



VÄESTÖLIITTO'S  
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION  
PROGRAMME FOR  
ADVANCING SEXUAL AND  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
AND RIGHTS  
2022–2025

**World where sexual rights are  
realized**



**Mid-term review 2024**

# 1. Introduction

Väestöliitto's implements a development cooperation programme during 2022-2025. The programme advances sexual and reproductive health and rights (**SRHR**) with the goal that everyone would be empowered and free to make their own informed and responsible choices over their bodies, sexuality, and relationships without discrimination. The programme focuses especially on those groups that are particularly vulnerable and easily marginalized when advancing SRHR. Therefore, the programme targets especially women and girls, persons with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ persons.

The programme is implemented in seven programme countries (Afghanistan, Malawi, Nepal, South Africa, Tajikistan, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) by civil society partners, supported by Finnish CSO partners. The programme contains three thematic projects: "Preventing SGBV in rural Malawi", "Advancing sexual rights of persons with disabilities", and "Advancing sexual rights of LGBTIQ+ persons", as well as global communications and advocacy conducted in Finland.

Main elements of the thematic projects are capacity building of rights-holders and stakeholders, raising awareness in societies on SRHR of vulnerable groups, conducting advocacy, and the capacity building and mutual learning among all programme partners.

In the halfway of implementation of the first programme period, a Mid-Term Review (MTR) was conducted with the purpose of assessing the relevance, efficiency, sustainability, and coherence of the interventions and chosen strategies thus far. The MTR was implemented internally using a facilitated self-assessment method in each thematic project.

All partners were guided to assess the methods chosen under each outcome, and to justify their relevance. Partners were also guided to consider the geographical coverage and whether all necessary target groups were reached. For efficiency, they were guided to consider the cost-effectiveness of each chosen method from the perspective of time, personnel and financial resources, and which methods yield best results for each outcome. Under sustainability, partners assessed to what extent it can be expected that the activities and outcomes will be sustained, and for coherence the partners assessed how well the project fits into the working environment especially from the viewpoint of national policies and the work of others working in the same field.

The self-assessments were commenced during the partnership meetings of each thematic project with the support of the Advisors of Väestöliitto who introduced the process, prompted with relevant questions and guided the discussion of the partners. The self-assessment discussions took place among the core personnel responsible for project implementation within the partner organizations. Each partner finalized the self-assessments after the partnership meetings independently and the last updated assessment was completed in December 2024 after which the analysis of the results was possible to be commenced.

The following chapters on relevance, efficiency, sustainability, and coherence provide a synthesis of the responses of all partners structured by the expected outcomes of the results framework. The final chapter draws the overall conclusions of the self-assessments, and identifies the key recommendations that can be drawn from the conclusions.

## **2. Relevance**

### **2.1 Capacity building of rights-holders**

The assessments provide a comprehensive outline of needs, methods, and outcomes for addressing SRHR challenges across diverse groups. While the initiatives are well-structured and community-centered, addressing resource limitations, accessibility gaps, and expanding coverage will be key to maximizing impact.

Persons with disabilities show significant interest in accessing e.g. female condoms, dildos, sexual education, and contraceptive pills. Peer support programmes have been effective, with peers from the same communities acting as role models and ensuring meaningful participation across ethnicity, age, and sex. Comprehensive sexuality education sessions provide essential SRH information and are facilitated by trusted peer educators, while outreach camps offer free, comprehensive services to large numbers. Awareness activities reduce stigma, motivate individuals to open up, and create demand for SRH services.

New initiatives include an "Academy" to train previous participants as trainers and outreach programmes for youth with disabilities in schools for hearing-impaired children. However, challenges remain in providing accessible materials like Braille and sign language and reaching those with hearing and intellectual impairments. Efforts to expand coverage to remote rural areas are critical.

For LGBTQIA+ individuals, innovative methods such as soccer tournaments create safe spaces, promote mental well-being, and integrate SRHR discussions. Training of peer educators and support group meetings enhance engagement, facilitate knowledge-sharing, and improve access to healthcare services. Community-led monitoring is a new feature requiring simplified tools for greater inclusivity.

Girls and women benefit from Village Savings and Loans (VSL) groups, which empower them economically, foster sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) awareness, and enable knowledge transfer within communities. Peer support in schools provides safe environments for discussing SGBV prevention.

Key challenges include limited resources, accessibility gaps, and the need for simplified tools and expanded geographic coverage. Despite these challenges, the strategies remain effective in addressing SRHR needs through inclusive, community-centered approaches.

