



Vikes

Viestintä ja kehitys -säätiö

Finnish Foundation for Media and Development

PROGRAMME RESULTS REPORT 2024

Strengthening independent media and free expression globally



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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| ACCH | La Asociación Centroamericana Centro Humboldt (Central American organisation Centro Humboldt) |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| MCT | Media Council of Tanzania |
| MFA | Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland |
| PMEL | Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning |
| PSEAH | Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment |
| RBM | Results-Based Management |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| Vikes | Viestintä ja kehitys -säätiö / Finnish Foundation for Media and Development |
| WIM | Women in Media project |

Summary

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

In 2024, Vikes continued its operations in Myanmar, Nepal, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Central America, and Finland. Partners included media associations, journalist unions, independent media, and civil society organisations (CSOs), who advanced press freedom and the rights of media workers, produced quality journalism on diverse topics, and promoted gender equality within media systems. In Finland, Vikes engaged a wide range of stakeholders – including journalists, journalism students, decision-makers, and the general public – through global citizenship education, advocacy, and communications.

Programme-level results in 2024 reflected steady progress despite significant operational challenges in many contexts. Partners expanded inclusive and pluralistic media content, improved gender representation in media production, and strengthened organisational practices. Outcome-level achievements varied across regions and partners, with the strongest progress observed where partners demonstrated thoughtful leadership and long-term strategic direction. Even in contexts with staff turnover, success was possible when guided by a shared vision and flexible, adaptive management – whether among partners or within Vikes itself. Efforts to build organisational resilience and advocacy capacity moved forward, particularly in contexts where partners focused on strategic planning and early revenue diversification. However, financial sustainability remains a concern across all regions. In Finland, Vikes' new domestic team strengthened national outreach and built a foundation for more coordinated, results-based work.

The programme's contributions align with Finland's foreign policy priorities and support progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, the work promoted SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through inclusive media practices and the defence of civic space.

A key milestone in 2024 was the external mid-term evaluation, which confirmed the programme's strategic relevance and provided practical recommendations for improving programme logic, sustainability planning, and monitoring practices. These findings, along with internal reflections and partner input, informed several programme-level improvements and shaped the design of the 2026–2029 programme. The revised results framework and Theory of Change will guide the next programme period, with final adjustments to be made in collaboration with partners after the funding decision by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in late 2025.

1. Introduction to Vikes 2024 Results Report

This Results Report presents the outcomes of the third year of Vikes' development cooperation programme, funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA). The report follows the structure of Vikes' Results Framework, with a particular emphasis on outcome-level achievements. The four outcome areas analysed in this report are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 1: Contribution of programme components to outcome level results

Local ownership and localisation within the Vikes programme

Local ownership and localisation remain foundational principles of Vikes’ programme. In 2024, Vikes continued to work closely with local partners – media organisations and outlets, civil society actors, and training institutions – who led project implementation in their respective countries, supported by Vikes through programmatic and administrative guidance, as well as technical and peer support from Finnish media professionals.

Empowered partnerships are central to Vikes’ way of working. Local media organisations and civil society actors lead the planning, implementation, and monitoring of activities, with Vikes providing support and peer-to-peer technical expertise. Facilitated self-assessments have helped partners identify development priorities and take initial steps toward strengthening their organisational resilience. Strengthening local leadership structures, holding regular consultations, and establishing formalised partnership agreements have further supported collaboration and helped manage expectations. Despite staff turnover and safety pressures in some programme countries, most partners remained highly engaged and committed throughout the year.

Ensuring **meaningful rights-holder participation** is another core element of Vikes’ approach to local ownership and programme implementation. Across the programme, rights-holders – including journalists, students, women, youth, and marginalised groups – contributed not only as beneficiaries but also as co-creators and decision-makers. They were involved in content production, advisory roles, training feedback, public dialogue, and monitoring. This has strengthened ownership, increased relevance, and, in some cases, catalysed institutional

* Outcome Area 2 was not a core focus of the Central America project in 2024, and no output-level results were planned under this area. However, the project’s results contributed to Outcome 2 indicators at the outcome level.

change, such as the adoption of gender-sensitive newsroom practices and improved editorial inclusiveness.

Contextual adaptation and flexibility have been crucial in enabling local ownership under difficult circumstances. In several programme countries, journalists and media actors continue to face serious risks, including political intimidation, censorship, and threats to personal safety. In Myanmar and Nicaragua, for example, partners operate under highly restrictive conditions, while in Somalia, clan dynamics complicate inclusive participation. Addressing these barriers requires sustained investment in trust-building, inclusive strategies, and flexible participation models tailored to each context. By placing partners and rights-holders at the centre of its work, Vikes fosters media development that is not only locally led but also resilient and responsive. Strengthening local ownership is especially important in contexts where independent journalism itself is under threat – it lays the foundation for media systems that can endure, evolve, and serve their communities.

The following chapters present the results achieved in 2024, analyse key risks and mitigation efforts, and offer an overall assessment of the programme year. Together, they provide a comprehensive view of Vikes' progress, challenges, and lessons learnt in advancing locally led media development.

2. Results of the Vikes Programme 2024

In 2024, Vikes continued to support independent media and strengthen the role of journalism in diverse and often challenging contexts. This chapter presents the programme's progress in 2024 across each outcome area, based on Vikes' Theory of Change and results-based management approach. The analysis highlights key achievements, challenges, and factors that influenced change during the reporting year.

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

In 2024, Vikes' partners continued to produce a wide range of journalistic content across multiple formats and platforms. From investigative reports, tv debates, and radio programmes to podcasts, short videos, and documentaries, partners adapted their content strategies to suit the needs of their audiences and respond to evolving political and technological environments.

One of the year's most encouraging developments was the increase in diversity within the content itself. Gender equality and the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH), which had seen a slight dip in 2023, returned to earlier levels of visibility. Coverage of civic space and democratic governance also showed signs of increased visibility, including a range of perspectives such as on media freedom, government policies, and corruption. Coverage of disability and minority issues nearly doubled, from 6% of reported content in 2023 to 11% in 2024. This growth reflects a genuine effort among partners to better represent underrepresented groups, with good examples from East Africa where organisations like Jamii FM continued their collaboration with a local disability rights organisation. While the direct

participation of persons with disabilities in trainings decreased compared to the previous year, the inclusion of disability perspectives in content production increased, signalling a shift in editorial priorities.

The gender balance among content producers also shifted in 2024. Around half of the published content was produced by women journalists, down from 75% the previous year. This change partly reflects the more balanced gender ratio among training participants: in 2024, women and men were represented equally, compared to a 63% female majority in 2023. However, the measurement of this indicator remains challenging in practice. In many cases, media content is produced by teams rather than individuals, and particularly in Central America, security concerns lead many journalists to work under pseudonyms, making it difficult to reliably assess the gender of contributors after publication.

Despite these challenges, partners demonstrated strong progress in terms of reach and audience engagement. In East Africa, community radio portals in Tanzania and Uganda continued to surpass expectations. Although the focus in 2024 remained on strengthening collaboration with existing stations, one new station joined the Ugandan portal, yet another station was forced to temporarily suspend broadcasting due to licensing issues. Overall, the programme now works with over 60 community radio stations in Tanzania and Uganda, significantly exceeding original targets. Together, these rural stations reach over 10 million people through on-air broadcasts and online platforms. In Central America, partners steadily increased their social media followings, meeting or exceeding their project targets. Many did so by actively exploring new platforms and formats, such as TikTok videos, WhatsApp newsletters, and other short-form multimedia content. These innovations proved particularly useful in contexts of media censorship and surveillance, where they ensured safer content distribution as well as expanded reach, especially among young people. The coordination within Vikes partners and with other media also added journalistic value and credibility to the stories, encouraging mutual reinforcement of editorial agendas. For instance, Onda Local in Nicaragua successfully adapted environmental research from La Asociación Centroamericana Centro Humboldt (ACCH) into podcasts and co-produced videos with La Sala exploring women's leadership and civic participation.

