

**Sustainable Journalism,  
Stronger Societies –  
Strengthening Independent  
Media for Democracy,  
Resilience, and Inclusion**



Finnish Foundation for Media and Development

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACCH	Asociación Centroamericana Centro Humboldt
CIJN	Centre for Investigative Journalism - Nepal
COMNETU	Community Media Network Uganda
CSO	Civil society organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DTM	Development Through Media, Kenya
FESOJ	Federation of Somali Journalists
Fingo	Finnish Development NGOs
FPU	Free Press Unlimited
GFMD	Global Forum for Media Development
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IFEX	The Global Network Defending and Promoting Free Expression
IMS	International Media Support
KIOS	Finnish NGO Foundation for Human Rights
LDC	Least developed country
LMIC	Lower middle-income country
MCT	Media Council of Tanzania
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMEL	Planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning
PSEAH	Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
RSF	Reporters Sans Frontières / Reporters Without Borders
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TAMCODE	Tanzania Media for Community Development
TAMWA	Tanzania Women's Media Association
UMIC	Upper middle-income country
UMWA	Uganda Media Women's Association
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Vikes	Viestintä ja kehitys -säätiö / Finnish Foundation for Media and Development

## Glossary and key terms

<b>Disinformation</b>	Disinformation refers to deliberately false or misleading information that is spread with the intent to deceive or manipulate people. Unlike misinformation, which is shared without malicious intent, disinformation is purposefully crafted to mislead, create confusion, or influence public opinion.
<b>Environmental journalism</b>	Journalism that focuses on reporting and analysing issues related to the environment, including topics such as climate change, conservation, pollution, and sustainable development.
<b>Global citizenship education</b>	It aims to equip learners of all ages with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes needed to thrive in an interconnected world and contribute to a more just, peaceful, and sustainable society.
<b>Journalism in exile</b>	Refers to the practice of journalists and media outlets operating from outside their home countries due to threats, persecution, or censorship in their native lands. These journalists are often forced to flee to continue their work safely and freely.
<b>Media literacy</b>	Refers to the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media in various forms. It involves understanding how media messages are constructed, the purposes they serve, and their potential impact on audiences.
<b>Media organisations</b>	Refers to both independent media outlets and media development or advocacy organisations (e.g. journalist associations).
<b>Media resilience</b>	Refers to the ability of media organisations to adapt, survive, and thrive in the face of various challenges and disruptions, including resistance to misinformation.
<b>Misinformation</b>	Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information that is spread, regardless of intent to deceive. It can include rumours, myths, and incorrect data that people share without realising it is wrong. Misinformation can be harmful because it can mislead people and cause confusion.
<b>Peace journalism</b>	A style and theory of reporting that aims to promote non-violent responses to conflict and create opportunities for society to consider and value peace.

## Summary

Vikes Development Cooperation Programme 2026–2029 is designed to strengthen independent media, promote freedom of expression, and enhance the role of journalism in democratic societies. The ability of media professionals to operate independently and ethically is crucial for democratic development and accountability. The programme strengthens journalistic capacity, security, and financial sustainability, enabling media actors to operate freely and produce high-quality public interest journalism based on their own editorial choices. Vikes' approach to media support builds on long-term partnerships, local ownership, capacity-building, and mutual learning. By working closely with journalists, media associations, and civil society organisations, the programme fosters resilient and independent media ecosystems that can withstand external pressures.

Vikes' programme is structured around four interlinked outcomes that collectively strengthen independent media as a pillar of democratic and sustainable development.

**Outcome 1** Media provides independent, sustainable, and inclusive quality journalism that gives voice to underrepresented groups.

**Outcome 2** Media organisations have strengthened resilience and capacity to adapt, innovate, and operate independently and sustainably.

**Outcome 3** Media workers have improved working conditions and operate in safer, more equitable environments that protect and promote independent journalism and foster inclusive practices.

**Outcome 4** Duty-bearers demonstrate increased willingness and commitment to support the role of independent, pluralistic media in fostering accountability and informed decision-making.

Vikes' programme builds upon the experiences, successes, and lessons learnt from the 2022–2025 programme period while addressing emerging challenges in media freedom, safety of journalists, and civil society resilience. The development of the new programme has been an inclusive and participatory process. Insights gathered from past programme implementation, external assessments, and ongoing dialogue with partners and key stakeholders have been instrumental in refining Vikes' priorities and ways of working.

The development cooperation work is implemented in five core programme countries in Africa and Asia, as well as through regional cooperation in Central America. It is carried out in close collaboration with local partners, including independent media outlets, journalist associations and unions, media development and advocacy organisations, and civil society organisations working on media rights, inclusion, and accountability. The programme follows a programmatic model that integrates capacity-building, advocacy, and media development initiatives, creating synergies across different interventions.

Vikes' programme is structured around the following five thematic sub-programmes that reflect global trends, Vikes' strategic priorities, and the evolving landscape of international media development:

- 1) Media rights, equality, and inclusion
- 2) Journalism in exile
- 3) Environmental journalism
- 4) Peace journalism
- 5) Disability-specific media work

These thematic areas provide a structured framework that enables partners to engage where their expertise is most relevant while encouraging collaboration across different aspects of media resilience

and press freedom. All thematic sub-programmes include capacity-building to ensure that journalists and media organisations have access to the skills, knowledge, and tools needed to uphold journalistic integrity, enhance financial resilience, and strengthen operational sustainability. In Finland, Vikes capitalises on its strong connections with the media sector to engage journalists, media students, and the general public on themes related to press freedom, democracy, and media literacy.

Vikes' programme is guided by cross-cutting priorities that reinforce its overall impact and ensure that media development contributes to broader social change. These commitments – gender equality and inclusion, environmental sustainability, and media literacy – are integral components that enhance the effectiveness of the programme's four key outcomes.

The programme is based on the human rights-based approach. A commitment to gender equality and social inclusion underpins all programme activities. Vikes actively promotes the participation of underrepresented groups in media, working to eliminate discrimination based on gender, disability, or other marginalising factors, and advance inclusive, pluralistic journalism. This extends beyond representation to ensuring that media content itself is gender-sensitive and reflects the lived experiences of marginalised communities.

The programme promotes cross-border collaborations among journalists and independent media outlets, thereby encouraging peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange. Media outlets are also supported in adopting new technologies, diversifying revenue streams, and experimenting with alternative business models. Digital security training and strategies to counter misinformation are integrated into the programme to address emerging threats in the media landscape.

Vikes' programme aligns closely with Finland's development cooperation policy and global commitments under Agenda 2030. The programme contributes directly to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly:

- ✓ SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions) by promoting freedom of expression and strengthening the role of media as a watchdog,
- ✓ SDG 5 (Gender equality) by advocating for gender-sensitive journalism and promoting equal opportunities in the media sector,
- ✓ SDG 13 (Climate action) by supporting environmental journalism and the role of media in climate reporting.

By strengthening independent media, Vikes contributes to the broader objective of building inclusive, informed societies where citizens have access to reliable information and the ability to participate in local decision-making processes.

# 1. Introduction

## Vikes and its mission

Finnish Foundation for Media and Development (Vikes) is a journalists' solidarity organisation committed to strengthening democracy and an active civil society by supporting freedom of expression, quality journalism, and media diversity globally. As the only Finnish development cooperation organisation specialised in media and freedom of expression, Vikes plays a unique role in enhancing independent media ecosystems and defending press freedom in challenging environments.

Vikes collaborates with various global and national stakeholders, including 27 Finnish journalists' associations and other media organisations. Through its partnerships, Finnish journalists provide peer support to their colleagues worldwide, fostering equal, cooperative relationships for mutual learning. Local partners of Vikes include independent media outlets, journalist associations and unions, media development and advocacy organisations, and civil society organisations (CSOs) working on media rights, inclusion, and accountability. The direct beneficiaries of Vikes' work are always journalists and media professionals, who, in turn, contribute to ensuring that diverse voices are heard in public discourse.

Since its establishment in 2005, Vikes has gained extensive experience in development cooperation projects across 20 countries. These projects have focused on the training of journalists and media students, strengthening of journalists' associations and unions, and support to independent media and quality reporting. Notable results include the establishment of the first school for documentary filmmakers in Myanmar, the consolidation of environmental journalism in Nigeria, the development of online portals together with over 70 rural radio stations in Tanzania and Uganda, and the provision of peer support for independent media under threat from authoritarian regimes in Central America. Vikes has become a recognised civil society actor with deep expertise in grassroots-level media support in developing countries.

Beyond its international work, Vikes plays a crucial role in Finland's media landscape through global citizenship education, communications, and advocacy. Vikes provides training for media professionals and students on sustainable development-related reporting, media pluralism, and media literacy. Vikes also raises awareness about media environments and press freedom challenges worldwide while advocating for stronger international support for free and independent media.

A strong and independent media is fundamental to democracy, as it ensures access to factually correct and independently verified information, provides a forum for public debate, and holds those in power accountable. However, media itself must also be inclusive and pluralistic, reflecting the diverse realities of society. The quality and inclusiveness of journalism are closely linked to the overall strength of civil society. Vikes' work is particularly crucial in a world where press freedom and civic space are under increasing pressure, and independent media face growing restrictions.

## Strategic approach and key principles

Vikes' approach to development cooperation is firmly rooted in the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), ensuring that all interventions uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability, and transparency. At its core, the programme seeks to empower independent media actors, strengthen press freedom, and enhance the resilience of journalists operating in complex and often repressive environments. By supporting media as a pillar of civil society,

Vikes contributes to a broader transformation where access to information is safeguarded, civic space remains open, and diverse voices are represented in public discourse.

A commitment to gender equality and social inclusion underpins all programme activities. Vikes actively promotes the participation of underrepresented groups in media, working to eliminate discrimination based on gender, disability, or other marginalising factors, and advance inclusive, pluralistic journalism. This extends beyond representation to ensuring that media content itself is gender-sensitive and reflects the lived experiences of marginalised communities. Strengthening networks of women journalists, promoting leadership opportunities, and challenging harmful stereotypes within media structures are key elements in achieving this goal.

Environmental sustainability is another fundamental principle guiding Vikes' work. As the global climate crisis intensifies, the role of media in holding decision-makers accountable and raising public awareness is more critical than ever. The programme supports journalists and media organisations in strengthening their capacity to report on climate change, environmental justice, and sustainable development, ensuring that accurate, evidence-based information reaches communities and policymakers alike.

The programme operates with a strong commitment to media freedom and civic space, advocating for protection of independent journalism and the fundamental right to freedom of expression. As authoritarian pressures on media intensify in many regions, Vikes works to ensure that journalists can operate safely and ethically, free from undue external influence, censorship, or intimidation. Efforts to monitor media freedom, support advocacy initiatives, and build coalitions with civil society actors are integral to maintaining a vibrant and independent media.

Vikes recognises the potential risks that journalists and media organisations face in repressive environments and takes a conflict-sensitive approach across all interventions. Continuous risk assessments ensure that programme activities do not inadvertently expose beneficiaries to additional threats or reinforce existing power imbalances. At the same time, Vikes fosters resilience by equipping media actors with the skills, resources, and networks they need to navigate challenges and sustain their work also in hostile conditions.

By applying these principles, Vikes not only strengthens the capacity of individual journalists and media organisations but also contributes to the democratic and sustainable development of societies. The programme's strategic approach ensures that independent, pluralistic, and high-quality journalism remains a powerful force for accountability, civic engagement, and human rights.

Vikes' work is aligned with Finland's development cooperation priorities, contributing to democratic governance, human rights, and sustainable development. The programme supports the achievement of Agenda 2030 goals, particularly SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, SDG 5 on gender equality, and SDG 13 on climate action. By strengthening independent media, Vikes contributes to the broader objective of building inclusive, informed societies where citizens have access to reliable information and the ability to participate in decision-making processes.

## Development of Vikes programme

The 2026–2029 programme builds upon the experiences, successes, and lessons learnt from the 2022–2025 programme period while addressing emerging challenges in media freedom, safety of journalists, and civil society resilience. The new programme has been designed with a more strategic and structured approach, ensuring that Vikes' work remains relevant, impactful, and adaptable to shifting political, economic, and technological landscapes.

One of the most significant developments in the new programme is the introduction of clearly defined thematic sub-programmes, which provide a more structured and strategic framework for Vikes' work. This approach allows for greater coherence across different programme components while ensuring alignment with global trends in media development and freedom of expression. It also enhances flexibility, allowing partners to contribute to thematic areas in ways that best fit their contexts and capacities.

At the same time, Vikes has strengthened its planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (PMEL) systems, placing greater emphasis on results-based management. Ongoing refinements are made to ensure that programme results are systematically measured, that learnings feed directly into programme adjustments, and that reporting remains meaningful and actionable. The refined PMEL approach also enhances transparency and accountability, both internally and towards donors and partners.

Recognising the increasing risks faced by journalists and media organisations, the programme incorporates a more robust risk management framework. Strengthened risk assessment, mitigation, and response mechanisms enable Vikes and its partners to navigate challenging environments while ensuring the safety and resilience of those working in media.

Additionally, Vikes is placing greater strategic emphasis on diversifying funding sources to enhance the long-term sustainability of its work. By broadening its donor base and exploring new funding opportunities, Vikes aims to secure more stable and flexible resources that support its mission while reducing reliance on a limited number of funding streams.