### **2.2. Awareness raising in societies**

Persons experiencing vulnerability face significant challenges. These groups experience stigma, discrimination, and limited access to sexual and reproductive health services due to societal ignorance, harmful practices, and systemic barriers. Addressing these issues requires robust awareness-raising efforts aimed at fostering empathy, combating misconceptions, and promoting inclusivity. Documenting lived experiences and sharing them through advocacy and media can further serve as evidence for systemic change.

The methods include a range of strategies. Media and communication initiatives, such as orientation programmes for journalists and media personnel, radio programmes, social media campaigns, and the development of informational materials, are effective in reaching large audiences and promoting positive narratives. These approaches have demonstrated success in generating awareness and engagement, such as radio spots covering 100,000 people and social media campaigns fostering interaction with diverse stakeholders. Similarly, targeted awareness meetings and call center services provide personalized engagement and facilitate access to services, particularly for persons with disabilities.

However, the analysis also reveals several limitations. Digital and mass campaigns, while impactful in scale, often fail to reach communities with limited access to technology or connectivity. Furthermore, measuring the behavioral changes resulting from these campaigns can be challenging. Targeted interventions, although more focused, may have limited outreach. Additionally, the content creation process must consider the diverse needs of the target groups to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness.

There is an opportunity to enhance these efforts through collaboration with organizations working in similar fields, which could amplify outreach and resource-sharing. Developing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is crucial to measure impact and guide future initiatives. Efforts to create inclusive and accessible content, such as videos in sign language and plain-language materials, will further ensure that all audiences are adequately served. Training and capacity building for journalists, healthcare providers, and community leaders can also help dismantle stigma and foster an inclusive narrative.

In conclusion, the strategies of the partners provide a strong foundation for raising awareness and addressing stigma and misconceptions. By integrating targeted interventions with broad-reaching methods, fostering partnerships, and focusing on inclusivity and evaluation, these efforts can create significant, sustainable impacts in promoting SRHR and SRH services for persons experiencing vulnerability.

### **2.3. Capacity building in civil society**

The analysis highlights the needs and methods employed to address the intersections of sexual and reproductive health and rights for persons with disabilities and other persons experiencing vulnerability. It underscores gaps in knowledge, accessibility, and capacity building, and details a variety of tested interventions and strategies aimed at fostering inclusivity, advocacy, and effective service delivery.

The needs for capacity building revolve around overcoming the limited linkage between SRHR and the work of civil society, including organizations of persons with disabilities, teachers, and service providers. Despite efforts, stakeholders demonstrate varied perceptions and attitudes toward SRHR services. Capacity gaps exist among service providers, community health workers, and civil society organizations, requiring training and awareness-building on gender, disability, SRHR, and human rights-based approaches. Furthermore, male involvement in tackling social norms perpetuating gender-based violence and engaging right holders in planning and advocacy remain areas of critical need.

To address these needs, a range of methods has been implemented, focusing on training, capacity building, and community engagement. Trainings for OPD members, government service providers, teachers, and students have led to notable improvements in attitudes and service delivery. For example, OPDs have incorporated SRHR topics into their activities and facilitated access to FPAN clinics for their members in Nepal. Government health providers have begun offering more disability-friendly services after targeted training sessions. Similarly, school-based sessions on SRHR and comprehensive sexuality education have empowered teachers and students to openly discuss SRHR issues, encouraging schools to adopt inclusive CSE programmes independently.

Capacity building efforts extend to health service providers, with significant improvements noted in their ability to offer SRHR services tailored to persons with disabilities. However, expansion of such trainings to wider recipients is necessary to address persisting gaps in quality of care and accessibility. Orientation programmes for parents and spouses of persons with disabilities have tackled family-based discrimination, fostering understanding of the sexual health needs of persons with disabilities and enhancing their access to services.

Innovative approaches, such as the Barbershop Toolkit, promote male involvement by challenging harmful gender norms and engaging men as champions against GBV. Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) empowers civil society to assess service provision, demand accountability, and influence policy formulation, while outreach clinics increase accessibility of SRHR services for vulnerable populations.

Partnerships and networking also play a pivotal role. Collaborations between programme partners and OPDs have led to the establishment of disability-focused clinics and projects modeled on successful interventions. Regular meetings with local OPDs ensure alignment and continuous improvement of activities. Orientation sessions for CSOs and community elders have gradually shifted perceptions regarding FP and SRHR needs of persons with disabilities.