Capacity strengthening remained a core element of the programme's support. Across the programme, training volumes increased for the third consecutive year. The ForoCAP journalism forum in Central America served as both a learning platform and a safe space for regional and exiled journalists to network and share practices. The Women in Media (WIM) project continued to strengthen women journalists' professional skills. In Tanzania, the mentored women journalists produced programmes and stories on issues such as gender-based violence, challenges faced by street children and children with disabilities, and barriers women journalists face in the workplace. In Nepal, investigative stories produced by the trained women journalists reached an audience of over three million readers. In Myanmar, an inclusive recruitment strategy and a well-supported learning environment enabled students to produce twelve short films, half of which were directed by women.

While the programme saw strong progress in most regions, some challenges limited the full achievement of targets. In Somalia, for example, the volume of content produced was lower than planned. This was due in part to a strategic shift toward training activities focused on preventing sexual harassment, disinformation, and hate speech – issues that were identified as urgent by local partners. Initial work on disability inclusion in Somalia also revealed significant cultural barriers. Despite this, the country team successfully organised a seminar on disability rights and began preparing for a sign language news segment to be launched in 2025.

Partners faced a range of contextual risks in 2024 that affected outcome area 1. In Central America, political repression and financial uncertainty continued to affect operations. In response, partners implemented protective measures, such as anonymous attribution and secure content-sharing systems, to ensure team safety. Meanwhile, outreach was expanded to media outlets in Guatemala, and new communication strategies, including press releases and thematic campaigns, helped increase the uptake of partner content. In Myanmar, security risks and the reintroduction of the conscription law led to the postponement of the Travelling Cinema component. However, the partner maintained public engagement through alternative screening strategies and continued to support alumni affected by the changing security landscape.

Taken together, the results achieved in 2024 reaffirm the programme’s core assumption: with sustained support, independent media organisations can produce more inclusive and diverse journalism, extend their reach, and strengthen public credibility – even under challenging conditions. Most partners remained committed to diversifying their content and elevating underrepresented voices, including women, youth, indigenous communities, and persons with disabilities. Exiled partners upheld editorial independence, while collaborative working methods helped sustain production during times of volatility. Although not all planned outputs were reached, the overall direction of change remains strongly aligned with the intended outcome. The link between improved media capacities and the ability to produce high-quality, inclusive content holds true, though shaped by structural and contextual factors.

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

In 2024, Vikes programme continued to promote the mainstreaming of gender equality in targeted media organisations. These included both Vikes’ direct partners and selected media outlets with which partners collaborated during the year. Progress was visible at both individual and organisational levels, despite the more limited scope of activities compared to initial plans. Several carefully designed and well-implemented interventions led to meaningful and tangible changes.

Programme indicators show steady progress in the development of gender policies and reporting systems, although advancement varied by context. Reporting mechanisms remain highly context-specific, shaped by cultural sensitivities and differing levels of organisational maturity. In many cases, efforts to build or strengthen internal systems had to navigate the difficult balance between usability and confidentiality – often a challenging task for small organisations with limited capacity and resources. Importantly, reporting systems alone are not

sufficient. Their effectiveness depends on complementary investments in awareness-raising, training, and trust-building among staff, leadership, and external stakeholders. Organisational culture change cannot be achieved through policy alone; it requires understanding, skills, and the confidence to act on shared values.

The overall number of training participants for gender equality and PSEAH themes in 2024 was significantly lower than in previous years – around 50% fewer than in 2023. Despite this decline, participant feedback indicates that the trainings were more impactful. A total of 91% of participants reported improved understanding and increased confidence in addressing discrimination and harassment. The programme’s approach shifted towards fewer, more targeted and context-specific interventions, allowing for greater depth and relevance. Careful selection of both target groups and implementing partners proved essential, and training content was tailored to reflect the specific realities and needs of each audience. This quality-over-quantity approach led to more meaningful results, particularly in contexts where trust and long-term collaboration were already in place.

While participation in general gender equality training declined in 2024 compared to the previous year, there was a notable increase in engagement in organisational-level capacity-building sessions focused on gender policies and gender-sensitive reporting practices. These sessions exceeded the programme-period targets for this area and contributed directly to strategic changes within many targeted organisations. The combined approach of building individual awareness and advancing institutional development proved effective in sustaining progress.

Women in Media project, for example, made good progress in Tanzania in advancing gender equality within media organisations. Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) worked with around 20 media houses, contributing to the development of gender policies in five and initiating similar efforts with others. Gender desks were also established in three outlets to comprehensively address equality in both editorial content and internal practices. Additionally, newsroom leaders – including editors and producers – received training in both Tanzania and Nepal to better integrate gender perspectives into media content.

In Somalia, Vikes partner facilitated a series of workshops on preventing sexual harassment in media workplaces. These sessions deliberately targeted male media leaders and executives, creating a safe space for open dialogue on sensitive issues that are often silenced. This male-only format was key to building trust and encouraging reflection. The involvement of experienced female journalists, who shared firsthand experiences, further deepened participants’ understanding. As a result, several participants went on to initiate internal discussions within their organisations, and some began drafting codes of conduct to address sexual harassment and promote gender equality. Other practical steps included introducing staff meetings on workplace culture and creating private changing rooms for female employees. While structural barriers remain – such as the lack of formal policies, few women in decision-making roles, and persistent cultural taboos – these initiatives signal meaningful first steps toward organisational change.

In Myanmar, progress in this area was supported by an already favourable institutional environment. The partner organisation had long-established policies and procedures related to PSEAH, complemented by inclusive recruitment practices and integrated training on gender equality. Women comprised the majority of beneficiaries (58%), and 78% of those surveyed reported improved capacity to identify and address discrimination and harassment. A strong organisational commitment to maintaining a safe and inclusive learning environment was a key enabler of this outcome.

2024 also saw a notable institutional advancement in Central America. La Sala launched its *Women's Media Agenda for Media*, offering a practical framework for integrating gender perspectives into newsroom practices. The agenda gained visibility across the region and generated strong interest among peer media outlets and civil society organisations. In addition, the appointment of La Sala's first Gender Editor significantly improved the quality and consistency of reporting on women's rights and gender issues. Both these developments marked an important institutional step toward mainstreaming gender equality within editorial structures and content production.

The progress achieved in 2024 highlights the importance of context-specific approaches to gender mainstreaming. Not all partners are positioned to pursue policy-level interventions, and programme expectations must remain flexible to accommodate varying mandates, operating environments, and institutional capacities. While the indicator data suggests steady advancement, reporting gaps and inconsistencies persist. Partners use different methods to track change, and systems for monitoring institutional development remain under refinement. This points to the need for more harmonised yet flexible monitoring tools in the next programme period to more accurately reflect progress in gender equality work. Despite these challenges, 2024 demonstrated that even modest, well-targeted efforts can generate meaningful results. Partner expertise, strategic engagement, and trusted local networks were critical to success, especially in environments where gender equality remains a sensitive or contested issue.

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

In 2024, Vikes continued to support its partners in strengthening their institutional resilience and advocacy capacity. Progress under this outcome was tangible but uneven, with good advancements in some regions – particularly Central America – and more incremental steps elsewhere. The pathway toward greater self-sufficiency proved more complex and slower than anticipated, constrained by limited human and financial resources, competing operational demands, and broader sectoral instability.