The development of this new programme has been an inclusive and participatory process, shaped by consultations with partner organisations, an independent evaluation with case studies from the projects in East Africa and Central America, and internal strategic reflections. Insights gathered from past programme implementation, external assessments, and ongoing dialogue with partners and key stakeholders have been instrumental in refining Vikes' priorities and ways of working.

While the programme has evolved, Vikes' core strategic commitments remain unchanged. Long-term partnerships with independent media organisations and journalist associations and networks continue to be at the heart of the programme, with a focus on locally driven initiatives, capacity-building and shared learning, and enhancing sustainability. The programme is designed to complement the work of other development actors, ensuring that Vikes' support remains targeted, relevant, and aligned with broader efforts to advance sustainable development and uphold freedom of expression and media pluralism. By taking a forward-looking and adaptive approach, Vikes ensures that its 2026–2029 programme remains an effective and responsive tool for strengthening independent media and civil society in a rapidly changing world.

## 2. Rationale and context of the programme

The rationale for Vikes' programme is grounded in the urgent need to support independent media in increasingly challenging environments. Around the world, press freedom is under threat from political repression, economic instability, digital surveillance, and the rise of disinformation. Journalists and media organisations face mounting risks, ranging from legal harassment and financial constraints to physical violence and online attacks. These trends not only undermine independent journalism but also weaken democratic accountability, civic space, and the public's right to information.

In response, Vikes' programme is designed to strengthen independent media by addressing key challenges such as financial sustainability, safety of journalists, media pluralism, and gender equality.

The programme fosters resilient media ecosystems that can withstand external pressures while continuing to provide fact-based, inclusive, and ethical journalism. By advocating for freedom of expression and reinforcing the role of media as a pillar of democracy, Vikes contributes to broader human rights and governance objectives.

Given the complexity and regional variations of these challenges, Vikes adopts a context-sensitive approach, ensuring that its interventions are both strategic and adaptable. The following sections outline the global trends shaping media freedom and the regional contexts in which Vikes operates, highlighting both the threats and opportunities for strengthening independent journalism.

## 2.1. Global trends and challenges

The global landscape for independent media and civil society is facing unprecedented challenges. Over the past decade, press freedom has deteriorated in many parts of the world, with a growing number of governments imposing legal, financial, and political restrictions on independent journalism. From repressive laws that criminalise investigative reporting to targeted harassment and state-controlled media takeovers, these measures have severely undermined journalistic independence. Reports from organisations such as Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) consistently highlight a decline in global press freedom, with a sharp increase in censorship, threats against journalists, and restrictions on access to information. In fragile and authoritarian contexts, independent media struggles not only with political pressure but also with severe financial constraints and a lack of institutional protections, further limiting its ability to operate freely.

The digital revolution has fundamentally reshaped the media landscape, creating both new opportunities and complex challenges. Digital platforms have democratised access to information and enabled alternative voices to emerge, yet they have also become vehicles for misinformation, disinformation, and online harassment. The deliberate spread of false information – whether for political manipulation, economic gain, or ideological influence – has eroded public trust in traditional journalism. At the same time, journalists, particularly women and those reporting on sensitive topics, face escalating levels of online abuse and digital threats, ranging from coordinated disinformation campaigns to cyberattacks and surveillance. The need for high-quality, ethical, and fact-based journalism is more urgent than ever to counter false narratives and ensure access to reliable information.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is further transforming the digital information ecosystem, with significant implications for journalism and media freedom. AI-powered tools offer new opportunities for content creation, fact-checking, and audience engagement, but they also introduce serious risks. The increasing sophistication of AI-generated disinformation, deep-fake technology, and algorithm-driven news curation threatens the integrity of independent journalism and the public's ability to distinguish fact from fiction. AI systems – often controlled by large tech companies – can reinforce biases, limit media pluralism, and prioritise engagement-driven content over public interest journalism. To navigate this evolving landscape, media professionals must develop AI literacy, understanding both its potential and its risks.

Gender-based discrimination continues to be a significant challenge within the media sector. Women journalists face persistent harassment, threats, and structural inequalities that hinder their career progression and safety. Women's voices remain regularly underrepresented in media content, with reporting often failing to include gender-sensitive perspectives. In many contexts, women journalists are disproportionately targeted for online harassment and gender-based violence, forcing them into self-censorship, or pushing them out of the profession altogether. Addressing these challenges is essential

not only for ensuring gender equality at media workplaces but also for promoting inclusive and representative journalism that serves all sectors of society.

The climate crisis and environmental challenges also present critical issues for the media. Journalists play a central role in informing the public about climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental justice, yet many face political and corporate pressure, censorship, and threats when reporting on these topics. Access to accurate environmental data remains limited, and misinformation about climate science continues to spread unchecked. Strengthening environmental journalism is crucial, not only to raise awareness of climate issues but also to provide practical, locally relevant information that helps communities adapt to changing conditions. Quality environmental reporting means equipping people with knowledge on how to sustain their livelihoods in a shifting climate, prepare for environmental crises, and mitigate the worst impacts where possible. By ensuring that the public, policymakers, and civil society actors receive accurate, actionable information, media can play a vital role in addressing the growing climate emergency.

While the media sector plays a key role in shaping public discourse on climate action, independent media actors in the Global South often have limited environmental impact beyond standard office operations. However, in some cases, practical sustainability measures can strengthen both resilience and cost-effectiveness. For example, several rural radio stations in East Africa have integrated solar power into their operations to counter unreliable electricity supply and reduce fuel costs from back-up generators. Supporting such sustainable solutions in media operations not only improves efficiency but also aligns with the media sector's role in advocating for climate action.

These global challenges are deeply intertwined with broader development issues, including democratic governance, human rights, and social inclusion. As media freedom declines, so does public accountability, enabling corruption and authoritarianism to flourish. Without strong, independent journalism, marginalised communities lose their voice, and civic space shrinks, making it harder for societies to address pressing global challenges. In this increasingly complex environment, supporting independent, pluralistic, and sustainable journalism is not only about strengthening the media sector – it is about defending democracy, human rights, and sustainable development.

## 2.2. Country and regional contexts

Vikes' programme is designed to respond to the specific challenges and opportunities within different media environments, ensuring that our work is locally relevant while contributing to global press freedom efforts. While media contexts vary significantly between regions, common challenges include threats to press freedom, economic instability in the media sector, journalists' safety concerns, and the impact of digital transformation.

The selection of programme countries is based on their strategic relevance to press freedom, media pluralism, and civil society resilience, as well as Vikes' long-standing experience working in these countries and regions. This continuity has fostered strong relationships with local partners, deep contextual understanding, and the ability to adapt interventions effectively. Through years of engagement, Vikes has built trust with media actors, journalist associations, and media sector CSOs, ensuring that our support is both relevant and impactful. This experience allows Vikes to provide tailored assistance that responds to country-specific challenges while contributing to broader regional and global efforts to uphold media freedom.

While Vikes' programme is primarily focused on the selected programme countries, we maintain the flexibility to respond to emerging needs in other contexts where independent media and press freedom

face significant threats or need thematic support. This adaptability ensures that Vikes can provide targeted support to journalists, media organisations, and exiled media actors in rapidly changing environments. Depending on available resources and the severity of the challenges, Vikes may extend its expertise, partnerships, or interventions to countries beyond the core programme regions. Before expanding support to other countries or regions, Vikes assesses the media landscape and press freedom challenges to ensure that interventions are relevant and feasible. This approach allows for strategic and needs-based expansion while maintaining the flexibility to respond to emerging opportunities and urgent situations.

The programme primarily targets fragile contexts, lower-income countries, and regions where civic space is under threat. The table below presents the positioning of programme countries in international indices on fragility, media freedom, and civic space, highlighting both the urgency of support and the strategic focus of the programme.

**Table 1. Vikes programme countries 2026–2029: Development and media landscape overview**

Country	OECD/ DAC <sup>1</sup>	OECD Fragility <sup>2</sup>	Fragility <sup>3</sup>	Press Freedom <sup>4</sup>	Civic Space <sup>5</sup>
<b>Core programme countries</b>					
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>LDC</b>	-	Elevated warning	Problematic	Obstructed
<b>Somalia</b>	<b>LDC</b>	Extreme fragility	Very high alert	Difficult	Repressed
<b>Uganda</b>	<b>LDC</b>	High fragility	Alert	Very serious	Repressed
<b>Tanzania</b>	<b>LDC</b>	High fragility	Elevated warning	Difficult	Repressed
<b>Kenya</b>	<b>LMIC</b>	High fragility	High warning	Difficult	Repressed
<b>Nicaragua*</b>	<b>LMIC</b>	High fragility	Elevated warning	Very serious	Closed
<b>Guatemala*</b>	<b>UMIC</b>	High fragility	Elevated warning	Difficult	Repressed
<b>El Salvador*</b>	<b>UMIC</b>	-	Warning	Difficult	Repressed
<b>Costa Rica*</b>	<b>UMIC</b>	-	Stable	Satisfactory	Narrowed
<b>Potential expansion countries (subject to additional funding)</b>					
<b>Ukraine</b>	<b>LMIC</b>	-	Alert	Problematic	Obstructed
<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>LMIC</b>	High fragility	Alert	Difficult	Repressed
<b>West Bank and Gaza Strip</b>	<b>UMIC</b>	High fragility	Alert	Very serious	Closed

\*Regional cooperation in Central America, see details below.

<sup>1</sup> [OECD/DAC DAC List of ODA Recipients](#)

<sup>2</sup> [OECD report. States of Fragility 2025](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Fragile States Index 2024](#)

<sup>4</sup> [2025 World Press Freedom Index](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Civicus Monitor 2025](#)

The following sections provide compact summaries of Vikes programme countries, outlining key media challenges, opportunities, and the programme's strategic responses in each context. As part of the programme preparation process, detailed context analyses were led by Vikes Programme Specialists in close collaboration with partners and, where relevant, other key stakeholders.

### 2.2.1. Core programme countries

#### **Nepal**

Nepal has a relatively open media environment compared to many countries in the region, yet significant challenges remain. Political influence over media ownership, government-imposed legal restrictions, and self-censorship hinder truly independent journalism. Journalists, particularly those reporting on corruption, environmental issues, and human rights violations, face threats and legal harassment. Major political changes are expected after the 2025 Gen Z protests and March 2026 elections.

Although officially abolished, the discriminatory caste system still plays a significant role in Nepalese society. Dalits and other marginalised groups continue to face discrimination in many parts of the country, particularly in rural areas. Gender inequality is another pressing social issue. Marginalised communities and women remain underrepresented in media reporting, perpetuating narratives dominated by privileged groups.

Vikes' work in Nepal focuses on investigative reporting and strengthening gender equality and inclusion in media. Women journalists and journalists from marginalised communities are supported to ensure fair representation in public discourse. Environmental journalism is another priority, equipping media professionals with the skills and networks needed to report on climate mitigation, natural disaster prevention, and environmental justice.

#### **Somalia**

Somalia is one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists. Threats from both state and non-state actors, including armed groups, continue to restrict press freedom. Media professionals face intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and targeted killings, with little accountability. The legal framework for media remains weak, and journalists often operate in self-censorship out of fear of reprisal.

Despite these risks, independent media plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse and providing reliable information amid ongoing conflict and political instability. Social media platforms serve as alternative spaces for public debate, but they also amplify the spread of disinformation and hate speech, posing additional risks to journalists and media integrity as well as deepening societal divisions and undermining social cohesion.

Vikes' programme in Somalia focuses on strengthening peace journalism and promoting an inclusive media environment. By supporting conflict-sensitive reporting, Vikes enables journalists to foster narratives that contribute to dialogue and reconciliation rather than deepening divisions. Emphasis is placed on women journalists and on increasing media representation, participation, and accessibility for persons with disabilities. For the first time in Somalia's history, sign language news broadcasts will be launched. To support this initiative, sign language interpreters will be trained to interpret and deliver news in sign language, ensuring greater access to information for deaf communities.

Through training, networking, support for content production, and advocacy, Vikes enhances the safety and resilience of Somali journalists while promoting a media landscape that upholds human rights and inclusivity.

## **Tanzania**

Tanzania's media environment is constrained by restrictive legal frameworks, economic pressures, and continuing political interference. Journalists and media houses face licensing challenges, government censorship, and legal threats under restrictive laws such as the Media Services Act and Cybercrimes Act. Critical journalists have been subjected to harassment and arbitrary arrest. Economic challenges due to declining advertising revenues have further undermined the sustainability of many independent media outlets. The country is also politically deeply divided after the disputed 2025 elections and the killing of protesters.

In Tanzanian media, women remain underrepresented in newsrooms and editorial leadership roles. Urban-based mainstream media is also very much focused on national politics and urban developments, only rarely giving the voice to the large majority of people living in rural communities with poor infrastructure and limited access to basic services. Meanwhile, increased mobile penetration provides opportunities and markets for innovative digital solutions that can widen the audiences of rural-based community radios.

Vikes' work in Tanzania strengthens independent and inclusive journalism, focusing on gender equality in the media, training and technical support to rural radio stations across the country via the community radio online portal established in previous years, and advocacy for access to information and media law reform. The programme also supports disability-inclusive reporting, environmental and climate reporting, and cross-border collaboration among partners in East Africa.