Despite these advancements, areas requiring further attention include developing accessibility manuals for reproductive health centers, enhancing the capacity of community health workers and women with disabilities across all components of the national health service package, and incorporating advanced technologies in planning and implementation. Strengthening alliances among CSOs and addressing knowledge gaps within advocacy movements are equally vital for sustaining progress.

Overall, these efforts demonstrate that while significant strides have been made in promoting SRHR for persons experiencing vulnerability, continuous refinement of methods, expanded training, and enhanced collaboration among stakeholders are essential to achieving sustainable, inclusive, and impactful outcomes.

#### **2.4. Advocacy of all partners**

Programme partners employ various methods and strategies aimed at addressing the needs of persons experiencing vulnerability, focusing on advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and capacity building. For instance, in Nepal the primary need identified is the requirement for continued advocacy to align laws, policies, and guidelines with the desired outcomes for persons with disabilities, which remains an ongoing challenge. Methods like one-day orientation programmes, celebrations of International Disability Day, and participation in disability-related events aim to raise awareness, build partnerships, and increase the visibility of disability issues. These activities help local governments realize the importance of disability-friendly services, encourage regular budget allocations, and ensure the implementation of approved guidelines.

In Afghanistan's context, IEC materials, including braille resources and fact sheets, help disseminate critical information about disabilities. The collaboration with various organizations, such as UNESCO, UNFPA, and the Afghan health clusters, seeks to address gaps in comprehensive sexuality education and healthcare for persons with disabilities. However, there are identified gaps in research and advocacy materials, as well as insufficient cooperation with key international bodies. More face-to-face meetings with the Ministry of Health are required for effective engagement and progress.

For marginalized groups like women, girls, and transgender people, the need to increase capacity for engaging duty bearers is highlighted. Participation in thematic working group meetings, alliances with like-minded organizations, and capacity-building efforts for duty bearers are essential methods to raise awareness and influence decision-makers. These methods allow for presenting advocacy issues and creating a collaborative approach to addressing the needs of marginalized communities. Joint field visits to appreciate the priorities of rights holders also help in identifying advocacy areas and shaping policy priorities.

The methods identified are primarily designed to improve the flow of information, create partnerships, and influence decision-makers at both local and national levels. The pros of these methods include building trust, increasing visibility, and promoting a collaborative approach to problem-solving.

However, challenges remain, such as the need for more research, the complexity of building effective partnerships, and the difficulty of engaging uninterested stakeholders. Additionally, the overload of information in some advocacy materials and the sometimes performative nature of public consultations may limit the impact of these efforts.

In summary, while these methods offer opportunities for advocacy, awareness-raising, and policy influence, there is a need to address existing gaps in research, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement to achieve more substantial and sustainable outcomes.

## **2.5. Learning and capacity building of programme partners**

Key methods for cross-learning and building capacity of programme partners include yearly partnership meetings, supportive monitoring and evaluation, and joint learning visits, which facilitate sharing best practices, feedback, and emerging issues. These meetings and visits allow partners to enhance their understanding of each other's work and improve the overall capacity for SRHR of persons experiencing vulnerability.

While capacity has improved in areas such as project and financial management, there is still room for growth, particularly in managing SRHR for persons with disabilities. The methods of capacity building, including training, orientations, and face-to-face sessions, are deemed relevant and effective. Additionally, understanding methodologies like RMB (Results-based Management) and outcome harvesting is important for refining strategies.

One of the challenges noted is addressing issues affecting diverse vulnerable groups, particularly those within the LGBTIQ community. It's suggested that a more inclusive approach to these issues would increase stakeholder involvement. The need for capacity building in areas such as SGBV and synergies among partners is highlighted as an ongoing concern.

In terms of internal advocacy, the importance of cooperation within organizations, including disability inclusion training and raising LGBTIQ+ awareness was brought up. These efforts aim to enhance internal understanding and contribute to external advocacy for marginalized groups.

## **2.6. Global communications in Finland**

Social media campaigns are highlighted for their affordability and potential reach, though competition among organizations and algorithm limitations can hinder their visibility. While digital campaigns allow for targeted messaging, there is growing pressure to invest in paid visibility, and challenges exist in effectively profiling the organization on certain channels. Additionally, organic reach is weak, and there is no data to measure how effectively messages are reaching audiences.

Events and occasions play a critical role in networking, visibility, and proactively raising important issues. However, their effectiveness is not consistently measured, and attracting new participants remains a challenge. These events do, however, often lead to positive feedback and high-profile speakers, lending credibility to the organization's efforts.

