On security**
 - Journalists and organizations were not ready for the crisis that occurred in 2018 in Nicaragua, however as human beings we are resilient, we have the capacity to mutate.
 - Journalists have learned the importance of their security (physical, mental and material) especially women journalists.
 - Be in exile had teach us to collaborate as journalist and to grow our media platform, virtually interconnected.
 - Is necessary to have a contingency plan for the safety of our profession: our physical, mental and material security in the homeland and in exile.
3. **Sustainability and capacities,**
 - Is necessary to have a person that would dedicate time to elaborate projects. It's difficult for us to both work: journalistic and management.
 - Not all partners are ready to be self-sufficient or to diversify their income.
 - We learn the importance of the indicator in our planning: we need to create them, to measure the results in our projects.
 - Planning activities must be followed by funding, to advance in our media schedule.
4. **Content creation**

- Partners need to have constant content production on their digital platform; it will help to get more followers, deepen or extend topics of investigation, allow the opportunity for more collaboration and increase the audience.
- Having more funds will help to disseminate content in other platforms helping to increase and attract other donors.

In Central America, it was decided to the experience of **La Sala and ForoCap** are two **case studies** that were spotted and presented here because they have a high interconnection with the programme outcome and the countries' ground needs. Also it is important to mention that the two experiences are different in magnitude, and life time, thus it can have two approaches to strengthen Vikes programme. These case studies were not intended to be representative of the overall project's experience, given the diversity among territories. Instead, the country studies were considered important to provide a more in-depth and grounded understanding of the case projects and how Vikes programme is relevant to and how effective activities were in producing results on-the-ground.

Case Study: La Sala - Women Directors Media Network

La Sala is a women directors media network founded in 2020 in Nicaragua. Its purpose is to provide women journalists access to funding sources and protection against government reprisal. They are an emerging media that focuses on covering human rights and gender equality issues. Is a supportive community for women journalists in exile, which started with 8 women directors, but has expanded to 13 women directors, who vary in age, vision on feminism issues, and hail from different departments of Nicaragua, and currently residing in various foreign countries. Similarities among them are to be mothers, caregivers, and journalists.

The reason to present this case study is that the journalist's female network aligns with Vikes programme second outcome. This network is new, it needs to improve its organizational structure and management, thus supporting the network is a win for both sides.

"What I know of the CA environment La Sala is a unique initiative. This space has obtained support from other donors, however, cutting the support to this network would lead the leadership in hand of men and women to become housekeepers".

Even though they are operating effectively and producing journalistic works while living in different countries in exile, they are facing repression and threats from the government, they have a necessity of financial support, and managing the dual responsibilities of caregiving and professional work. During the field visit it was confirmed that this network is pushing toward a stronger structure, imparted many workshops and mentoring to the women directors, it has visibility among the journalists, and that they are producing and engaging a niche audience with high-quality and relevant content. The biggest challenges are the security for them and their family members and getting funds.

Conclusion and Recommendation: La Sala is a new initiative, it has the potential to be a strong space for women journalists, especially for those in exile. It is recommended that Vikes support the network to explore new funding opportunities and partnerships, secure grants and sponsorships toward them, provide mental health and well-being resources, and implement project management tools for better organization and coordination. It is recommended that La Sala improve communication among all the directors and map what topics and formats will be used to produce media content.

Case Study: Foro CAP - A Convergence of Citizens and Journalists

The second case study presented is **ForoCap** organized by Vikes partner El Faro. This event was created in 2010 in El Salvador, with the aims to bring together citizen and journalists in a same place for 3-6 days to discuss the main topics and challenges that occurred in Central America. At ForoCap journalists and communicators have training opportunity by renown journalist from Latin American and other regions. For instance, Jon Lee Anderson, Martín Caparrós, Gioconda Belli, Carlos Fernando Chamorro, Seymour Hersh, Leila Guerriero, Diego Luna, and others. It also became a space to disseminate the cultural scope of the region.

Since its creation ForoCap has mutated. Until 2019 it was held in El Salvador for 6 days at the Art Museum with local people and journalists from the region. It was a space between civil society and journalists. In 2020, it was not held because of Covid and in 2021 it was hybrid. In 2022, it was organized in Antigua, Guatemala for 3 days, only with journalists. The participation of the civil society decreases because it of the context organized out of El Salvador and lack of funds.

In 2023, Cap Forum was organized for second time in Antigua Guatemala for 4 days, distributed in 25 events such as public talks, book presentations, cultural activities, training workshops for journalists, masterclasses, and roundtables. A total 250 participants were presented ²². In the final speech in 2023, Carlos Martinez creator of the Cap Forum said:

"In 2023, against all odds, against some of our own predictions, we will be 25 years old, and we are fortunate to celebrate it in a party like this, surrounded by friends like you. A luxury".














Foro Cap is a crucial space for journalists in CA. In addition, this event has many elements from Vikes programme approach such as an impact on journalists by providing professional growth through exposure to international journalistic standards and practices, networking opportunities with renowned journalists and peers, and the opportunity to cover regional issues in depth and insight. In addition, it also brings citizens to understand the challenges faced in CA and to participate in discussions with journalists which can influence public discourse and policy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Foro CAP has successfully created a dynamic platform for dialogue, professional development, and cultural promotion in Central America. It is recommended that Vikes guarantee and expand a strategic partnership and funding for the event. Increase the number of participants, guaranteeing women journalist participation, and create a format to register participants. It is recommended for El Faro to include the civil society organizations again in the event, develop specialized training modules on emerging media trends and technologies, and offer continuous professional development opportunities before the event, so the face-to-face training can be considered as the closing.

²² El Faro. (2023). *Relatoría del Foro Centroamericano de Periodismo* Vol. 13 Forocap: Un lugar para las palabras.

4. Annexes

<p>1. Evaluation Matrix</p>	 Evaluation matrix .docx
<p>2. Data Collection tools</p>	 Interview guide to Project  Focus Group Guide for partners.docx  Focus Group Guide for partners.docx
<p>3. Projects outputs</p>	 EA Project Outputs Matrix.docx  CA Project Outputs Matrix.docx
<p>4. Projects outcomes</p>	 EA Project Outcomes  CA Project Outcomes
<p>5. References and list of documents consulted</p>	 References.docx  List of Vikes key documents
<p>6. ToR and short bio of consultant team</p>	 EVAL_2024_ToRVI kes_Mid-  Team Bio.docx
<p>7. Code of conduct MFA signed</p>	 Ethical Code of Conduct for INGOs