## **Uganda**

Ugandan independent media is professional and brave while operating in highly restricted circumstances. Journalists face legal and physical threats, particularly when covering sensitive issues such as corruption, human rights, and electoral processes. State surveillance, online harassment, and arbitrary detentions create a climate of fear, leading many journalists to self-censorship. Independent media outlets also struggle with economic sustainability, making them vulnerable to political and commercial pressures. The country is also politically divided after the disputed January 2026 elections and silencing of main opposition parties.

As in neighbouring Tanzania, also in Uganda women journalists face different kind of discrimination and harassment both at their workplaces and when reporting in the field. Mainstream media coverage often underrepresents women and marginalised communities in rural or urban settings.

Vikes' work in Uganda focuses on improving gender equality in the media as well as providing training and technical support to rural radio stations across the country via the Ugandan community radio portal established in 2023 following the good experiences from a similar platform in Tanzania. The programme also supports environmental and climate reporting, disability-inclusive reporting, and cross-border collaboration among partners in East Africa.

## **Kenya**

Kenya has a relatively vibrant media landscape but faces increasing political interference, restrictions on press freedom, and economic pressures on independent media houses. Media ownership is highly concentrated among few economically powerful and politically connected individuals, making the industry vulnerable to external influence from political and business interests.

Despite the challenge of ownership, independent media in Kenya plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, promoting democratic governance, and acting as a check on power. While investigative journalism has long traditions in Kenya, economic instability in the media sector has led to growing self-censorship and a decline in media diversity.

As in Tanzania and in Uganda, also in Kenya mainstream media rarely reports about social development and special needs of people in rural areas and marginalised urban communities.

In Kenya, Vikes supports training of young underemployed reporters and their content production from rural areas and marginalised urban communities, making use of Kenya's first online media devoted to development journalism. Emphasis is put on gender equality and reporting on agriculture, education, health, environmental issues, and closer to the elections in 2027 especially on governance issues and accountability.

### **Central America (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica)**

While each country in Central America has its own distinct challenges, there are significant commonalities in terms of political instability, economic inequality, and social struggles. These factors have profound implications for the media landscape, where journalists often work in precarious conditions, facing threats, censorship, and repression. The overall political climate in the region, marked by weakening democracies and rising authoritarianism, directly impacts freedom of expression and access to independent and reliable information.

Especially Nicaragua and El Salvador have seen marked decline in press freedom due to government crackdowns, legal restrictions, and harassment of journalists, forcing many media professionals into exile. Guatemala faces increasing restrictions on media freedom, while Costa Rica remains a relatively free environment for media and serves as a safe haven for many exiled journalists. Overall, the media landscape in Central America reflects a region in crisis, where press freedom is under siege, and the struggle for a free, independent, and pluralistic media is more critical than ever.

Vikes programme in Central America prioritises journalists in exile, ensuring that independent media voices continue to operate despite repression. Vikes supports the institutional resilience of exiled media by exploring new funding models, diversifying revenue sources, and facilitating strategic donor engagement, ensuring that exiled journalists and media outlets can continue to work safely and effectively while remaining a vital source of independent information.

The programme also strengthens regional networking and media collaborations in quality journalism production with an emphasis on environmental issues, support to vocational and safety training, promoting leadership roles for women in media organisations, and inclusive, gender-sensitive reporting.

#### **2.2.2. Potential expansion countries**

The following summaries outline contexts where expansion is strategically relevant. Implementation in these countries will be phased in if additional funding becomes available.

##### **Nigeria**

Nigeria has a large and diverse media sector operating under significant economic and political pressure. Financial instability, dependence on advertising revenue, and risks linked to reporting on corruption, environmental issues, and human rights weaken editorial independence and compromise the safety of journalists. At the same time, the country has a strong professional media community and a vibrant civil society, offering important entry points for thematic work.

Nigeria is included as a potential expansion country due to its relevance for environmental journalism and climate justice, as well as Vikes' previous long-term engagement in the country. Programme activities will be phased in if resources allow.

## **Ukraine**

The war in Ukraine has profoundly affected the media landscape, increasing security risks for journalists, accelerating disinformation, and placing strong psychological and ethical pressures on media professionals. Despite these challenges, independent media actors continue to operate and adapt, including through digital platforms and exile-based journalism.

Ukraine is included as a potential expansion country due to the urgent need for support to independent journalism in conflict and post-conflict conditions and the strategic relevance of exile media work. Implementation will depend on the availability of additional funding and the evolving security context. In parallel, Vikes is preparing a separate EU-funded consortium initiative with Ukrainian and Baltic partners on media literacy, which would complement the programme's objectives and strengthen regional cooperation.

## **West Bank and Gaza Strip**

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, severe restrictions on civic space, recurrent violence, and the destruction of media infrastructure create an extremely challenging environment for independent journalism. Journalists face high levels of physical risk, movement restrictions, and constraints imposed by multiple authorities, while access to reliable information remains limited.

The area is included as a potential expansion context because of the acute need for support to independent media and the programme's focus on press freedom in highly constrained environments. Any engagement will be based on resource availability and a context-specific feasibility assessment.

### **2.2.3. Finland as a strategic programme hub**

Finland is not a programme country in the traditional sense, but it is a key operational and strategic context for the programme. Activities in Finland strengthen global media resilience by supporting journalists in exile, facilitating international professional networks, and providing a platform for thematic development, joint learning, and advocacy.

Through communications, media literacy and global citizenship education, the programme increases public and professional awareness of press freedom and the role of independent media in sustainable development. Advocacy and policy dialogue are carried out in cooperation with national, European, and international networks, reflecting Vikes' role as a specialised media development actor that amplifies the perspectives of its partners rather than acting alone. This network-based approach enables the programme to contribute to an enabling environment for media development and to link national and EU-level decision-making with the realities faced by journalists and media organisations in programme countries. Finland also serves as a hub for partnerships, knowledge exchange, and visibility, enabling the experiences of programme countries to inform public debate, professional communities, and international cooperation priorities.

## 2.3. Programme beneficiaries, partners, and strategic synergies

### 2.3.1. Beneficiaries: rights-holders and duty-bearers

The programme's primary rights-holders are journalists, media workers, and media organisations that produce public interest journalism in often challenging environments. Strong, independent reporting is essential to hold power to account, inform public debate, and enable citizens to exercise their rights and participate in democratic processes. The programme also benefits civil society organisations whose efforts to advance rights, accountability, and inclusion rely on accurate and independent information being available in the public sphere. In the long term, the ultimate rights-holders are citizens and media audiences who rely on fact-based information to make informed decisions in their daily lives.

Particular attention is paid to groups that are often underrepresented in media systems, including women, persons with disabilities, rural communities, and ethnic or linguistic minorities. These groups are engaged both as audiences and as media professionals, contributors, and sources, in line with the programme's cross-cutting priorities on equality and inclusion.

In Finland, the programme's key target groups include journalism students, media professionals, educators, civil society actors, and the broader public. Through communications, media literacy, and global citizenship education, the programme strengthens understanding of press freedom, media ethics, and the global role of independent journalism.

Duty-bearers are mainly addressed indirectly through the programme's support to independent media, media organisations, and press freedom networks. In the programme, journalism itself is a key form of public-interest advocacy: by producing credible reporting, investigations, and debate-oriented content, media actors can expose abuses, elevate underreported issues, and increase public pressure for accountability and reform. In contexts where dialogue is possible, partners also engage directly with relevant authorities and other decision-makers to advocate for improved legal frameworks, access to information, and the protection of journalists.

In addition to governmental and political duty-bearers, the programme also includes media-sector decision-makers such as media owners, managers, and editors, who shape editorial independence, professional standards, and the working conditions of journalists. Through partner-led advocacy, organisational development, and professional support, the programme promotes ethical journalism, stronger self-regulation, and safer and more decent working environments, including fairer compensation practices.

### 2.3.2. Partnership model and strategic collaborations

The programme is implemented through long-term, strategic partnerships with independent media, journalist associations and unions, media development organisations, and civil society actors. Partners are responsible for implementation in their own contexts, local networking, and the primary monitoring of results. Vikes provides programme coordination, financial and administrative oversight, capacity strengthening, and the consolidation of results and learning across countries and themes.

Strategic collaboration is further strengthened through partner and sector networks that connect actors across borders. For example, networks of investigative journalists, women-led media initiatives, and wider media coalitions facilitate knowledge-sharing, cross-border reporting, and joint advocacy. In practice, this includes joint training processes, thematic exchanges, and regional peer learning that allow partners working on similar issues to share methods, develop new approaches, and support each other

professionally. These collaborative structures reinforce solidarity among media actors and help build a collective voice to respond to shared challenges such as censorship, harassment, and disinformation.

The partnership model is based on mutual learning and long-term institutional cooperation, with a focus on strengthening local ownership, relevance, and sustainability. While the programme strengthens partners' professional and organisational capacities, it also draws on their contextual knowledge, innovation, and thematic expertise. Regular programme monitoring meetings and joint learning processes ensure coherence across contexts, supports the development of new approaches, and connects country-level experience with Vikes' work in Finland and in international networks. In this way, partnerships contribute not only to country-level results but also to the programme's strategic development and broader impact in the media sector.

Vikes also contributes to media development at domestic, regional, and international levels through cooperation with academic institutions, media sector organisations, civil society actors, and international coalitions. These networks provide access to specialised expertise, create channels for policy dialogue, and enable perspectives from partner countries to be reflected in European and global discussions on press freedom and media development.

### 2.3.3. Partner selection

The partner network brings together complementary expertise in areas such as investigative and community journalism, gender equality in media, environmental and peace journalism, and exile media. Partners are recognised actors in their respective media sectors, with a strong role in training, content production, organisational development, or media policy dialogue. This enables the programme to address media development simultaneously at the level of media content and newsrooms, media organisations, and the wider professional and regulatory environment.

Partnerships are established based on their strategic relevance to the programme's objectives, their commitment to independent journalism, and their potential to contribute to sustainable results. The selection of partners is guided by clear criteria that ensure strategic alignment and effective cooperation. Partners are expected to demonstrate:

**Strategic fit:** Independent actors aligned with Vikes' goals and values, particularly in defending press freedom and producing innovative quality journalism.

**Local expertise and ownership:** Strong contextual knowledge and the ability to lead processes within their media environment.

**Capacity and commitment:** Adequate human, technical, and financial resources to implement planned activities, along with strong administrative capacity.

**Accountability and transparency:** The ability to meet donor reporting requirements and uphold ethical media practices.

**Proven track record:** A history of effective collaboration and impact in media development, press freedom, or quality media production.

At the same time, Vikes remains open to new partnerships that bring complementary expertise, respond to emerging contextual needs, or strengthen thematic priorities.

### 2.3.4. Overview of programme partners

The programme is implemented with a core group of long-term partners. Additional partnerships will be phased in during the programme period based on thematic relevance, contextual needs, and available resources.

**Table 2. Core programme partners**

Country/Region	Partners
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Centre for Investigative Journalism – Nepal (CIJN)</b> Media CSO focusing on investigative journalism including environmental reporting</li> </ul>
Somalia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cafis Organization</b> Partner in peace journalism</li> <li>• <b>Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ)</b> Media workers’ national trade union and advocacy organisation</li> </ul>
Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Community Media Network Uganda (COMNETU)</b> National organisation of community radio stations, operating the Ugandan community radio portal</li> <li>• <b>Uganda Media Women’s Association (UMWA)</b> Partner in gender equality work, operates the popular women’s radio Mama FM</li> </ul>
Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Media Council of Tanzania (MCT)</b> Partner in gender equality work and advocacy for freedom of expression, access to information, and media law review</li> <li>• <b>Mtukwao Community Media</b> Media CSO managing the community radio station Jamii FM in Mtwara</li> <li>• <b>Tanzania Media for Community Development (TAMCODE)</b> Partner in training with community radios, operating the Tanzanian community radio portal</li> <li>• <b>Tanzania Media Women’s Association (TAMWA)</b> Partner in gender equality work</li> </ul>
Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development Through Media (DTM)</b> Media CSO devoted to development journalism, manages the online media Radio Baraza</li> </ul>
Central America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Asociación Centroamericana Centro Humboldt (ACCH)</b> Environmental CSO based in Guatemala, partner in environmental journalism training</li> <li>• <b>El Faro</b> Awarded online media from El Salvador operating partly from exile in Costa Rica</li> <li>• <b>La Sala</b> Network of independent online media outlets operated by Nicaraguan women journalists in exile</li> <li>• <b>Onda Local</b> Nicaraguan online media operating from exile in Costa Rica</li> </ul>

#### Potential partners (phased in if funding allows)

- **Renevlyn Development Initiative (RDI)** Nigerian media CSO focusing on climate change and environmental justice
- **Sancharika Samuha** National association of women journalists in Nepal
- **Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA)** Somaliland media workers’ advocacy organisation
- **Union of Tanzania Press Clubs (UTPC)** Tanzanian regional journalists’ association, partner in advocacy for access to information and training with upcountry journalists
- Partners in Ukraine (to be confirmed)
- Partners in Palestine (to be confirmed)

### 3. Objectives and expected results

Against the backdrop of shrinking civic space and increasing pressures on independent media, Vikes' programme is designed to reinforce the role of journalism in safeguarding access to reliable information, fostering accountability, and amplifying diverse voices. Independent media remains essential, not only in democratic societies but even more importantly in contexts where press freedom is under threat and information ecosystems are highly contested.