Media visibility is considered an important tool for reaching broader audiences, especially those who do not follow specific themes, and provides free exposure. Media presence enhances credibility and can aid in fundraising. However, the organization faces challenges in gaining media access and dealing with negative reactions or hate speech resulting from media visibility.

Material production is another communication method, with physical items sometimes serving as effective conversation starters. Publications are also seen as a way to structure information and increase the organization's credibility. However, there are concerns about the environmental impact of physical publications and the declining demand for them. Additionally, the production of such materials is labor-intensive and results in static content.

Content production through blogs, websites, and social media is an essential part of the organization's communication strategy. It is critical for both internal capacity building and visibility, especially in international contexts. However, challenges such as strict social media community guidelines, the need for paid visibility, and the mental strain of moderating hate speech complicate the use of digital platforms. There is also increasing competition for visibility, both internally within the organization and externally with other groups.

Finally, digital fundraising is recognized as an effective way to increase awareness and engage a broad audience with limited budgetary resources. However, the organization faces stiff competition from other organizations in this space and has seen limited returns thus far. Additionally, there is a concern about conflicting messages between advocacy and fundraising communications.

Overall, while these strategies show promise in terms of visibility and engagement, they face significant challenges related to competition, accessibility, resource limitations, and the evolving digital landscape.

## **2.7. Conclusion on relevance**

The importance of inclusive, community-centered strategies in addressing SRHR of persons experiencing vulnerability remains critical. The key themes of capacity building, awareness raising, advocacy, and cross-sector collaboration are essential in ensuring that SRHR services are accessible, equitable, and effective. While significant strides have been made through initiatives like peer support programmes, comprehensive sexuality education, outreach camps, and media campaigns, challenges remain particularly regarding resource limitations, accessibility gaps, and the need for expanded geographic coverage.

Capacity building efforts have been effective in enhancing knowledge and service delivery among civil society organizations, service providers, and community health workers, though further expansion of training programmes is necessary to ensure sustainability and address ongoing service gaps. Collaborative partnerships, particularly between organizations of persons with disabilities and other key stakeholders, have been critical in driving innovative solutions, but more work is required to ensure that advocacy materials and outreach strategies are fully inclusive and reach all affected communities.

The integration of advocacy efforts has been a key tool in influencing policy and aligning local and national services with the needs of marginalized populations. However, there is a continued need for improved research, more robust stakeholder engagement, and greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluation to gauge the impact of these initiatives. Notably, the creation of safe spaces, training of peer educators, and community-led monitoring have proven effective, but more tailored interventions and outreach to remote areas are essential to reach those most in need.

Ultimately, these efforts must evolve to address emerging needs, ensure continued engagement of marginalized communities, and expand the coverage and accessibility of SRHR services. By enhancing inclusivity, fostering cross-sector collaborations, and refining strategies based on continuous feedback and evaluation, these initiatives will contribute to achieving sustainable, meaningful outcomes for marginalized groups.

## **3. Efficiency**

### **3.1. Capacity building of rights-holders**

The programme demonstrates strengths in cost-effectiveness, quality of management, and resource utilization, creating significant impacts for rights-holders while maintaining a sustainable approach. By utilizing volunteer-led initiatives, the programme minimizes expenses while reaching a wide audience. Peer educators, for example, manage to cover over 700 persons with disabilities annually

at minimal cost, while local facilitators reduce logistical expenses by working within their own communities. Activities such as the Summer School and peer support groups are designed to provide comprehensive benefits, addressing SRHR, independent living, and decision-making, all while fostering empowerment and long-term economic planning among participants. Cost-sharing strategies, such as training peer educators in collaboration with other projects, further reduce expenses and enhance resource efficiency. Although some activities, like soccer tournaments, have higher initial costs due to their geographic scope, the long-term benefits, such as increased SRHR service uptake and improved community engagement, justify the expenditure.

Management quality within the programme is another notable strength, characterized by grassroots-level coordination and community ownership. Peer educators and local facilitators play a vital role in organizing and implementing activities effectively, while regular meetings ensure consistent engagement. Support teams in implementation areas provide oversight and enhance the programme's responsiveness to local needs. However, logistical challenges, such as long travel distances for facilitators and the lack of reliable public transportation, present barriers to reaching remote communities. Monitoring and evaluation processes also require enhancement, particularly through capacity-building efforts in Results-Based Monitoring and Outcome Harvesting, to ensure more effective tracking of programme outcomes.