Encouraging developments were especially visible among partners in Central America. Onda Local, operating under severe political repression, increased its annual income by 27% by offering communications services, while also reinforcing internal systems such as editorial protocols and safety procedures. These efforts enabled the organisation to maintain journalistic

output while investing in staff protection and institutional continuity. La Sala, meanwhile, secured dedicated funding for editorial work, launched a Strategic Plan for 2025–2026, and expanded its public visibility through a regional campaign built around its *Women’s Media Agenda for Media*. The appointment of its first Gender Editor further consolidated these gains, helping the outlet embed gender perspectives in editorial work and strengthen its public profile. These successes were enabled by strategic leadership and the ability to prioritise organisational development despite daily pressures. ACCH, formerly a prominent environmental organisation in Nicaragua called Centro Humboldt, which, like independent media outlets, was forced out of the country, is now operating as a reborn regional organisation in Guatemala and has also made significant progress. Managing a diverse project portfolio funded by nine international donors, ACCH improved its institutional maturity, developed a communications strategy, and began building a national environmental journalism network – addressing an identified gap in regional advocacy and collaboration.

Despite these achievements, structural and contextual challenges persisted. Partners across Central America continued to face political persecution and logistical constraints, including cross-border coordination difficulties and direct threats to staff. In Nicaragua, for example, journalists who participated in activities organised by Vikes’ partners were placed under house arrest, further highlighting the risks faced by independent media actors. Still, the partners’ determination to sustain operations, build systems, and engage in strategic planning under such pressure exemplifies the kind of resilience this outcome aims to strengthen.

In East Africa, training and collaboration with community radio stations continued to support capacity development among local media partners. A new editorial team was recruited and trained for the Ugandan radio portal, and almost 350 journalists trained in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya built local capacity to produce quality content. Notably, 73% of radio stations participating in the Ugandan portal reported improved fundraising, largely due to their increased online reach. In Somalia, Vikes partners also undertook capacity-building efforts, e.g. on results-based management, albeit on a more limited scale. Trainings tailored to local realities were well received, but ongoing demand outpaced resources. Regular engagement and sustained support will be needed to make long-term gains in fragile media environments.

Despite contextual constraints, advocacy capacity among partners remained strong. Across the programme, partners remained active civic actors, defending freedom of expression through diverse channels: publishing monitoring reports, lobbying for legal reforms, running public campaigns, and participating in national and international advocacy networks. In Central America, partners joined forces to denounce censorship and shrinking civic space, while in East Africa, community radio networks used their growing platforms to hold local officials accountable. These actions demonstrated continued relevance and impact, even in restrictive environments.

Vikes’ tailored support – ranging from mentoring and strategic planning to project management coaching and digital infrastructure – played a vital role in sustaining partners’ operations and laying the groundwork for future development. While these inputs enabled meaningful steps toward greater autonomy, it is still too early to assess their longer-term impact on self-

sufficiency beyond the current programme cycle. Strengthening self-sufficiency is a long-term process that requires sustained technical support, strategic guidance, and flexible funding, not one-off interventions. The experience of 2024 confirms the importance of clarity in programme design. Where partners combined realistic strategies with focused advocacy, they achieved tangible progress, even in challenging contexts. In contrast, where daily operational pressures overshadowed long-term planning, progress was more limited.

To address these dynamics more systematically, the revised results framework for 2026–2029 introduces clearer ways to track how strengthened capacities and advocacy contribute to partners’ resilience and independence. Despite variation across contexts, Outcome 3 advanced in 2024: several partners improved their fundraising capacity, expanded stakeholder engagement, and amplified their collective voice in defence of freedom of expression. These achievements, though modest, reinforce the programme’s logic and suggest clear opportunities for Vikes to deepen its impact in the years ahead.

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

In 2024, Vikes’ domestic work made progress across all key areas – advocacy, communications, and global citizenship education – despite considerable disruptions caused by a full turnover of domestic personnel. This transition affected the continuity of activities and led to some gaps in data collection, particularly early in the year. Even so, nearly all output targets were met or exceeded, and promising steps were taken to deepen public engagement, expand stakeholder networks, and sharpen the strategic focus of advocacy efforts.

What could have been a major setback became an opportunity. The successful recruitment of a highly professional, motivated, and well-connected team brought new ideas, energy, and momentum to Vikes’ domestic work. Their rapid integration helped keep progress on track, and in several areas, even accelerated it. The new team’s fresh perspectives and networks played a key role in broadening stakeholder engagement, including with duty-bearers. This was reflected in increased interest in Vikes’ work, new cross-sectoral contacts, and strengthened dialogue with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and other key actors. While broader societal shifts, changes in funding, and internal restructuring posed some challenges, the overall trajectory was positive.

A new **advocacy** strategy was finalised, providing clearer direction for Vikes’ advocacy work in Finland. The Board’s continued support, together with Vikes’ active role in national platforms such as the Development Policy Committee and Fingo working groups, offers a strong foundation for long-term impact. In parallel, Vikes is engaged in international networks and forums, aiming to learn from and collaborate more effectively with larger organisations and consortiums. Across all levels, Vikes’ advocacy is characterised by commitment, persistence, and a collaborative approach.

While outcome-level data for advocacy remained limited in 2024, activities at the output level were implemented successfully and, in many cases, exceeded original targets. The lack of

baseline data at the beginning of the programme period partly explains the modest ambition of current advocacy targets. In the next programme period, Vikes will adopt more ambitious goals and improved data collection systems to better capture longer-term influence. Looking ahead, Vikes' 20th anniversary in 2025 will serve as an opportunity to deepen advocacy efforts through enhanced communications and stakeholder outreach.

Vikes' **communications** in 2024 shifted to more strategic, impact-driven engagement. Although fewer articles were published than in previous years, content reached broader audiences and received positive feedback. Survey data cautiously indicated improved public understanding of freedom of expression and media diversity among target audiences. Increasing the working time of the Communications Specialist mid-year enabled more effective, professionalised communications work. One key target – Vikes' visibility in external media – was not met, but this remains a focus area for 2025. A refreshed communications brand and clearer focus on quality over quantity have laid the groundwork for more visible, impactful communication moving forward.

Activities in **global citizenship education** significantly exceeded quantitative targets. Supported by additional funding from the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation, Vikes expanded its work on pluralistic media and representation. Staffing increase enabled more outreach and a broader range of audiences. However, qualitative impact, especially in terms of improved understanding, showed a slight decline compared to previous years. This may reflect changes in approach: in 2023, practical, workshop-based formats (e.g. group projects with Tampere University) were used, while in 2024, the focus shifted to lecture-based formats and a final seminar. While both models serve important functions, the shift likely affected the perceived relevance and depth of engagement among participants.

Despite the transitional challenges caused by staff turnover, 2024 marked a year of renewal and strategic realignment for Vikes' domestic work. New team members brought fresh perspectives, expanded networks, and improved capacity across communications, global citizenship education, and advocacy. This contributed to more focused and impactful implementation, even as some short-term delays emerged. The development of an advocacy strategy, stronger stakeholder engagement, and a clearer communications approach laid a solid foundation for future influence. At the same time, persistent external pressures – such as shrinking civic space, weakened democratic development, and tightening public finances – underscored the need for sustained, adaptive engagement also in Finland. To remain effective, Vikes' advocacy and domestic work in general must continue to respond to the broader societal and geopolitical context and find ways to strengthen the visibility and recognition of our key themes. Close collaboration with professional networks, relevant stakeholders, and background communities will be essential. The next programme period will benefit from improved monitoring tools, more ambitious targets, and continued investment in inclusive, high-quality public work that promotes freedom of expression, global justice, and diverse media representation.

2.5. Summary of achievements

In 2024, the programme advanced on multiple fronts, despite a challenging global context and internal transitions. Results across the four outcome areas affirmed the core logic of the programme: carefully targeted, context-sensitive support can generate meaningful progress, even in fragile and volatile environments.