The programme's objectives are rooted in the need for high-quality journalism, resilient media organisations, improved working conditions, and strengthened institutional support for press freedom. These interconnected goals are further reinforced by cross-cutting commitments to gender equality, inclusion, environmental sustainability, and media literacy. Vikes integrates these aspects into all levels of programming, ensuring that media development contributes to broader social transformations. The following sections outline the programme's strategic approach, expected results, and the cross-cutting priorities that guide the programme.

#### 3.1. Theory of change: Strengthening media, empowering societies

Vikes' programme is built on the premise that independent, pluralistic, and professional media are essential pillars of democratic and participatory development. By ensuring access to reliable and diverse information, the media strengthen governance structures, enhance public trust, and promote accountability. However, in many of Vikes' programme countries, journalists and media organisations face significant restrictions, including legal constraints, violence, and economic pressures. In this challenging landscape, Vikes' Theory of Change provides a structured approach to achieving long-term impact by strengthening media ecosystems and reinforcing press freedom.

The core logic of the Theory of Change is as follows:

**IF** Vikes and its partners strengthen the professional capacities of journalists and media organisations, facilitate collaboration, promote ethical and inclusive journalism, and advocate for enabling environments for media freedom,

**THEN** media actors will be better equipped to produce independent, sustainable, and inclusive journalism and advance journalist safety and working conditions, while both the public and duty-bearers will have a greater appreciation of media's role in democratic governance and sustainable development.

**THEREFORE**, media organisations will demonstrate greater operational resilience, provide high-quality journalism that reflects diverse perspectives, and operate in safer, more equitable conditions, while policymakers and institutions will gradually improve their support for press freedom.

**FINALLY**, improved access to reliable information will enhance civic engagement, strengthen transparency and accountability, and contribute to equitable, democratic, and sustainable development.

The programme is based on the assumption that independent media can be strengthened even in restrictive environments and that incremental improvements in media ecosystems contribute to broader democratic and social development. While external conditions vary, the following key assumptions underpin the programme's logic:

- ✓ Media organisations maintain and build upon their strengthened resilience and capacity over time, ensuring consistent delivery of independent, pluralistic, and inclusive journalism.
- ✓ Journalists and media organisations continue to leverage networks and partnerships, amplifying their collective impact.
- ✓ Even in fragile or authoritarian contexts, there remain opportunities for engagement, whether through advocacy, strategic partnerships, or alternative forms of media distribution.
- ✓ Legal and institutional reforms may be slow and gradual, but sustained efforts can create pockets of openness or push incremental improvements in media freedoms.
- ✓ The public's willingness to engage with fact-based, inclusive journalism increases over time, leading to a greater demand for high-quality information and meaningful policy or behavioural changes.

Vikes Theory of Change including detailed assumptions is illustrated in Annex 1.

### 3.2. Expected results

Vikes' programme is structured around four interlinked outcomes that collectively strengthen independent media as a pillar of democratic and sustainable development. These outcomes focus on improving the quality and sustainability of journalism, enhancing the resilience of media and Vikes partner organisations, advocating for better working conditions and safer, more equitable working environments, and increasing duty-bearers' support for press freedom. While each outcome contributes to broader societal change, they are designed to be flexible and adaptable across diverse country contexts.

Operating in a variety of media environments – from fragile contexts with severe restrictions on press freedom to more stable but still constrained civic spaces – the programme tailors its focus based on contextual needs and opportunities. In Nepal, Somalia, Uganda, and Tanzania, all four outcomes are advanced, addressing media quality, organisational resilience, safety of journalists and improved working conditions, as well as engagement with duty-bearers. In Kenya, the emphasis is on strengthening media quality, organisational capacity and sustainability, with a particular focus on supporting rural journalists through training, mentorship, and enhanced content production from underreported areas. In Central America, where political repression limits direct engagement with authorities, the programme concentrates on quality journalism, media resilience, women journalists and inclusive media, journalism in exile, and safety of journalists, while support for duty-bearer engagement remains limited and primarily indirect through public-interest journalism. In Finland, the programme contributes by strengthening professional learning, promoting media literacy, and facilitating dialogue between media, decision-makers, and global partners, thereby reinforcing the role of independent media in democratic governance and global development.

A structured results framework underpins the programme, providing a clear mechanism for tracking progress against these outcomes. This includes defined outputs and indicators, ensuring accountability and continuous learning. The full results matrix serves as a tool for measuring effectiveness and guiding programme adjustments over time.

#### 3.2.1. Outcome 1: Improved quality journalism

Vikes' programme strengthens independent, sustainable, and inclusive journalism by equipping media professionals with skills, resources, and networks needed to produce ethical, fact-based reporting. In many programme countries, journalists operate under increasing political and economic pressures, face declining editorial independence, and struggle with the spread of misinformation. Limited access to

professional training and institutional support further weakens the ability of media to uphold high journalistic standards.

To counter these challenges, Vikes provides tailored support, capacity-building, mentorship, and networking opportunities, enabling journalists, other media workers, and journalism students to produce high-quality, public interest journalism. The programme prioritises investigative and data-driven reporting, gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive journalism, and conflict-sensitive, solutions-oriented reporting. This support is closely linked to practical outputs and collaborative production, ensuring that independent media amplifies diverse voices and counters misinformation.

In restrictive environments, where press freedom is under attack and many journalists operate from exile or under significant security risks, ethical and resilient journalism is a vital safeguard against propaganda and disinformation. By strengthening journalistic integrity, newsroom practices, and cross-border and national networks of independent media actors, the programme helps build public trust in journalism, enhance informed debate, and promote democratic accountability.

A human rights-based approach is embedded throughout the programme, ensuring that journalism is not only independent and fact-based but also inclusive. This includes advancing gender-sensitive reporting, diverse representation, and accessible media content for persons with disabilities. By reinforcing ethical and inclusive journalism, Vikes contributes to more open and informed societies where independent media serves all communities, particularly those who are most often excluded from public discourse.

### **3.2.2. Outcome 2: Strengthened media and partner organisations**

For independent journalism to thrive, media organisations must be financially and institutionally resilient. Many of Vikes' programme partners – including independent media outlets, journalist associations, and other media support organisations – operate in challenging environments, facing financial instability, limited business skills, and weak organisational structures. This makes them vulnerable to political and commercial influence while also limiting their ability to effectively support journalists. Additionally, rapid changes in the digital landscape have forced media actors to adapt to new technologies and audience behaviours while navigating censorship and online threats.

Vikes' programme supports media and partner organisations in strengthening their governance, operational capacity, financial sustainability, editorial independence, and long-term sustainability. Through peer learning, mentorship, and strategic partnerships, the programme helps partners develop resource mobilisation strategies, improve internal policies and accountability mechanisms, and enhance coordination within media networks and support structures. In East Africa, the programme supports the work of the community radio portals established in Tanzania and Uganda during the previous programme period, enabling rural radio stations to pool resources, increase their online reach, and generate new income streams. In Central America, journalist and media networks, including those operating from exile, strengthen organisational resilience through cross-border media collaborations, capacity development, and co-produced investigative journalism. These approaches reduce structural vulnerabilities and reinforce regional media ecosystems.

In fragile and authoritarian settings, where independent media is systematically weakened, strengthening media and partner organisations is a critical safeguard against democratic backsliding. By supporting institutional development, sustainable organisational practices, and the role of media support organisations and networks, Vikes contributes to media pluralism and the long-term resilience of independent media. Especially in least developed countries and fragile contexts, strong and well-

governed media institutions and support organisations are essential for transparency, accountability, and public participation.

### 3.2.3. Outcome 3: Safer, more equitable working environments

Journalists and media professionals in Vikes' programme countries face serious risks, including harassment, intimidation, legal persecution, and physical violence. Independent journalists are frequently targeted for exposing corruption, human rights abuses, or political misconduct, leading to self-censorship, forced exile, job insecurity, and the exclusion of many voices from the media sector. Women journalists and media professionals with disabilities encounter additional barriers, such as gender-based harassment, workplace discrimination, and exclusion from leadership positions. These risks weaken press freedom and limit the media's ability to serve the public interest.

Improving working conditions and ensuring safer, more equitable working environments is essential for protecting press freedom and sustaining independent journalism. Vikes works with journalist associations and unions, media sector CSOs, and women journalist networks to strengthen workplace policies and practices that prevent harassment, discrimination, and abuse, and to promote gender equality in newsrooms. In Somalia, the programme advances safer and more inclusive media workplaces through sector-level awareness, engagement of media managers, and the promotion of ethical and respectful working cultures. In Tanzania, Uganda, Nepal, and Central America, Vikes supports organisations and networks of women journalists in their efforts to promote gender equality in newsroom structures, strengthen leadership skills, and establish and implement gender-responsive and anti-harassment policies.

Employers and newsroom managers play a crucial role in shaping working conditions. Through Vikes' programme, media organisations are supported in developing and operationalising internal guidelines and mechanisms related to workplace safety, gender equality, and inclusion, and in strengthening the role of editors and media managers in fostering fair and supportive professional environments. This also includes improving digital safety capacities of journalists, particularly women. By fostering stronger protection mechanisms and more inclusive workplaces, the programme contributes to long-term press freedom, diversity, and professional integrity. A human rights-based approach ensures that Vikes' support addresses structural inequalities and supports sustainable improvements in the safety of journalists and their working conditions.

### 3.2.4. Outcome 4: Increased duty-bearers' support for independent media

For independent journalism to thrive, duty-bearers – including government officials, policymakers, regulatory bodies, and media owners – must recognise and uphold media freedom as a fundamental pillar of democracy, transparency, and accountability. However, in many of Vikes' programme countries, restrictive laws, political interference, and selective enforcement of media protections continue to limit press freedom. Particularly in fragile and authoritarian contexts, duty-bearers often view independent journalism as a threat rather than a public good, leading to censorship, intimidation, and regulatory constraints that weaken the ability of media to function as a watchdog.

Vikes' programme engages duty-bearers through context-appropriate approaches that combine evidence-based advocacy, policy dialogue, and the strengthening of media sector coalitions. In Tanzania, for example, Vikes works with a national media advocacy organisation to promote press freedom, legal and regulatory reforms, and structured dialogue between media, regulators, and policymakers. In Somalia, the programme contributes to an enabling environment for independent media by strengthening national dialogue platforms and improving recognition of professional and inclusive

journalism. In contexts where direct legal reform is not feasible, such as in Central America, the programme supports independent media and journalists in exile to produce public-interest journalism that raises awareness of press freedom, human rights, and democratic governance, thereby contributing indirectly to accountability and public debate. In Nepal, engagement focuses on media leadership, aiming to support better-informed decision-making and to reinforce the role of independent media in society.

In addition to supporting national-level processes, Vikes is actively engaged in advancing press freedom through global and regional networks. Vikes' approach is highly network-based, leveraging strategic partnerships to amplify advocacy messages and connect local experiences to international policy discussions. Through its work in Finland, Vikes contributes to raising awareness of press freedom challenges, facilitating exchanges between journalists, policymakers, and media development actors, and strengthening international solidarity for media freedom.

By increasing recognition of the role and value of independent media among duty-bearers and media owners, the programme contributes to long-term structural change that enables media to operate more freely and responsibly. A human rights-based approach underpins this work, reinforcing the responsibility of states to protect freedom of expression and access to information in line with international human rights commitments.

### 3.3. Cross-cutting priorities

Vikes' programme is guided by cross-cutting priorities that reinforce its overall impact and ensure that media development contributes to broader social change. These commitments – gender equality and inclusion, environmental sustainability, and media literacy – are integral components that enhance the effectiveness of the programme's four key outcomes.

#### **Gender equality and inclusion**

Inclusive and representative media is essential for producing quality journalism, fostering media pluralism, and strengthening public trust. Vikes promotes gender-sensitive reporting and the participation of women, marginalised groups, and persons with disabilities in media, ensuring that journalism reflects diverse perspectives and serves all segments of society. By integrating gender equality and inclusion across all outcomes, the programme supports gender-responsive newsroom structures and leadership, inclusive professional standards and training, and the systematic representation of marginalised groups in media content and media development processes.

#### **Environmental sustainability**

Journalism plays a vital role in informing public discourse on climate change, environmental justice, and sustainable development. Vikes strengthens environmental journalism to enhance awareness, promote evidence-based reporting, and support accountability in environmental governance. At the same time, media organisations are encouraged to reduce their own environmental impact through sustainable institutional practices. By embedding environmental sustainability in its work, the programme encourages local media outlets to serve as both an advocate and an example of responsible environmental action.

#### **Media literacy and misinformation resilience**

Strengthening media literacy is fundamental to ensuring that journalism fulfils its democratic role in society. Vikes promotes media literacy to counter misinformation, foster critical engagement with news

and other media content, and enhance public understanding of the role of independent journalism. These efforts support the programme's expected results by increasing audience trust in quality journalism, encouraging engagement with inclusive and fact-based media, and reinforcing duty-bearers' appreciation of press freedom as a cornerstone of democracy.

By integrating these cross-cutting priorities across all programme outcomes, Vikes enhances the sustainability, inclusivity, and societal relevance of independent journalism. Through its media development work, the programme contributes to more inclusive public debate, more accountable governance, and more informed civic participation, particularly in the programme countries, while also reinforcing these dynamics in Finland through its global engagement.

## 4. Programme structure and implementation

Vikes' programme is designed to provide both strategic direction and flexibility, ensuring that support for independent media remains relevant and effective across diverse political and media landscapes. The programme builds on strong local partnerships, aligning strategic priorities with the needs and realities of media actors in each context.

A fundamental principle of the programme is its commitment to editorial independence. Vikes does not interfere with content produced by partner media organisations or journalists. Instead, the programme strengthens the capacity, security, and sustainability of independent media actors, ensuring they have the skills, resources, and institutional resilience to advance and produce quality journalism on their own terms. This support is grounded in local and regional expertise and, in contexts where specialised competence is limited or where security conditions restrict open engagement, is complemented by international and regional peer exchange and cooperation.

To balance strategic coherence with local adaptability, the programme is structured around thematic sub-programmes that address key challenges and opportunities in media development. These sub-programmes ensure focused interventions on pressing media issues while allowing partners to retain autonomy in how they engage based on their specific country or regional context. This structure also enhances cross-country collaboration, strengthens learning across regions, and increases opportunities for co-funding from donors who prioritise specific thematic areas.

A key feature of the programme is its strong emphasis on capacity-building at both the individual and institutional levels. All thematic sub-programmes include components that strengthen journalistic skills, ethical reporting, and quality journalism, while also supporting the organisational resilience and long-term sustainability of media organisations. By integrating these elements across all thematic sub-programmes, the programme ensures that both media professionals and organisations have the tools to uphold press freedom and maintain long-term independence.

While the programme is structured thematically, it maintains a strong country or region-specific focus, recognising that contextual realities influence how thematic priorities are addressed. The specific thematic focus in each country and with each partner varies based on local needs, opportunities, and restrictions on press freedom.

Vikes' interventions focus on training and mentoring with journalists, media and partner organisations, fostering regional and cross-border networks, supporting content production, and, where relevant, engaging in advocacy for freedom of expression, media inclusion, and sustainability. The programme also contributes to raising awareness of media literacy and sustainable development, ensuring that journalism plays a critical role in informed decision-making and responsible public discourse.

This chapter presents the programme’s structure, thematic focus areas, and implementation principles, illustrating how Vikes’ support contributes to independent, sustainable, and pluralistic media.

## 4.1. Thematic sub-programmes and their contributions

Vikes’ programme is structured around five thematic sub-programmes that reflect global trends, Vikes’ strategic priorities, and the evolving landscape of independent media development. These sub-programmes provide a strategic framework for programme-level coordination and learning, ensuring that partners engage where their expertise is most relevant while encouraging collaboration across different aspects of media resilience and press freedom.

While each sub-programme has a distinct focus, they are not standalone silos – they reinforce one another, and progress in one area often supports advancements in others. Partners contribute to one or more themes based on their priorities, expertise, and operational context.

### 4.1.1. Sub-programme 1: Media rights, equality, and inclusion

This sub-programme is grounded in the principle that independent media should be diverse, representative, and inclusive of all voices. It strengthens gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory journalism, promoting inclusive journalism that challenges stereotypes and amplifies marginalised voices. In parallel, it reinforces the commitment of media organisations to equality and fair working conditions, thereby ensuring that journalists and media professionals – regardless of gender, location, or background – can operate in safer and more equitable environments.

Key intervention areas contributing to programme outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Media provides independent, sustainable, and inclusive quality journalism that gives voice to underrepresented groups.

- ✓ Training on gender-sensitive and inclusive reporting to ensure that journalists can challenge stereotypes and promote diverse voices.
- ✓ Community-based reporting in East Africa, where online radio portals and local reporters amplify voices of marginalised rural and urban communities.
- ✓ Training with journalists on human rights-based reporting in Somalia to ensure media narratives promote justice and human dignity.

**Outcome 2:** Media organisations have strengthened resilience and capacity to adapt, innovate, and operate independently and sustainably.

- ✓ Promoting leadership opportunities for women journalists through mentorship, networking, and institutional support in Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Central America.

**Outcome 3:** Media workers have improved working conditions and operate in safer, more equitable environments that protect and promote independent journalism and foster inclusive practices.

- ✓ Strengthening policies and accountability mechanisms to prevent and address gender-based violence and harassment in media organisations.
- ✓ Safety and security training with female journalists in Somalia and Uganda.
- ✓ Men for Women training in Somalia to address gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination in media workplaces.

**Outcome 4:** Duty-bearers demonstrate increased willingness and commitment to support the role of independent, pluralistic media in fostering accountability and informed decision-making.

- ✓ Advocacy for access to information, media law reforms, and gender-responsive media policies in Tanzania.
- ✓ Joint advocacy efforts to safeguard press freedom in Finland and globally.
- ✓ Public dialogue and global citizenship education to reinforce media pluralism and inclusion in Finland and internationally.

#### 4.1.2. Sub-programme 2: Journalism in exile

Exiled journalists and media outlets face severe challenges in continuing their work under safe and sustainable conditions. Political persecution, repression, and conflict often force independent media professionals to flee, cutting them off from their home audiences and limiting their ability to report freely. This sub-programme ensures that independent media professionals forced into exile can continue reporting despite displacement, preventing their isolation and strengthening the long-term viability of exiled media organisations. By facilitating cross-border collaboration and supporting organisational resilience, the programme safeguards press freedom and independent journalism in highly repressive environments.

Key intervention areas contributing to programme outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Media provides independent, sustainable, and inclusive quality journalism that gives voice to underrepresented groups.

- ✓ Collaborative content production in Central America that enables exiled media outlets to continue serving their home audiences while reaching wider international platforms.

**Outcome 2:** Media organisations have strengthened resilience and capacity to adapt, innovate, and operate independently and sustainably.

- ✓ Strengthening the organisational and operational sustainability of exiled media through joint structures, shared services, and capacity development.

**Outcome 3:** Media workers have improved working conditions and operate in safer, more equitable environments that protect and promote independent journalism and foster inclusive practices.

- ✓ Strengthening digital and organisational safety practices for media operating from exile.

**Outcome 4:** Duty-bearers demonstrate increased willingness and commitment to support the role of independent, pluralistic media in fostering accountability and informed decision-making.

- ✓ Public-interest journalism that raises awareness of press freedom, human rights, and democratic governance and contributes to accountability and public debate.
- ✓ Engaging with international human rights and press freedom organisations for advocacy campaigns that highlight the risks facing journalists in exile and push for stronger legal protections and policy reforms.

#### 4.1.3. Sub-programme 3: Environmental journalism

With climate change and environmental crises shaping public policy and development priorities worldwide, the role of media in environmental accountability has never been more critical. This sub-programme equips journalists with the skills, knowledge, and networks needed to report on climate change, environmental governance, and sustainable development, ensuring that media can inform, educate, and empower communities. Beyond high-level climate policies, environmental journalism plays

a practical role in helping communities adapt to environmental changes. Reporting covers sustainable livelihoods, energy, land use, pollution, and the social impacts of climate change, particularly for women, rural populations, and marginalised communities. By strengthening fact-based journalism that holds policymakers and corporations accountable, the programme helps local communities make informed decisions about environmental risks and solutions.

Key intervention areas contributing to programme outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Media provides independent, sustainable, and inclusive quality journalism that gives voice to underrepresented groups.

- ✓ Training on investigative and in-depth environmental and climate journalism in Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, and Central America.
- ✓ Cross-border collaboration in environmental reporting, particularly in Central America.

**Outcome 2:** Media organisations have strengthened resilience and capacity to adapt, innovate, and operate independently and sustainably.

- ✓ Facilitating partnerships and networks that improve journalists' access to environmental data, expertise, and collaborative production.

**Outcome 4:** Duty-bearers demonstrate increased willingness and commitment to support the role of independent, pluralistic media in fostering accountability and informed decision-making.

- ✓ Media content that strengthens public debate and accountability on environmental governance.

#### 4.1.4. Sub-programme 4: Peace journalism

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, media can play a transformative role in either deepening divisions or fostering dialogue and social cohesion. This sub-programme strengthens conflict-sensitive journalism by equipping media professionals with the skills to report ethically, factually, and responsibly, ensuring that media contributes to informed public debate and peaceful dialogue. It focuses on countering hate speech and disinformation and promoting journalism that supports peacebuilding and social cohesion.

Key intervention areas contributing to programme outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Media provides independent, sustainable, and inclusive quality journalism that gives voice to underrepresented groups.

- ✓ Training on conflict-sensitive reporting and peace journalism in Somalia, equipping journalists with tools to navigate politically sensitive topics without exacerbating tensions.
- ✓ Training for journalists on disinformation and its impact on peacebuilding to equip them with skills to identify and counter false narratives that threaten journalistic integrity.

**Outcome 2:** Media organisations have strengthened resilience and capacity to adapt, innovate, and operate independently and sustainably.

- ✓ Strengthening national dialogue platforms and media collaboration that support conflict-sensitive reporting.

**Outcome 3:** Media workers have improved working conditions and operate in safer, more equitable environments that protect and promote independent journalism and foster inclusive practices.

- ✓ Engagement of media managers and journalists in strengthening conflict-sensitive, ethical professional practices that reduce harmful behaviour, build trust within the media sector, and support safer working environments in fragile contexts, particularly in Somalia.

**Outcome 4:** Duty-bearers demonstrate increased willingness and commitment to support the role of independent, pluralistic media in fostering accountability and informed decision-making.

- ✓ Media content and dialogue that increase recognition of the role of independent journalism in peace and social cohesion.

#### 4.1.5. Sub-programme 5: Disability-specific media work

Ensuring media accessibility and fair representation for persons with disabilities is a core aspect of Vikes' inclusion efforts. This sub-programme strengthens disability-inclusive reporting, promotes accessible media content, and enhances the participation of journalists with disabilities in the media sector. By removing barriers to representation, it ensures that media platforms serve all citizens. This work aligns with Vikes' broader strategic priorities on inclusion and diversity, reinforcing the ability of independent media to reflect the full spectrum of society.

Key intervention areas contributing to programme outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Media provides independent, sustainable, and inclusive quality journalism that gives voice to underrepresented groups.

- ✓ Training with journalists on disability-inclusive reporting in Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, and Nepal.

**Outcome 2:** Media organisations have strengthened resilience and capacity to adapt, innovate, and operate independently and sustainably.

- ✓ Strengthening the capacity of media organisations and networks to integrate accessibility and disability inclusion into their institutional policies, systems, and content production.
- ✓ Establishing sign language news broadcasts in Somalia to improve accessibility for audiences with disabilities.

**Outcome 3:** Media workers have improved working conditions and operate in safer, more equitable environments that protect and promote independent journalism and foster inclusive practices.

- ✓ Professional development opportunities for journalists with disabilities.
- ✓ Support for equal participation and career opportunities for journalists with disabilities in media workplaces.

**Outcome 4:** Duty-bearers demonstrate increased willingness and commitment to support the role of independent, pluralistic media in fostering accountability and informed decision-making.

- ✓ Advocacy and public debate promoting media accessibility and disability rights.

The table on the following page outlines how each thematic sub-programme contributes to the programme outcomes.

**Table 3. Thematic sub-programmes and their contributions to programme outcomes**

<b>Thematic sub-programmes</b>	<b>Outcome 1:</b> Improved quality journalism	<b>Outcome 2:</b> Strengthened media organisations	<b>Outcome 3:</b> Safer, more equitable working environments	<b>Outcome 4:</b> Increased duty-bearers' support for independent media
Media rights, equality, and inclusion	Strengthens ethical, gender-sensitive, and inclusive journalism, ensuring underrepresented voices are heard.	Enhances organisational diversity and leadership opportunities for women and marginalised groups.	Improves workplace policies and practices to address gender-based violence, discrimination, and unequal career opportunities.	Supports policy dialogue and advocacy for gender equality, access to information, and an enabling environment for independent media.
Journalism in exile	Ensures exiled journalists can sustain fact-based reporting despite displacement.	Enhances the institutional resilience of exiled media organisations, ensuring their long-term viability.	Strengthens digital and organisational safety practices for media operating from exile.	Increases international awareness of press freedom through public-interest journalism produced from exile and joint advocacy.
Environmental journalism	Enhances investigative and solutions journalism on environmental issues, increasing public access to fact-based reporting on climate and sustainability.	Strengthens collaboration between media and environmental organisations, supporting specialised coverage of environmental justice.	– (Not a primary focus of this sub-programme.)	Raises public and policymaker awareness of environmental governance through independent journalism.
Peace journalism	Promotes fact-based, conflict-sensitive reporting that fosters dialogue and mitigates misinformation in politically fragile contexts.	Strengthens the role of media in peacebuilding, ensuring responsible coverage of political transitions, post-conflict recovery, and reconciliation.	Promotes conflict-sensitive professional culture and dialogue that improve safety and trust in the media sector in fragile contexts.	Engages with duty-bearers, peacebuilding actors, and civil society to promote a media environment that supports conflict resolution.
Disability-specific media work	Advances disability-inclusive journalism, ensuring that persons with disabilities are represented in media content and narratives.	Enhances institutional capacity for disability inclusion and accessible media content.	Promotes equal participation and professional opportunities for journalists with disabilities.	Advocates for legal and policy reforms that improve media accessibility.