Outcome 1 demonstrated that investments in editorial capacity, technology, and distribution channels lead to more diverse and inclusive journalism reaching large and varied audience. From rural radio networks in East Africa to investigative journalism in Nepal, partners expanded their reach while amplifying the voices of women, persons with disabilities, and marginalised communities. They contributed to public debate and awareness through in-depth, pluralistic journalism that tackled sensitive themes such as media freedom, civic space, gender equality, and corruption. Gender-related topics regained visibility, and disability coverage nearly doubled compared to 2023. Gender-sensitive approaches were more consistently integrated into editorial planning, especially among partners with dedicated gender expertise. Community radio portals in Tanzania and Uganda continued to serve twice the planned number of stations, and Central American partners used platforms like TikTok and WhatsApp to bypass censorship and reach new audiences. Partners' strategic use of storytelling techniques, media monitoring, and multi-platform distribution helped increase reach and strengthen the public impact of their journalism.

Outcome 2 confirmed that gender mainstreaming takes root when clear policies are matched with deliberate, trust-based capacity-building. In Tanzania, MCT led extensive efforts to support gender policies and practices across the media sector, conducting visits to around 20 media houses, co-developing policies with five of them, and helping establish dedicated gender desks in three. While training reach was lower than in 2023, impact was high: 91% of participants reported stronger knowledge and confidence in addressing discrimination and harassment. Partners achieved institutional breakthroughs – including La Sala's *Women's Media Agenda* and its first Gender Editor, and Somalia-based workshops that catalysed internal reforms in media houses. In Myanmar, inclusive recruitment and sustained PSEAH implementation created safe learning environments where women's leadership could grow. While data gaps remain, a consistent trend emerged: where partners combined policy frameworks with local ownership and leadership buy-in, organisational culture began to shift.

Outcome 3 reflected uneven but encouraging progress toward partner self-sufficiency and advocacy strength. Central American partners in particular showed momentum: Onda Local grew its earned income by 27%; La Sala secured matching funding to Vikes' contribution, effectively doubling its 2024 operating budget; and ACCH managed a diverse project portfolio while laying the groundwork for a national environmental journalism network. In East Africa, 73% of radio stations participating in the Uganda portal reported a clear improvement in their fundraising, thanks to their increased online visibility. Across all regions, partners continued to defend media freedom through monitoring, advocacy, and, in some contexts, direct engagement with duty-bearers. However, progress toward outcome-level change in self-sufficiency was slower than the delivery of outputs. This highlights the need to more clearly link

capacity-building efforts to long-term institutional development – an area that is now more explicitly addressed also in the revised results framework for 2026–2029.

Outcome 4, focused on domestic work in Finland, underwent a full staff renewal that initially caused disruption but ultimately led to strategic revitalisation. New team members brought fresh energy, new networks and skills across communications, advocacy, and global citizenship education. A new advocacy strategy was finalised, communications became more strategic and targeted, and public outreach expanded. Events exceeded audience targets, and global citizenship education activities reached a wider range of participants, supported by additional funding and staff capacity. While some gaps in data collection and visibility in external media remained, the foundations for more impactful public engagement are now in place.

Across the programme, both partners and Vikes demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and strong commitment in the face of political, financial, and operational pressures. The programme’s strategic direction was reaffirmed, and several key assumptions in the results framework – such as the effectiveness of peer-based learning, the value of long-term mentoring, and the central role of local leadership – proved valid. However, other assumptions, particularly the expectation that operating environments would remain stable enough for planned implementation, were tested. In many contexts, shrinking civic space increased operational risks and disrupted implementation. These shifts affected the programme’s efficiency, causing delays, limiting mobility, and requiring ongoing adaptation. Nonetheless, the programme’s built-in flexibility and the strong commitment of partners helped to mitigate many of these challenges. These risk-related developments, and the programme’s responses to them, are examined in more detail next, in Chapter 3. Risk management.

3. Risk management

Risk management continued to play a central role in Vikes’ programme implementation during 2024. Based on the identified needs and earlier recommendations, Vikes took significant steps to strengthen its risk management system, balancing the need for structured processes with the realities of limited resources and diverse partner capacities. While the updated Risk Management Policy was only formally approved in early 2025, much of the groundwork for practical implementation was done during the reporting year. The revised Risk Management Policy and updated programme risk matrix provide a clearer structure, better alignment with on-the-ground realities, and more actionable mitigation measures.

The following sections provide an overview of the most significant external and internal risks, followed by an overall assessment of the current Vikes’ risk management practices.

3.1. Main external risks and their mitigation

In 2024, the most serious external risks to Vikes’ work continued to arise from the deteriorating political and security conditions in several programme countries. These risks affected the safety of journalists, staff, and partners, at times disrupting project implementation and restricting public dialogue and civic participation. As these challenges are largely structural, they cannot be

fully mitigated. However, responses rooted in local knowledge, strong partner networks, and flexible operating models helped reduce harm and maintain programme continuity. In this context, Vikes' sustained support for independent media and civil society actors remains not only relevant but essential. By helping to safeguard spaces for public interest journalism and civic engagement, Vikes contributes to democratic resilience in increasingly restrictive environments.

Shrinking civic space and the repression of media freedom remained a critical and intensifying risk in several regions, particularly in Central America, Myanmar, and East Africa. In **Central America**, partners documented ongoing censorship, surveillance, and criminalisation of journalists, most severely in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Incidents of exile, denationalisation, and cyberattacks highlighted the hostile operating environment for media actors. Reduced international support and political shifts in countries previously seen as relatively stable, like Costa Rica and the United States, further undermined civic space and press freedom in the region. This highlights the growing need to monitor global as well as regional political shifts. To respond, partners activated emergency protocols, promoted the use of virtual private networks (VPNs), invested in digital security and regional networking, relocated to safer countries when necessary. While these actions enabled continuity, the broader political landscape in Central America remained highly restrictive. In **East Africa**, civic space continued to narrow as Tanzania and Uganda approached upcoming elections. Although Vikes-supported community media actors were not directly targeted, attacks on journalists, opposition groups, and civil society actors increased. Partners responded by upholding transparent, balanced and inclusive reporting practices and strengthening networks with other media and civic actors to reduce exposure. Nonetheless, the residual risk remains high as political tensions are likely to intensify further in the coming election years. In **Myanmar**, new and existing laws, including amendments to the film law and the introduction of a conscription law, further restricted freedom of expression and civic participation. These legal measures, combined with an already volatile political context, complicated project planning and delivery. Vikes' partner responded by assessing risks, adapting training schedules, issuing official travel confirmations for students, and providing tailored security briefings. These measures helped reduce disruptions, but the environment remains unpredictable.

Political instability and armed conflict affected multiple regions and posed significant threats to both individuals and programme implementation. In **Myanmar**, frequent outbreaks of violence and indiscriminate arrests disrupted fieldwork and limited movement. In some cases, students were unable to return home due to fighting, requiring extended stays in Yangon. The partner mitigated these risks by relying on its alumni network for local intelligence, adjusting filming locations, and applying flexible implementation schedules. In **Somalia**, increased insecurity in certain areas hindered peace-focused events and required careful planning to ensure participant safety. In both contexts, ongoing conflict sensitivity, local coordination, and updated protocols helped reduce exposure to harm, though risks remained high.

Journalist safety and targeted threats remained a cross-cutting and intensifying concern across nearly all regions. Political repression, social unrest, and digital surveillance created

conditions of acute vulnerability for journalists, particularly during electoral periods or in authoritarian settings. These threats were strongly linked to the broader trend of shrinking civic space. **Female journalists faced distinct and heightened risks**, including sexual harassment, online abuse, and imprisonment. In *Nicaragua*, several female journalists were placed under house arrest, prompting adjustments to beneficiary engagement and the introduction of psychosocial support. In *Somalia*, cultural resistance to gender inclusion remains strong, heightening the risk of backlash against women participating in journalism or other public-facing roles. In response, Vikes partners strengthened safeguarding measures, adapted working group compositions, and expanded awareness efforts to address underlying gendered dynamics.

Misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech also emerged as a growing threat to programme objectives in 2024. While the most visible impacts were reported in *Somalia*, where harmful narratives on social media undermined peacebuilding efforts and inflamed community tensions, similar risks are increasingly recognised across other contexts. In response, Vikes partners in Somalia implemented targeted journalist training and messaging campaigns to promote ethical reporting and counter harmful content. Recognising the broader relevance of these risks, Vikes has updated its programme-level risk matrix to reflect the growing influence of disinformation and polarisation on public perceptions of programme themes. In the coming years, the programme plans to broaden its response by integrating media literacy initiatives and community engagement strategies, helping to build public resilience against disinformation and polarisation.

In parallel with global trends, increasing societal polarisation has also introduced new risks in Finland. **Targeted online harassment or reputational attacks against Vikes in Finland** were identified as an emerging external threat. As Vikes continues to advocate for gender equality, pluralism, independent media, and global development, there is a growing possibility of attracting online abuse, disinformation, or smear campaigns aimed at delegitimising its work or threatening staff. Although the risk has not yet materialised significantly, increasing visibility and recognition heighten exposure. In response, Vikes is reinforcing its internal social media protocols, enhancing staff guidance, and actively monitoring online discourse. Preparedness efforts also include strengthening crisis communication procedures and building alliances with trusted media and civil society actors to safeguard the credibility of Vikes and support collective resilience.

Financial uncertainty and economic instability continued to challenge long-term planning and implementation, particularly in Myanmar and Central America. Funding cuts from institutional donors led to underfinancing in several budget lines, affecting salaries, travel, and programme outputs. Partners responded by seeking new funding sources, reallocating resources, and exploring local revenue diversification. In *Myanmar*, persistent inflation and currency instability created further complications. The partner adopted the use of financial intermediaries and prioritised budget flexibility to sustain operations. However, financial unpredictability remains a serious concern in fragile economies, especially where external shocks are combined with limited institutional capacity.

Climate-related risks and natural disasters also disrupted operations, underscoring the vulnerability of infrastructure in partner countries. In **Tanzania**, an exceptionally severe thunderstorm damaged broadcasting and solar power equipment at a partner community radio station. Emergency support was provided to replace and repair damaged equipment, and a new surge protector was installed to reduce future risk. While effective in the short term, these incidents point to a broader need for climate resilience planning and investment in backup systems.

In sum, 2024 was marked by a convergence of high-level external threats that demanded rapid response, local adaptation, and ongoing flexibility. While mitigation strategies have been effective in sustaining programme continuity under pressure, the structural and political nature of many risks suggests that the operating environment for independent media and civil society across Vikes' programme regions will likely remain challenging in the years ahead. To address this, Vikes is continuously strengthening its risk management systems, including early identification, scenario planning, and partner support strategies tailored to fragile contexts.

3.2. Main internal risks and their mitigation

Internally, Vikes encountered a range of interconnected risks in 2024, particularly related to staffing, operational resourcing, technical systems, and partner capacity. Many of these challenges were successfully mitigated through timely interventions, proactive adjustments, and improved coordination.

Staff turnover and limited resourcing affected programme continuity both in Finland and among partners. While the impact was temporary, these changes highlighted the importance of proactive human resource planning and institutional memory. This was compounded by challenges in **mobilising co-funding**, which prevented the full use of budgeted resources and resulted in reduced activity levels. Nevertheless, task reallocation and effective use of available funds helped maintain the quality of operations. In some partner organisations, staff departures due to security risks or better salaries elsewhere created similar challenges. The impact was most notable in Central America, where partners operate in forced exile and face particularly volatile conditions. The combination of high living costs, insecurity, and limited access to stable employment environments caused uncertainty, fear, and emotional strain. In response, Vikes supported emergency staffing arrangements, offered flexibility in programme timelines, and adapted training models to shifting team compositions.

Institutional capacity gaps among partners – particularly smaller organisations operating in complex environments – reflect a conscious and strategic choice by Vikes to support independent media and civil society actors who might otherwise be excluded from international programmes. While this approach brings certain risks, it also contributes to long-term local ownership and resilience. Tailored capacity-building, ongoing mentoring, and adaptive planning remained key components of Vikes' support model in 2024. Good progress was made in several areas, particularly in documentation practices. At the same time, challenges such as staff turnover and external pressures continued to affect the pace of change. Vikes remains

committed to this inclusive approach, recognising that sustained engagement and flexibility are essential to strengthening partners' systems over time.

Compliance with donor requirements was generally strong in 2024, with no major incidents reported. Ongoing improvements to Vikes' planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (PMEL) systems, along with targeted support and enhanced documentation practices, contributed to risk mitigation. No cases of **financial mismanagement or corruption** occurred within Vikes or its partner organisations during the year, although the risk remains moderate in high-risk contexts. Preventive measures such as audits, spot checks, and updates to financial procedures helped ensure accountability. The likelihood of **reputational risk** increased slightly in 2024, reflecting the potential impact of operating in politically sensitive environments and the possibility of external crises or internal challenges. Transparent communication and internal preparedness remain critical to maintaining trust among stakeholders and responding effectively if incidents arise. To address the risk, Vikes regularly reviews and updates its crisis communication protocols. Overall, ongoing efforts to strengthen internal systems, invest in organisational capacity, and ensure resource flexibility will remain critical to managing risks and maintaining programme quality.

3.3. Overview of risk management in 2024

In 2024, Vikes made substantial progress toward building a more integrated, transparent, and proactive risk management system. In response to the increasingly volatile operating environment – characterised by shrinking civic space, political repression, financial instability, and digital threats – Vikes strengthened its internal systems and updated its Risk Management Policy, formally approved by the Board in early 2025. While many risks materialised or escalated during the year, Vikes and its partners largely succeeded in mitigating their impact through flexible planning, local knowledge, and a growing culture of shared risk awareness.

The updated Risk Management Policy provides a solid foundation for managing risks across all areas of operation and partnership. It clearly defines roles and responsibilities for all team members and the Board, outlines procedures for assessing and monitoring risk, and reinforces Vikes' commitment to the *Do No Harm* principle. Notably, the policy introduces Vikes' first formal *risk appetite statement*, offering guidance on acceptable levels of risk in different programme contexts.

While Vikes has long maintained both project-specific and programme-level risk matrices, a key improvement in 2024 was the development of a more systematic approach to linking the two. Previously, risks identified at the project level were not consistently elevated or reflected in the programme-level analysis. This gap began to be addressed during the 2024 annual reporting process, which introduced a more structured review of recurring or systemic risks. Internal coordination meetings supported alignment between project- and programme-level risk analysis, encouraging more anticipatory and collaborative approaches to risk management.

The updated programme-level risk matrix now clearly distinguishes between the inherent risk level (before mitigation) and the residual risk level (after mitigation), helping to visualise the

actual impact of risk management efforts. A new four-point risk rating scale was adopted to allow for more nuanced analysis and prioritisation of mitigation actions. However, the introduction of this scale has also had the side effect of making some risks appear more severe than in previous years, even when the underlying risk level has remained the same.

In addition, risk descriptions were revised and refined to reflect the current risk landscape more accurately. This has supported the planning and implementation of more targeted and practical mitigation measures, helping to strengthen both partner and programme-level responses. Ongoing refinements in 2025 aim to support light-touch, continuous monitoring, improve early detection of emerging risks, and enhance risk escalation processes. These efforts are intended to strengthen learning and enable more adaptive programme management over time.

Throughout the year, Vikes maintained a focus on upholding human rights standards and the *Do No Harm* principle. Risk assessments systematically addressed risks with human rights implications, including threats to freedom of expression, journalist safety, and gender-based violence. Activities were adapted where needed to avoid increasing exposure, reinforcing harmful structures, or compromising safety of partners or beneficiaries. Given the complexity of high-risk contexts, active and ongoing vigilance is essential to safeguarding human rights and ensuring ethically sound operations.

New and emerging risks were identified in 2024, including signs of democratic backsliding in countries such as Costa Rica and the United States. These developments are particularly relevant for Vikes' partners in Central America but also reflect a broader global erosion of civic space and press freedom. Such trends may influence the work of Vikes and its partners, especially in advocacy and international partnerships. Both in Finland and globally, growing concerns related to disinformation and polarisation continued to challenge public trust in media and democratic institutions. For example, shifts in U.S. foreign policy that began to take shape in late 2024 and materialised more clearly in early 2025 have already affected the global development sector. These changes have influenced funding priorities, multilateral commitments, and the broader enabling environment for civil society and independent media, with implications for Vikes and its partners. Meanwhile, recurring risks – such as shrinking civic space, repression of journalists, economic instability, and staffing challenges – intensified in several programme areas. While mitigation strategies helped manage many of these pressures, the overall risk landscape remained complex and uncertain, underscoring the continued need for flexible systems, close monitoring, and strategic adaptation.

Vikes' ability to navigate this complex environment was strengthened by its evolving risk management system. Nonetheless, the long-term sustainability of mitigation efforts will depend on continued investment in partner capacity, emergency preparedness, and flexible programme delivery models. Vikes and its partners remain highly adaptive and committed, but sustaining this resilience will require continued strategic support, especially in the areas of staff well-being, safe relocation, and sustainable funding – particularly for those operating in exile or other high-risk regions.

4. Overall assessment of the year 2024

In 2024, Vikes' development cooperation programme made meaningful progress toward its long-term goal: strengthening the role of journalists and media organisations in civil society. This work helped improve access to independent information, promote more inclusive and gender-sensitive media, and support freedom of expression. Together, these efforts contribute to more democratic, equitable, and sustainable societies.

This chapter provides an overall assessment of the programme year 2024, drawing together key insights from the results achieved, observed changes at the impact level, and contributions to broader political agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4.1. An analysis of the achieved results within the programme

In 2024, the programme's outcome-level progress remained broadly on track, with advancements observed across all outcome areas. However, progress was uneven across projects and regions, shaped more by differences in partner priorities, funding availability, and internal capacities than by the national operating context itself. Overall, the results confirmed the importance of adaptive, context-specific approaches and continued investment in institutional resilience.

Outcome 1 saw the strongest and most consistent advancement. Partners across multiple contexts produced ***diverse, inclusive journalism that reached wide audiences*** using various platforms and formats. The combination of editorial training, technological support, peer collaboration, and the use of creative, flexible formats proved effective across a range of contexts, even in restrictive environments. This outcome area benefited particularly from strong partner commitment, shared learning and content creation, and the strategic use of digital channels. In contexts affected by political repression and safety risks, audience engagement and content production were occasionally limited, but even in these settings, partners adapted by relying more heavily on digital strategies. These experiences underscore the importance of sustaining a mix of support modalities – including training, infrastructure, and regional collaboration – to safeguard media pluralism.

Outcome 2 presented a more uneven picture, largely reflecting the funding cuts that affected Vikes' ***gender mainstreaming work*** during the reporting year. Despite these constraints, some meaningful gains were made, particularly where partners had an established commitment to gender equality and internal strategies in place. Training media leaders and other individuals in positions of power contributed to improved representation and awareness and helped shift norms within media institutions. These results highlight the value of targeted interventions, even when resources are modest. While some organically emerging improvements were observed in settings like Central America, more consistent progress requires deliberate, sustained investment. The experience across projects underscores the need for clearer strategies, adequate resourcing, and cross-sectoral collaboration to embed gender equality and inclusion in both institutional practices and editorial content.

Outcome 3 focused on **strengthening partners' self-sufficiency and advocacy capacity**.

Progress in this area reflected the long-term nature of institutional development, with many partners taking foundational steps such as strategic planning, legal registration, and initial efforts toward revenue diversification. However, outcome-level change remained limited, suggesting that the institutionalisation of good practices requires targeted support for financial and institutional capacity, and a clear results logic to translate capacity gains into organisational resilience and advocacy impact.

Outcome 4 focused on **strengthening awareness and public engagement in Finland** through global citizenship education, advocacy, and communications. Progress was evident in increased visibility, expanded networks, and deeper stakeholder engagement, made possible by Vikes' newly recruited domestic team. Their expertise and swift onboarding enabled a strategic leap forward in national outreach. However, measuring impact at the outcome level remained challenging due to limitations in the current results framework, which does not fully capture the interconnected nature of domestic activities. These constraints have been acknowledged, and a revised results matrix – designed to better reflect strategic goals and outcome-level logic – will be introduced in the next programme period (2026–2029). Rather than retrofitting the current framework, resources have been focused on learning and strengthening future monitoring and design. The 2024 experience underscored the importance of integrated planning, adequate resourcing, and results-oriented communication to enhance the domestic contribution to the programme's global objectives.

Across the programme, three interlinked factors significantly influenced outcome-level progress. First, **staff continuity and capacity** were crucial: stable staffing and dedicated roles enabled several partners to make tangible progress toward strategic and organisational goals. Conversely, staffing transitions, including those in Central America and within Vikes' domestic team, caused disruptions to institutional memory, follow-up, and momentum. Second, **strong internal leadership and strategic clarity** were key enablers. Partners with clear long-term plans and the ability to balance short-term content production with organisational development priorities achieved more consistent results. The absence of dedicated staff for institutional development remained a recurring constraint. Third, the **programme's flexible and responsive approach** – including tailored support, peer learning, and trust-based collaboration – was instrumental in navigating civic space closures, security risks, and funding fluctuations. These enablers were reflected in the programme's achievements across outcome areas: strengthening media diversity, advancing gender equality in journalism, supporting institutional development, and enhancing civic engagement. In fragile settings, progress was often slower, but local ownership and adaptive tools helped mitigate many challenges. A sustainability lens provides further insight into the programme's overall trajectory. Social sustainability emerged as a strength, with most projects embedded in local communities and leveraging civic networks, alumni, and inclusive content to ensure long-term relevance. However, institutional and financial sustainability remain critical gaps. These patterns reinforce the need for adaptive, context-specific approaches and continued investment in both technical capacity and organisational resilience in the next programme phase.

4.2. Contribution to impact-level changes

In 2024, Vikes continued to pursue its long-term vision of a media landscape where journalists and media organisations play a vital role in civil society, citizens have improved access to independent information, and media content reflects greater diversity and gender-sensitivity.

Across different regions and thematic areas, partners' efforts contributed to these impact-level goals in varied but complementary ways. Many strengthened their public presence, built alliances, and contributed to civic discourse by producing content that held power to account and gave voice to underrepresented groups. While political pressure and civic space restrictions limited engagement with state actors in several contexts, media organisations continued to act as watchdogs and connectors within civil society. Their reporting, public events, and joint advocacy efforts served to uphold fundamental rights and amplify the concerns of marginalised communities. Vikes' domestic work – including global citizenship education, communications, and advocacy – also contributed to these objectives by raising public awareness, promoting media literacy, and strengthening support for freedom of expression.