## 4.2. Implementation approach principles

The programme is implemented through a partner-led model in which local organisations are responsible for contextual design and delivery of activities, while Vikes provides strategic direction, overall programme coordination, financial management, thematic expertise, and external representation. This structure enables implementation that is locally relevant and responsive, while ensuring alignment with the programme's Theory of Change, results framework, and cross-cutting priorities.

Vikes' implementation approach balances strategic direction with the flexibility required to support independent media in diverse and often rapidly changing environments. The programme is designed around three core principles:

**Locally led implementation:** Partners lead the design and execution of activities based on their expertise and local contexts.

**Strategic coordination and capacity-building:** Vikes provides technical support, learning opportunities, and cross-border networking to enhance impact.

**Adaptive and context-sensitive approaches:** Implementation remains flexible, enabling partners to respond to shifting political, economic, and security conditions.

A decentralised implementation model ensures that interventions are tailored to the realities of each country while remaining aligned with broader strategic objectives. Partners actively shape implementation plans, adjusting strategies as needed. At the same time, cross-regional learning fosters collaboration, allowing media actors in different regions to share experiences, best practices, and innovative solutions to common challenges.

The programme integrates participatory monitoring and evaluation, ensuring continuous learning and adaptation. Regular reflection sessions, capacity-building workshops, and thematic exchanges help refine approaches, making the programme dynamic and responsive to emerging media challenges.

While maintaining a clear strategic direction through its Theory of Change and results framework, Vikes applies an adaptive programming model. This flexibility is particularly vital in fragile environments, where security threats, restrictive policies, or economic instability may necessitate adjustments. By working closely with partners to identify risks and respond proactively, the programme ensures that independent media support remains relevant and effective.

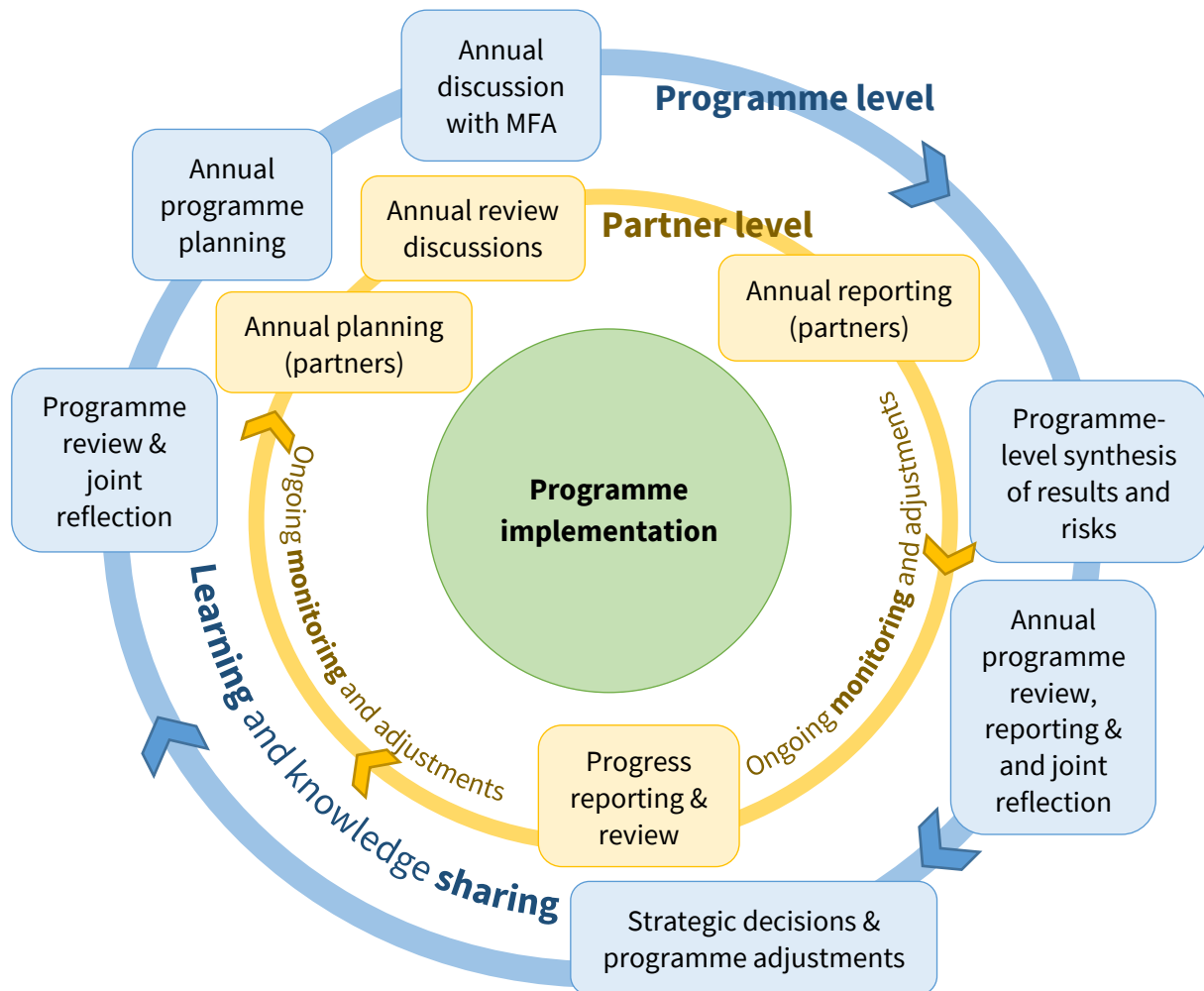
Vikes also leverages collaborations with media organisations, journalist associations, civil society groups, international press freedom organisations, and donors to maximise impact. These partnerships amplify advocacy efforts, provide technical expertise, and create opportunities for cross-border cooperation, reinforcing Vikes' commitment to long-term media sustainability.

By embedding editorial independence, capacity-building, and media resilience at the core of its work, Vikes ensures that its programme has strong local ownership but remains globally connected, and strategically adaptable – empowering independent media actors to navigate complex challenges while fostering a more democratic and pluralistic media landscape.

## 4.3. Planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning

Vikes' Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL) system provides a structured framework for tracking progress, supporting adaptive management, and integrating learning throughout the programme cycle. It enables Vikes and its partners to assess results, reflect on implementation, and

make informed adjustments to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness. Recognising that media development is a complex and evolving field where change is not always fully captured through predefined indicators, the PMEL system combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate meaningful evidence. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning are closely interconnected and inform planning, implementation, and strategic decision-making at both operational and programme levels.



**Figure 1:** Key elements of the annual cycle of the PMEL processes.

## Planning

Planning provides the foundation for programme implementation by linking strategic objectives with context-responsive partner action. Programme-level priorities are informed by country and regional context analyses, developed in collaboration with partners and complemented by wider global trend analysis. These provide the basis for identifying key challenges, opportunities, and areas of strategic focus.

Partners define their own priorities and select the thematic focus areas and programme result areas that best reflect their objectives and operating contexts. Planning is supported through harmonised multi-year and annual planning templates, which help align partner activities with programme-level goals while allowing flexibility to respond to local realities.

Programme planning therefore integrates:

- ✓ Context analyses of operating environments
- ✓ Programme-level strategic priorities
- ✓ Partner-driven multi-year and annual work plans

Plans are reviewed and updated regularly based on monitoring findings, evaluation results, and changes in the operating environment, ensuring that implementation remains relevant and responsive over time.

## Monitoring

Monitoring is embedded in programme implementation and provides continuous information on progress, challenges, and contextual developments. Partners play an active role in monitoring and reflection, as they are best placed to interpret change within their operating environments. Monitoring therefore combines structured reporting with ongoing dialogue to ensure both consistency and contextual relevance.

At partner level, progress is tracked through indicator-based data, including disaggregated information where relevant, as well as qualitative reporting and participatory reflection that capture broader changes in media ecosystems. Harmonised reporting processes support systematic documentation of results while allowing flexibility in diverse and sometimes restrictive contexts. Partners select indicators from the programme Results Matrix in line with their interventions and contextual relevance, and regular dialogue between partners and Vikes Specialists enable follow-up on progress, emerging risks, and support needs.

At programme level, partner-generated information is synthesised to assess progress towards expected outcomes across different contexts. This takes place primarily after the submission of annual partner reports and is complemented by lighter mid-year reviews of progress and risks. Regular check-ins, field visits, and joint reflection with partners support this process and strengthen a shared understanding of results.

Monitoring findings are synthesised and examined for operational and strategic decision-making in programme monitoring meetings of Vikes Specialists, held regularly and serving as the main structured forums for programme-level review. These meetings bring together evidence from partner reporting, ongoing dialogue, and risk monitoring to analyse progress, identify required follow-up, and agree on operational and strategic adjustments. The conclusions are fed back into partner dialogue and annual planning processes. Decisions and follow-up actions are documented within programme planning and reporting to ensure continuity and accountability.

## Evaluation

Evaluation complements ongoing monitoring by providing periodic, in-depth analysis of programme performance, results, and sustainability. It supports both accountability and learning by examining progress, identifying challenges, and generating evidence for programme development. Evaluations follow internationally recognised methodologies, including OECD/DAC evaluation criteria.

Three main evaluations will be conducted during the programme period:

- 1) **Thematic evaluation on gender equality** (Q2/2027, external evaluation) to assess how gender equality and inclusion have been integrated into programme activities and their impact on independent media development. Conducted by external evaluators, it will provide an independent assessment of how effectively the programme addresses gender disparities in

media. Findings will be used to refine programme strategies and strengthen gender-sensitive journalism.

- 2) **Mid-term programme evaluation** (Q1-2/2028, external evaluation) will assess the effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the programme. It will examine how thematic sub-programmes and country-level interventions contribute to overall programme goals. Conducted by external evaluators, it will generate recommendations for the final phase of the programme and inform future programming.
- 3) **Final programme review** (Q4/2029, internal review) will serve as a comprehensive reflection on programme successes, challenges, and lessons learnt. The review will involve Vikes staff, partners, and other relevant stakeholders, ensuring diverse perspectives are included. The findings will be used to inform the design of the next programme cycle, integrating insights from monitoring and past evaluations.

The evaluation plans are being further specified during the programme set-up phase in Q1/2026. Evaluation findings are systematically translated into programme development through structured management responses. Following each evaluation, Vikes prepares a management response outlining actions to be taken, responsible persons, and timelines for implementation. These actions are monitored as part of the programme's regular planning and reporting cycle. Evaluation results inform adjustments to implementation strategies, thematic priorities, and partner support approaches, and they also contribute to strategic planning for subsequent programme periods.

## Learning

Learning is an integral part of programme management and ensures that evidence generated through monitoring and evaluation informs ongoing adaptation and development. Structured reflection takes place through annual programme reviews and regular programme monitoring meetings, where lessons from implementation are analysed and translated into concrete follow-up actions. Vikes continues to strengthen learning mechanisms, including internal reflections and collaborative exchanges with partners.

Shared learning is fostered through:

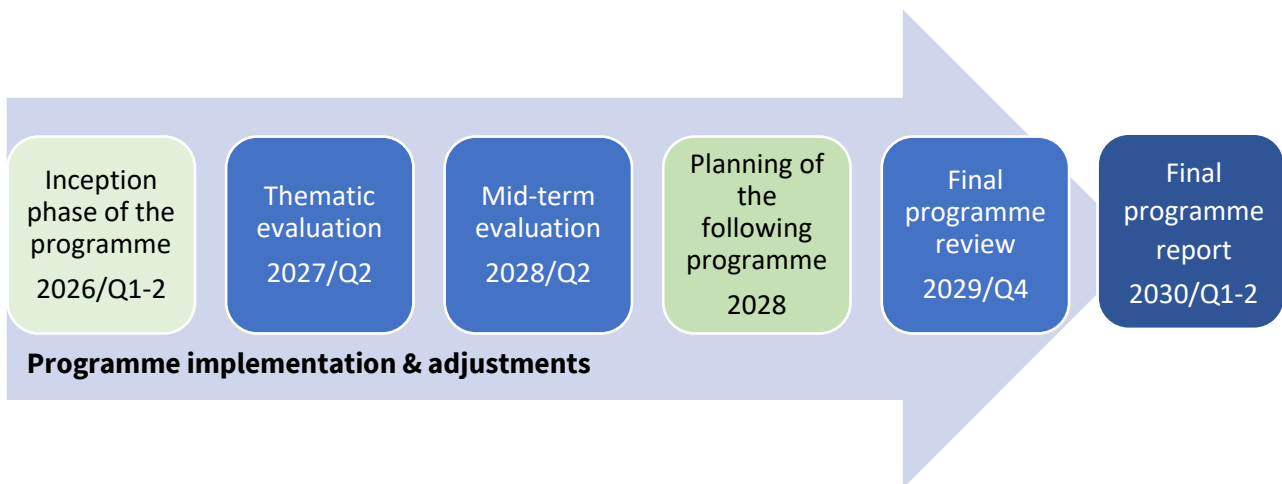
- ✓ Annual review sessions, where Vikes teams and partners analyse progress, identify challenges, and adjust strategies based on real-world experiences.
- ✓ Regional and cross-thematic exchanges, providing a platform for partners to share insights, discuss solutions, and explore emerging media trends in different contexts.
- ✓ Engagement with other media support organisations, research institutions, and advocacy networks, ensuring that Vikes remains connected to broader developments in the sector and can integrate global best practices into its work.