The reach and relevance of independent journalism also improved in key areas. Partners produced pluralistic content across a wide range of platforms, expanding access to information despite technological, legal, or geographic barriers. Strategic use of community radio, social media, and digital storytelling enabled content to reach broader and more diverse audiences, including in areas where formal media channels are inaccessible or tightly controlled. Progress was also visible in the way partners approached inclusion. Gender-sensitive practices became more embedded in editorial processes, and partners took concrete steps to promote gender equality within their organisations and public messaging. Although a comprehensive media content analysis was not conducted in 2024, anecdotal evidence and internal reviews indicated a growing emphasis on inclusive reporting and institutional commitment to non-discrimination. Vikes' domestic activities also reinforced these efforts by cultivating broader understanding and support for independent media and democratic values among Finnish audiences.

At the same time, structural and contextual constraints – such as restricted civic space, repression of journalists, and resource limitations – continued to shape what was possible. According to RSF's 2024 World Press Freedom Index¹ and CIVICUS Monitor², most programme countries continued to experience deteriorating or severely constrained civic space and media freedom. Editorial independence declined or remained highly restricted across nearly all contexts. These realities did not halt progress, but they often slowed it or required significant adaptation.

The programme's achievements, while incremental and context-specific, reflect a consistent commitment to the overarching goals of Vikes. They demonstrate that even under difficult circumstances, carefully targeted support and long-term partnerships can strengthen the role of independent media in society. The combination of trust-based collaboration, peer learning, and local leadership has enabled partners to remain active, relevant, and increasingly influential

¹ Reporters Without Borders (RSF), *World Press Freedom Index 2024*. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/index?year=2024>

² CIVICUS, *Global Civic Space Report 2024*. Available at: https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2024/

within their communities. These elements, together with the interplay between global and domestic work, remain central to Vikes' Theory of Change and will continue to guide future programming.

4.3. Contribution to Finnish political agenda and Sustainable Development Goals

Vikes' development cooperation programme continued to align with Finland's broader political priorities, particularly the promotion of human rights, democracy, gender equality, and sustainable development. In 2024, the programme supported media diversity, strengthened civic space, and enhanced the role of journalists and media organisations in society. These efforts contributed to more inclusive media practices, improved access to independent information, and stronger foundations for democratic governance – advancing Finland's development policy objectives and reinforcing the global Agenda 2030 framework.

The programme's results in 2024 contributed most clearly to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 4 (Quality Education), with more cross-cutting or indirect contributions to SDGs 17, 10, and 9. A more detailed analysis is provided below.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The programme's most direct and consistent contributions aligned with **SDG target 16.10**, which promotes public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms. In highly restricted environments such as Nicaragua, Myanmar, and Somalia, partners played a critical role in sustaining access to editorially independent information, often under threat or in exile. Across contexts, the programme support for media actors to continue reporting, documenting human rights violations, and creating spaces for civic dialogue helped safeguard essential democratic functions where they were otherwise undermined.

The programme also contributed to **SDG target 16.7** by promoting inclusive and participatory dialogue. Media platforms supported through the programme – ranging from traditional outlets to digital and community-based formats – gave voice to underrepresented groups, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities, and facilitated more diverse public discussions. These efforts were particularly relevant in fragile or polarised contexts, where inclusive and representative media content can contribute to social cohesion, accountability, and resilience. In Somalia, for example, the peace ambassador initiative engaged schoolchildren as messengers of peace in their communities and gave them a platform to participate in public media discussions. This grassroots-level effort fostered civic participation, encouraged local dialogue, and promoted youth involvement in peacebuilding – laying a foundation for broader social change.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

Progress toward gender equality was supported through a range of gender-transformative interventions. The programme advanced **SDG targets 5.1, 5.2, and 5.5** by promoting the leadership of women journalists, challenging discriminatory norms, and improving workplace safety in media organisations. In Nicaragua, women-led media outlets strengthened their

editorial leadership and visibility; in Somalia, male staff and media leaders received training on preventing sexual harassment and fostering inclusive practices; and in Tanzania, gender policies were revised and adopted by local media houses. These efforts not only increased women's visibility and participation in media but also contributed to long-term institutional change. In several contexts, women were supported to take on leadership roles and influence editorial direction, despite operating in male-dominated or otherwise restrictive environments.

SDG 4: Quality Education

Under **SDG targets 4.4 and 4.7**, the programme contributed to both skills development and global citizenship education. Youth-focused training initiatives in East Africa and Myanmar equipped emerging journalists and media professionals with practical skills and critical thinking tools, improving employability and professional resilience in difficult environments. In Finland, global citizenship education and advocacy activities promoted awareness of sustainable development, freedom of expression, and media pluralism. These interventions supported public understanding of global interdependencies and reinforced Finland's domestic implementation of Agenda 2030.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

The programme's implementation model, rooted in long-term partnerships with civil society and media actors, reflected the spirit of **SDG target 17.17**. Equitable collaboration was key to advancing results, particularly in contexts where formal civic space is constrained. Strategic partnerships – for example, among Nicaraguan exile media or in regional networks – enabled peer learning, mutual support, and the exchange of practical tools across borders. In East Africa, training support among partner organisations and wider sharing of experiences has been especially useful in the further development and marketing of the Tanzanian and Ugandan community radio portals. Capacity development, joint planning, and flexible support models also helped strengthen institutional resilience among partners, contributing to more sustainable impact.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

Reducing inequalities remained a cross-cutting priority throughout the programme's work in all programme countries. While no specific SDG 10 targets were defined, the programme consistently aimed to promote inclusion and equal access to information by amplifying the voices of underrepresented and marginalised groups such as women, youth, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and rural populations. In the Global South, efforts to promote pluralistic media content and reach underserved audiences contributed to more inclusive media ecosystems. In Finland, global citizenship education, advocacy work, and communications encouraged critical reflection on representation and power structures in journalism, supporting broader understanding of social justice and equity in global contexts.

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

While not a central focus area, the programme also contributed to **SDG 9.c** by improving access to information and communication technologies in underserved regions. In East Africa, support

to community radio stations in Tanzania and Uganda enabled the continued use of digital portals and the integration of online platforms. These efforts improved connectivity, expanded the reach of community media, and provided more affordable access to independent information for remote audiences. More broadly, in fragile and repressive contexts, the programme supported partners to strengthen their digital infrastructure and adopt secure communication tools, enabling continued collaboration, innovation, and information sharing across borders.

5. Programme learning and development

Systematic learning is an area Vikes has continued to strengthen during the programme period. In 2024, key learning processes – including partner capacity assessments, the external mid-term evaluation, and internal reflections – provided valuable insights that have informed both ongoing improvements and future programme planning. This chapter explores how these learning processes have shaped programme development and highlight key areas for continued investment and adaptation.

5.1. Partner capacity assessments

In 2024, Vikes completed a comprehensive round of facilitated self-assessments with 14 partner organisations. Originally launched in late 2023, the process was finalised by the end of 2024, taking longer than anticipated due to scheduling challenges across multiple partners. Each assessment was conducted as a structured discussion between the partner representatives and Vikes Project Specialist, facilitated by the Quality and Learning Specialist.

The assessments covered 13 thematic areas, including financial sustainability, diversity and inclusion, risk management, results-based management (RBM), and the application of human rights-based approaches. Using a 1–5 scale (from “very poor” to “very good”), partners assessed their organisational capacity in each area. Discussions were used to contextualise the scores, identify development priorities, and document areas of expertise partners could share with others.

The process revealed several recurring development needs across the programme. Most notably, ten partners highlighted financial sustainability and management as key areas for improvement, and six noted challenges related to systematic risk management. Other common priorities included strengthening RBM practices, organisational policies, annual planning, disability inclusion, and safeguarding (PSEAH).

While Vikes has not yet developed a formal programme-level capacity development plan – mainly due to limited internal resources – targeted follow-up has already begun. In Somalia, EU co-funding enabled additional support for administrative systems, strategic planning, and RBM. In Central America, insights from both the mid-term evaluation and the self-assessments were used by partners to improve internal management practices.

The assessment process itself offered important lessons for Vikes. Many partners described the assessment as a rare opportunity to pause, reflect critically on their organisation’s

development, and identify areas requiring prioritised attention. At the same time, the process was resource-intensive for both partners and Vikes staff. For the next programme period, Vikes will adopt a lighter-touch assessment model that builds on the 2024 baseline and focuses more clearly on each partner's specific priorities.

The experience also highlighted the importance of tailoring facilitation methods. For example, in Central America, translating the assessment form into Spanish and using interpretation improved inclusivity – an approach that may be expanded to other regions. At times, internal hierarchies (e.g. between partner directors and staff) or power dynamics (e.g. between Vikes and the partner) may have influenced how openly partners could engage in the process, but strong relationships and mutual trust helped enable meaningful dialogue.

For the next programme period, Vikes will design a realistic, long-term capacity-strengthening approach that responds to both shared development needs and partner-specific priorities. This will allow for more systematic support and help ensure that capacity development remains an integral part of programme implementation.

5.2. Programme mid-term evaluation

Vikes' mid-term evaluation was conducted in 2024 to assess the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of the programme, with a particular focus on two case projects in East Africa and Central America. The evaluation also reviewed the validity of the programme's Theory of Change (ToC) and the appropriateness of its impact-level indicators. The findings and recommendations are being used to inform the design of the next programme period.

The evaluation confirmed the overall relevance and effectiveness of the programme. The case projects were well aligned with partner and journalist needs, enhancing their skills and capacities. In East Africa, the current project model was seen as particularly effective and worth adapting more widely. In Central America, partners were required to shift activities due to increased threats and exile, underlining the need for stronger programme flexibility and mechanisms to adjust to changing contexts.

The ToC and results framework were assessed as broadly valid. However, the evaluation recommended involving partners more actively in the design of the next programme period and refining the underlying assumptions to better reflect current realities – particularly in more fragile or repressive contexts. Cross-cutting objectives, such as gender equality and non-discrimination, were found to be well integrated, and the evaluation encouraged further development through targeted training and peer learning.

One recurring challenge relates to results measurement. Although the programme has largely delivered on its intended outcomes, some indicators were seen as too abstract or disconnected from local realities. The evaluation recommended simplifying the indicator framework and adjusting selected indicators to better reflect partner roles and the diversity of contexts.

Sustainability was identified as an area requiring more systematic attention. While some East African partners had started to integrate project work into core functions, Central American

partners continued to struggle with legal restrictions and financial uncertainty. The evaluation highlighted the need for tailored sustainability strategies, strengthened resource mobilisation, and long-term support for institutional resilience.

Risk management practices were considered appropriate but would benefit from more systematic updates to risk matrices and contingency plans. These improvements would support better preparedness in unstable or rapidly evolving environments.

Vikes has taken the evaluation findings into account in the proposal for the next programme period. Final plans and adjustments will be made in collaboration with partners after the MFA funding decision in late 2025. Key lessons and planned follow-up actions are discussed in more detail in the following section.

5.3. Lessons learnt and future development needs

The 2024 mid-term evaluation provided a key opportunity for programme-level learning. Its findings have shaped both final-year adjustments and the planning of the next programme phase (2026–2029). Internal reflections and ongoing monitoring have further deepened understanding of where the programme has performed well and where development is still needed. This chapter summarises the main lessons and actions emerging from these learning processes.

Strengthening strategic clarity and programme logic

Vikes reviewed and updated the programme’s Theory of Change (ToC) to clarify how change is expected to happen in different contexts. Particular attention was given to making the underlying assumptions more explicit, including assumptions about the enabling environment, partner capacities, and the role of journalism in advancing human rights and sustainable development. This process was informed by new context analysis papers, which summarised key political, social, and media-related developments in each target area. These papers were largely drafted by selected partners, based on their expertise and contextual knowledge.

In parallel, the programme’s results framework was revised to reflect the updated ToC and align with the new thematic programme structure developed for Vikes’ next programme period (2026–2029). This structure is designed to strengthen coherence across countries and projects by organising work around shared thematic areas, rather than by region or individual project. As part of this process, several programme-level indicators were simplified or redefined to improve clarity, feasibility of data collection, and relevance across different contexts. Special attention was paid to the impact-level indicators, whose definitions and data sources were clarified to support more consistent monitoring. Final adjustments will be made together with partners after the MFA’s 2026–2029 funding decision, ensuring shared ownership and practicality in implementation.

Improving programme management tools and systems

The need to strengthen programme management tools and systems had been identified and advanced already in previous years, and the mid-term evaluation reinforced the importance of

continuing this development work. In 2024, significant progress was made, particularly in risk management and in clarifying internal monitoring processes. Vikes updated its Risk Management Policy and introduced clearer procedures for risk identification, follow-up, and prioritisation. A light-touch tracking tool was piloted to support more systematic monitoring. In parallel, internal flowcharts were developed to clarify roles and decision-making in monitoring processes. Further improvements in escalation procedures and shared learning on risk mitigation are planned for 2025.

Efforts also continued to standardise reporting and documentation practices across the programme. These are being gradually aligned with the revised results framework, with the aim of reducing reporting burden and improving the usability of monitoring data for decision-making and learning.

Strengthening cross-cutting integration

While gender equality and non-discrimination were found to be relatively well integrated, the evaluation highlighted a need for more consistent approaches across partners. In response, Vikes is developing cross-cutting checklists covering gender equality, disability inclusion, non-discrimination, and environmental aspects. These tools are being developed in consultation with partners and will be finalised in 2025, supporting accountability and learning. Where possible, partner expertise will be leveraged to support peer learning, including regional exchanges and thematic discussions.

Building long-term partner capacity

The evaluation reinforced the need for a more strategic and sustained approach to capacity development. In 2025, Vikes will finalise a long-term capacity-building plan for the next programme period. It will focus on core organisational capacities such as financial management and institutional sustainability, as well as thematic competencies. Particular attention will be paid to partners operating in high-risk or resource-constrained environments. The plan builds on the findings from the 2023–2024 partner capacity assessments, which provided a strong baseline for more targeted support in the coming years.

Developing a systematic approach to sustainability

The evaluation found that while many partners had developed promising ideas or informal plans for sustaining their work, a formalised, programme-level sustainability strategy had not yet been established. Vikes is responding by developing a more systematic approach to sustainability, closely linked with capacity-building efforts. Project-level exit strategies will be co-developed with partners to support continuity after Vikes' direct involvement ends. Improved coordination with other donors will also be prioritised to reduce financial vulnerability and strengthen the long-term resilience of partners.

6. Conclusions

The 2024 mid-term evaluation marked a key moment in the development of Vikes' programme. It confirmed the continued relevance of Vikes' strategic direction while offering timely recommendations to strengthen programme logic, risk management, sustainability planning, and results-based management. Together with internal reflections and partner input, the evaluation has informed concrete improvements for the final programme year and helped shape the next programme period (2026–2029).

Significant progress was made in 2024 to strengthen the foundations for the future. The Theory of Change and results framework were revised, internal systems clarified, and risk management practices improved. While some tools remain under development, these steps have laid the groundwork for more coherent, responsive, and collaborative programme management.

The upcoming shift to a thematic programme structure, drafted as part of Vikes' next programme period (2026–2029), creates new opportunities to enhance learning across regions and strengthen the links between partner-level work and programme-level outcomes. At the same time, challenges such as data quality, monitoring capacity, and institutional resilience will require sustained attention. The new domestic team has made a strong start and is well-placed to expand the programme's reach and relevance in Finland.

As Vikes progresses the final year of the current programme, it does so with a clearer focus, more robust systems, and a deepened commitment to continuous learning and partnership. The next programme period will build on this progress, guided by shared learning, flexible approaches, and a strong belief in the role of journalism in promoting inclusive, democratic development in a rapidly changing world.