Learning is directly linked to adaptive programme management. Insights from monitoring, evaluation, and partner dialogue are used to adjust implementation approaches, refine thematic priorities, strengthen partner capacity support, and update risk management measures. Agreed changes are incorporated into updated work plans and followed up through subsequent monitoring.

To contribute to the wider media development field, findings and experiences are actively shared to support collective knowledge-building. By sharing evaluation insights with partners and sector peers, Vikes ensures that learnings from the programme contribute to broader discussions on media development and international media support. Programme-generated insights are also used to inform

policy discussions and funding strategies when advocating for evidence-based approaches to media support. By continuously integrating new knowledge into programme design and implementation, Vikes ensures that its interventions remain effective, responsive, and strategically aligned.

Responsibility for facilitating learning and ensuring its use in decision-making is shared across the organisation. The Quality & Learning Specialist coordinates programme-level analysis and synthesis of monitoring and evaluation findings. Programme Specialists work with partners to apply learning in implementation and planning. Strategic programme adjustments are discussed within Vikes' leadership structures and incorporated into organisational and programme planning processes.



**Figure 2.** Key evaluations on the level of the programme cycle.

#### 4.4. Risk management

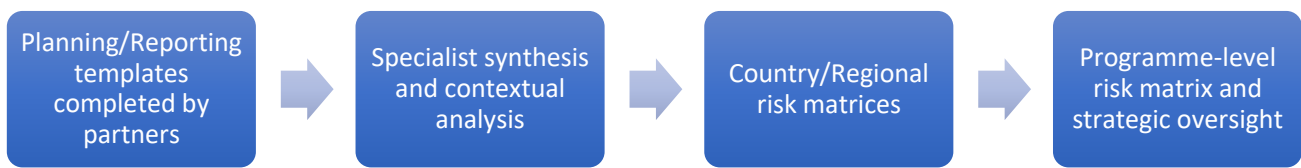
Risk management is an integral part of Vikes' programme implementation. It ensures that interventions remain effective and sustainable, while also safe, accountable, and responsive to complex and often volatile environments. The Risk Management Policy defines the overarching principles, roles, and responsibilities, while risk identification, monitoring, and response are embedded in programme planning, implementation, and reporting processes.

Risks are assessed and managed at three interconnected levels:

**Partner level:** Partners reflect on sustainability risks, cross-cutting risks, and operational challenges through planning and reporting templates. These reflections inform partner-specific risk considerations and highlight emerging contextual or organisational concerns.

**Country/Regional level:** Programme Specialists synthesise partner inputs and contextual analysis into country- or region-specific risk matrices. These matrices identify key contextual, operational, and institutional risks, define preventive (mitigation) measures, and include clearly defined corrective actions.

**Programme level:** The Quality & Learning Specialist consolidates recurring or systemic risks into the programme-level risk matrix. This matrix captures cross-regional, thematic, and organisational risks and supports strategic oversight by management and the Board.



**Figure 3.** Risk management workflow.

This tiered structure ensures that risks are identified close to implementation realities while allowing escalation of issues that affect multiple partners or the programme as a whole. High-risk contexts receive enhanced monitoring, more frequent dialogue, and adaptive planning measures. In cases of acute escalation, contingency procedures – such as activity redesign, temporary suspension, or emergency support – may be activated. Country/regional and programme-level risk matrices are reviewed at least annually and updated whenever significant contextual or operational changes occur. Partner-related risks are reviewed through planning and reporting processes, as well as ongoing dialogue with partners. The system is designed to remain practical and proportionate, strengthening documentation and escalation without creating unnecessary administrative burden.

Vikes distinguishes clearly between **preventive (mitigation) measures**, which aim to reduce the likelihood or impact of a risk before it materialises, and **corrective actions**, which define immediate and follow-up steps if a risk occurs. For each risk, the programme-level risk matrix includes short, concrete corrective actions specifying who acts and what steps are taken first. Corrective actions are reviewed as part of the annual risk matrix review and during crisis situations to ensure they remain realistic and context appropriate. This distinction strengthens accountability and ensures that risk management provides not only preventive safeguards but also practical response guidance when incidents occur.

Vikes applies a **zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH), other harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority**. Safeguarding measures include clear Codes of Conduct and contractual obligations; safeguarding training for Vikes staff and partners, proportionate to their role and risk exposure; and an anonymous whistleblowing channel and internal reporting mechanisms.

Information about reporting channels is communicated through partnership agreements, trainings, and Vikes website. Reporting mechanisms are confidential and designed to protect whistleblowers and affected individuals. Survivor-centred principles apply in SEAH cases, including confidentiality, protection from retaliation, and referral to appropriate support services where available. Where needed, the programme may support partners in strengthening their own safeguarding and reporting mechanisms. Where partner mechanisms require strengthening, Vikes provides guidance and oversight to ensure minimum safeguarding standards are upheld.

**Financial and compliance risks** are addressed through a combination of preventive screening and ongoing monitoring. Prior to funding decisions, Vikes conducts due diligence assessments of partners, reviews financial management capacity, and applies relevant sanctions compliance screening procedures. During implementation, partnership agreements define financial reporting obligations and anti-corruption clauses. Spot-checks and audits are regularly conducted, and suspected irregularities trigger immediate documentation, internal review, and donor notification in accordance with funding conditions. Vikes' approach to preventing terrorism financing and money laundering is embedded in

financial control procedures, due diligence processes, and compliance monitoring. High-risk country contexts receive proportionate additional scrutiny.

Vikes recognises that **risk landscapes evolve**. The updated risk matrix structure, including the introduction of clearer residual risk analysis and corrective actions, represents a significant strengthening of the organisation's approach. Further refinements during the 2026–2029 programme period will focus on improving contextual specificity, partner-level risk capacity, and the systematic documentation of risks and risk responses. Through this structured yet adaptive approach, Vikes ensures that risk management remains a practical management tool, supporting responsible programme delivery, safeguarding partners and beneficiaries, and maintaining accountability to donors and stakeholders.

#### 4.5. Sustainability and exit strategies

Ensuring that the programme's impact extends beyond the funding cycle is a core principle of Vikes' approach. Sustainability is embedded in the programme's design, shaping the way interventions are planned, implemented, and monitored. The programme strengthens the foundations of independent media, equipping journalists and media and partner organisations with the skills, structures, and strategies needed to sustain their work in the long run.

Vikes promotes sustainability by reinforcing **institutional resilience** among its partners. By enhancing governance structures, financial sustainability, and leadership capacities, the programme ensures that media and partner organisations can continue to operate effectively, even in restrictive or resource-limited environments. Support for local media associations and professional networks also plays a crucial role in strengthening collective rights, workplace protections, and advocacy efforts, enabling media professionals to defend their space and negotiate better working conditions and terms of employment.

**Financial sustainability** remains a significant challenge, particularly in fragile contexts where independent media is systematically weakened, and economic constraints limit opportunities for revenue generation. Vikes works with partners to explore alternative funding models, such as diversifying income streams, strengthening audience engagement strategies, and developing innovative business approaches that reduce dependency on external aid. However, in some contexts such as Central America, the financial realities make full independence from donor support unrealistic in the near future. In such cases, the focus shifts to ensuring that media organisations remain adaptable, resilient, and capable of navigating financial uncertainty while continuing their work. Meanwhile, in East Africa, the online radio portals have been created specifically as a tool to widen the outreach of rural radio stations and improve their own fundraising through new partnerships with advertisers and other stakeholders from outside their local coverage area.

**Technical sustainability** is also an important consideration. As media environments evolve, digital security, audience engagement, and the ability to leverage emerging technologies are critical for long-term success. Vikes supports partners in adopting cost-effective and open-source solutions, reducing reliance on expensive software, and building in-house expertise to independently manage technical systems. To ensure the technical sustainability of the Tanzanian and Ugandan radio portals, local technicians and editors have been trained to provide IT support and user training to the radio stations, and a new mobile application is under development.

Beyond institutional and financial sustainability, the programme also highlights **socio-cultural sustainability**, recognising that achieving lasting results in the media sector is not just about resources

but also about shifting norms, strengthening public trust in independent journalism, and ensuring diverse representation. In East Africa and Nepal, supported content production gives voice to local communities and encourages dialogue on locally relevant development issues. Gender-sensitive and inclusive reporting is integrated across all thematic sub-programmes, reinforcing ethical standards and increasing the visibility of underrepresented groups. Efforts to promote media literacy further support long-term impact by enabling audiences to critically engage with information and counter misinformation.

**Environmental sustainability** is another important consideration in Vikes' approach. While the programme itself does not have a significant environmental impact, Vikes recognises the role of local media in raising awareness of climate change, environmental justice, and sustainable development. Through its thematic sub-programme on environmental journalism, the programme strengthens fact-based reporting on environmental issues, ensuring that journalists are equipped to cover topics such as climate change adaptation, biodiversity loss, and local environmental policies. Internally, Vikes also seeks to minimise its environmental footprint by adopting sustainable travel policies, encouraging digital-first approaches where possible, and encouraging environmentally responsible practices among partners.

Vikes' approach to sustainability also includes careful transition planning and exit strategies, ensuring that support is phased out responsibly when necessary. Exit strategies are not uniform but tailored to context-specific realities, with the aim of leaving behind strong, self-sufficient media organisations rather than abrupt funding gaps. Transitions may involve gradually reducing financial support, strengthening networks to connect partners with new funding sources, or embedding media development initiatives into broader governance and civil society structures. Wherever possible, the programme seeks to institutionalise learning, ensuring that best practices, methodologies, and policy advancements remain embedded in local systems even after direct Vikes involvement ends.

Ultimately, sustainability is a continuous process – one that requires adaptability, long-term commitment, and close collaboration with partners. By addressing economic, institutional, technical, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability in an integrated manner, Vikes ensures that its interventions contribute to lasting improvements in media resilience, independence, and public trust.

## 5. Communications, advocacy, and global citizenship education

Communications, advocacy, and global citizenship education in Finland connect the experiences and knowledge generated with partners to the Finnish media, education, and policy environment. Through this work, the global perspectives are integrated into professional learning, public debate, and decision-making also in Finland. In this way, the programme strengthens its societal relevance, supports long-term impact, and creates reciprocal learning between Finland and programme countries.

Rather than functioning as a separate component, this work contributes directly to the programme outcomes by strengthening professional competence, promoting more inclusive participation in the media sector, and increasing recognition of independent and pluralistic media as a prerequisite for democratic development. It is based on Vikes' long-term cooperation with media professionals, journalism education, civil society organisations, research institutions, and decision-makers.

### **Bringing global perspectives into professional learning and public debate**

Vikes brings global media development themes and partner perspectives into Finnish professional education, journalism, and public discussion. Journalistic content and expert contributions are used in

teaching, media cooperation, and public events. This deepens understanding of the links between media, democracy, and sustainable development, and supports critical media literacy. The work challenges narrow or stereotypical representations of the Global South by providing contextualised knowledge and case studies that are often missing from Finnish debate. By doing so, it strengthens the capacity of Finnish media professionals and journalism students to report on global issues in a responsible, inclusive, and well-informed manner, and increases the wider public's access to diverse perspectives.

### **Cooperation with the media and education sector**

Close and long-term cooperation with journalism education and the media sector forms the backbone of the work in Finland. Joint learning activities, background briefings, and thematic workshops provide tools for covering global phenomena that are underreported in Finland and require stronger international contextualisation. At the same time, this cooperation creates direct and continuous connections between Finnish journalists and colleagues in programme countries. These structures support peer learning, enable the use of partner expertise and content in Finland, and contribute to the longer-term integration of the programme's themes into institutional practices.

### **Mentoring and inclusive participation in the media sector**

Mentoring and targeted professional support are used to strengthen equal participation in the Finnish media sector. The activities are directed particularly at journalists with international backgrounds and others who are underrepresented in newsrooms. The aim is practical: to strengthen professional networks, increase visibility, and support access to employment and freelance opportunities. This contributes not only to individual career paths but also to more diverse newsroom cultures and broader public debate by enabling new voices to participate as content producers and experts.

### **Advocacy and multi-stakeholder dialogue**

In Finland, advocacy takes the form of dialogue, coalition-building, networking, and expert participation in public and policy processes. Vikes works together with journalist associations, civil society actors, research institutions, and international partners to keep media freedom, access to information, and the safety and sustainability of journalism on the agenda. Key arenas include thematic events such as World Press Freedom Day, cooperation with national media and education institutions, and contributions to policy discussions and public debate. By bringing global experiences and partner perspectives into these processes, Vikes supports evidence-based decision-making and strengthens the recognition of independent and pluralistic media as a cornerstone of democratic development.

### **Communication and visibility**

Communication ensures that the programme's results, partner expertise, and key themes reach relevant audiences in Finland. Digital channels, media cooperation, and public events are used to make global developments understandable in a Finnish context and to encourage informed and constructive discussion. At the same time, communication increases the visibility and use of partner-produced content, strengthening the programme's credibility and supporting new cooperation and funding opportunities.

### **Contribution to long-term impact**

By linking international partnerships with professional learning, public debate, advocacy, and institutional cooperation, the work in Finland creates continuous interaction between the programme's

different components. Knowledge produced in one context is used in another, and long-term cooperation with key institutions ensures continuity beyond the programme period. As a result, the competence of media professionals is strengthened, public understanding of global interdependencies increases, and the role of independent and pluralistic media in democratic society is more firmly recognised in Finland and in international cooperation.

## 6. Budget and resources

### 6.1. Financial resources

The total budget for the 4-year programme is 3,8 MEUR. The annual budget ensures the continuation of successful programme work. The detailed budget specifies expenses, the share to be sent to partners, and the costs of domestic operations.

Vikes will provide the required co-funding (10 %) to the programme through its own fundraising. The most important and secured source for co-funding is the Union of Journalists in Finland together with other Vikes founding organisations who make annual contributions to Vikes to support journalist colleagues in developing countries. Other funding comes from private non-profit foundations, the European Union, Barents Press Finland, and Vikes own media service delivery through Global Media Consulting (GLOMECO) or other profit-based activities. Vikes is expected to have strengthened its fundraising as part of the supporting activities during the first years of the new programme. The composition of co-funding is described together with the budget.

### 6.2. Human resources

Adequate human resources in both partner organisations and Vikes are essential for achieving the intended results. Most programme activities are human resource intensive rather than dependent on investments in infrastructure or technology.

Vikes' team combines expertise in journalism, media development, development cooperation, results-based management, gender equality and inclusion, and organisational capacity strengthening. This multidisciplinary competence enables the organisation to support partners in both technical media content development and institutional strengthening, and to translate implementation experience into programme-level learning and advocacy. Volunteers contribute specialised professional expertise, particularly in journalist training, mentoring, and peer exchange. Their role complements partner-led implementation by providing targeted technical support and strengthening international professional networks. External experts are engaged when specific thematic or methodological expertise is not available within the partnership, with priority given to local and regional expertise whenever possible.

Vikes has a dedicated programme team with clearly defined and complementary roles to ensure effective implementation, results-based management, learning, and visibility.

Programme Specialists are responsible for the coordination of country and partner cooperation. Their tasks include planning and follow-up of implementation, maintaining regular monitoring dialogue with partners, supporting reporting processes, and facilitating capacity-strengthening activities and mutual learning between partners. They contribute to programme development by bringing together implementation experience, contextual analysis, and partner feedback.

The Quality and Learning Specialist is responsible for the development and coordination of the programme's results-based management system. This includes programme-level monitoring and

synthesis of results, the development of monitoring tools and practices, and the coordination of evaluation processes in collaboration with Programme Specialists and partners. The role ensures that evidence generated through monitoring and evaluation is systematically used in programme reporting, adaptive management, and strategic decision-making, and facilitates organisational learning across the programme.

The Communications Specialist is responsible for the programme's strategic communications and visibility, including the dissemination of results, partner perspectives, and key themes to relevant audiences and the use of communication to support advocacy, partnerships, and learning. The Global Citizenship Education Specialist is responsible for the thematic coordination of the programme's work in Finland, particularly in the areas of media literacy, pluralistic media, and professional learning.

The Executive Director provides strategic leadership for the programme and is responsible for its alignment with Vikes' overall strategy and the decisions of the Board. The Executive Director ensures compliance with the funding agreement and conditions set by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and oversees programme-level planning and resourcing.

In addition to their coordination and management responsibilities, programme staff contribute their thematic expertise to training, mentoring, and peer-learning processes together with partners and other stakeholders. The role of volunteers, journalists, and other media professionals remains significant as trainers, mentors, consultants, and content producers. Their involvement strengthens the programme's professional networks and provides targeted technical support.

The Board of Vikes provides strategic guidance, supports resource mobilisation, and contributes professional expertise and networks for the development of the programme and the organisation.

In the programme countries, each partner has a designated responsible person or project coordinator/manager to oversee the planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting of activities, and to act as the focal person for communication and exchange of information with Vikes and other partners. Depending on the scope of their work, partners may also engage additional personnel such as media officers, reporters, trainers, facilitators, and administrative staff, often on a part-time basis. Personnel costs in each project are based on a careful estimation of the expected workload and reflect a context-appropriate and fair salary level in each country.

### **6.3. Administration**

Vikes Executive Director is responsible for the programme administration and works closely with the programme team. Vikes' bookkeeping is outsourced to an accounting service with a designated accountant responsible for bank transfers to the partners. Long-term cooperation with an accounting company ensures effective and accurate financial management.

Vikes administrative and financial regulations describe processes and responsibilities in detail.

### **6.4. Multistakeholder partners and networks**

The stakeholder analysis shows the extensive networks through which Vikes works for advancing freedom of expression in Finland and globally. The most important network is formed by the 27 founding media associations who provide Vikes with annual financial support but also special thematic expertise and regional outreach throughout the country. The Union of Journalists in Finland is the biggest of these organisations, and its communication channels, events, and dedicated staff offer Vikes valuable support.

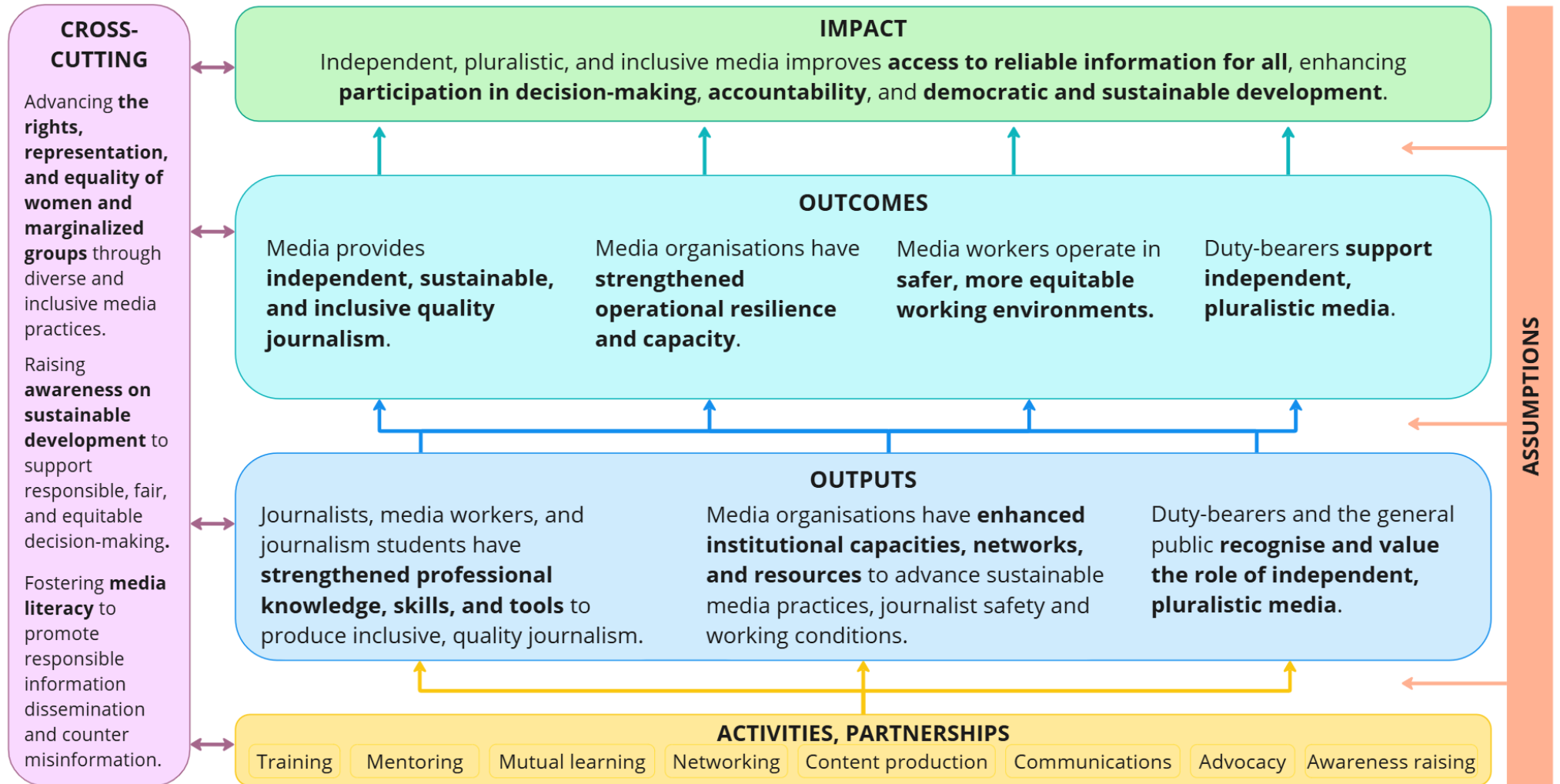
Vikes is well networked with other Finnish development CSOs. Vikes has established partnerships, for example, with Finn Church Aid, Finnish Red Cross, Abilis, KIOS, and Siemenpuu Foundation. Vikes also collaborates with other organisations devoted to democracy support and freedom of expression, such as Demo Finland, Reporters Without Borders Finland, Barents Press Finland, PEN Finland, and International Press Institute.

Vikes is also an active member of Finnish Development NGOs Fingo. In global citizenship education, Vikes has worked with several universities and media studies programmes at universities of applied sciences. The most recent partners are Tampere University and Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki. As a media development organisation, Vikes has exceptionally good connections with Finnish journalists and media outlets. Vikes has established partnerships, for example, with the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation in granting a joint Award for Development Journalism.

At the international level, important partners include International Media Support (IMS) and Free Press Unlimited (FPU) with whom Vikes has collaborated on a joint EU-funded media support project in Somalia. Other close partners and networks include the Global Forum for Media and Development (GFMD) and IFEX, the Global Network Defending and Promoting Free Expression, which bring together media support organisations across the world. Vikes seeks to create more synergies and joint actions with other international actors to support media organisations and promote freedom of expression in partner countries, including Finland. Opportunities for journalist and student exchange between East Africa and the Nordic countries are being sought through Nordic cooperation. The most recent initiative is related to Ukraine where journalists need training and support to work in the middle of war and disinformation, but also to use the new media channels.

Vikes has close connections also with the public and private sectors. Information sharing and media cooperation is carried out with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and Finnish embassies in partner countries and regions. In addition to these bodies, the Finnish National Commission for UNESCO is a regular partner with Vikes in the promotion of press freedom and arrangements of the World Press Freedom Day events in May each year. In recent years, Vikes has also been actively seeking for cooperation with private companies, partly via Fingo's business cooperation network. Even more effort will be invested in creating partnerships with private sector since joint projects with private businesses require longer-term engagement to be realised.

## Annex 1. Vikes Theory of Change



## ASSUMPTIONS

### FROM OUTCOMES TO IMPACT

#### Internal:

- Media organisations sustain their strengthened resilience and capacity over time, ensuring consistent delivery of independent, pluralistic, and inclusive journalism.
- Journalists and media organisations continue leveraging networks and partnerships to amplify their impact.

#### External:

- Political and societal conditions, including respect for democratic principles and freedom of expression, support an enabling environment for media and civil society.
- In countries where political instability and resistance to freedom of expression persist, advocacy efforts help create pockets of openness or push incremental reforms.
- Audiences and duty-bearers gradually increase their engagement with inclusive and sustainable media content, leading to meaningful policy or behavioural changes.

### FROM OUTPUTS TO OUTCOMES

#### Internal:

- Journalists, media workers, and organisations are able to apply improved skills and tools despite external constraints.
- Media organisations implement institutional changes that enhance resilience, inclusivity, and independence.
- Partners remain committed to shared goals, mutual learning, and collaboration.

#### External:

- Sociopolitical environments allow media organisations to function with some degree of independence, despite challenges such as censorship or political interference.
- Duty-bearers are open to dialogue and advocacy efforts, leading to incremental changes in policies and practices that support freedom of expression and pluralistic media.
- Audiences value and engage with inclusive, accurate, and diverse media content, enabling its broader societal impact.
- Broader cultural and societal norms evolve incrementally toward greater acceptance of gender equality, inclusion, and pluralism.

### FROM ACTIVITIES TO OUTPUTS

#### Internal:

- Vikes and its partners have sufficient capacity, resources, and expertise to implement planned activities effectively, even in restricted environments.
- Partners and staff are committed to integrating gender equality, inclusion, and sustainability into activities and outputs.
- Media professionals, students, and partners are motivated to participate in capacity-building activities and apply what they learn.
- Women and marginalized groups are supported to participate in training and mentoring activities through appropriate accommodations.

#### External:

- The operating environment allows planned activities to proceed without major disruptions.
- Sociocultural norms enable participation by women and marginalized groups without significant barriers.
- Audiences are open to engaging with advocacy and awareness-raising efforts on gender equality, sustainable development, and media literacy.