The programme utilizes effectively its human and time resources, with flexible schedules enabling facilitators to balance their commitments. Community-based facilitators maintain close engagement with beneficiaries, which fosters trust and strengthens the programme's impact. However, limited resources hinder the development of essential training materials in accessible formats, such as Braille, sign language, or easy-to-read formats, which limits inclusivity.

Despite these challenges, the programme achieves substantial outcomes. It empowers participants by fostering skills in independent living, financial planning, and SRHR decision-making. Activities like support groups enhance community cohesion, encouraging participants to form friendships and support each other. The programme's sustainability is further supported by training of trainers, which ensures continuous capacity building and knowledge transfer. Advocacy efforts also promote active citizenship and amplify the voices of marginalized groups, including LGBTIQ+ individuals.

To build on these strengths, the programme could focus more on enhancing accessibility by allocating resources for transportation and developing training materials in accessible formats, although transport allocation has its sustainability challenges. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation processes, particularly by training peer educators in community-led methods, would improve data collection and impact tracking. Addressing logistical inefficiencies through better planning and partnerships with local transportation services would further expand the programme's reach. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives for staff and the development of digital resources, such as animated documentaries, could enhance the programme's impact and sustainability.

Overall, the programme effectively combines cost-efficiency with quality management to deliver meaningful and lasting benefits to its beneficiaries. By addressing existing logistical and resource challenges, it has the potential to further maximize its impact and foster long-term sustainability.

### **3.2 Awareness raising in societies**

Cost-effectiveness is achieved through several strategies. For instance, collaborating with national media personnel can result in free coverage, provided the importance of the subject is emphasized. Similarly, social media is identified as a low-cost platform for promoting SRHR materials, and awareness campaigns leverage existing community events, such as weddings or funerals, to disseminate information without requiring significant additional resources. The cascading model, which builds on existing community structures, is another efficient method to reach large audiences with minimal costs. Digital advocacy is highlighted as an affordable and impactful approach,

particularly by using social media platforms, where content can have a lasting digital footprint that sustains institutional memory and fosters ongoing engagement.

However, there are cost-related challenges, such as the high expense of producing quality videos and IEC materials. While IEC material development is conducted cost-effectively, it involves extensive revisions to ensure the message is appropriate for the target audience, which makes the process time-consuming and resource intensive. Comparatively, digital advocacy is noted as a cheaper alternative but may lack the depth of information provided by IEC materials. Broadcast services and public awareness campaigns also incur additional costs for production, airing, and materials like placards and leaflets, although they reach a wider audience.

In terms of management quality, the project demonstrates several strengths. Timely implementation is ensured by a sufficiently staffed team that supports one another, contributing to efficient project delivery. Training journalists is identified as a cost-effective investment, as it equips media personnel with knowledge that can be repeatedly applied in mass media, amplifying the impact of a single training session. Awareness campaigns and digital advocacy spaces also create hubs of knowledge and provide platforms for rights holders to share their evolving stories, which can influence public perception and contribute to solidarity and advocacy efforts.

Despite these strengths, there are notable limitations in management. Media personnel often have limited understanding of disability-related issues, requiring them to submit draft copies of their news for finalization, which adds to the workload and slows down the process. Maintaining the quality of videos post-production and tracking data on viewership and listenership remain ongoing challenges. Human resource capacity in media and communications is also identified as insufficient, which limits the project's ability to scale its outreach effectively.

Overall, the project employs a range of innovative, cost-effective strategies and demonstrates strong management practices that ensure timely implementation and meaningful engagement. However, addressing resource constraints, improving the quality of media outputs, and enhancing data tracking mechanisms would further strengthen the project's impact and sustainability.

### **3.3. Capacity building in civil society**

Capacity-building programmes emerge as a key strength, being conducted at low cost while having a broad reach. These interventions train civil society groups, including organizations of persons with disabilities, teachers, service providers, and community stakeholders. A notable cost-saving measure includes training service providers in sign language, which reduces the need for interpreters in clinical settings. Similarly, outreach clinics target the most in-need groups, offering an efficient way to provide services while simultaneously engaging male volunteers and community structures to expand outreach efforts.

The programme's cost-efficiency is further bolstered by using existing service delivery points in the more remote project implementation areas, ensuring that capacity-building activities incur minimal expenses. Organizations such as the Afghan partner benefit from a qualified team and sufficient staff at service delivery points, enabling them to reach a wide audience, including health providers, community health workers, and women with disabilities, with limited additional costs. Additionally, trained community volunteers are instrumental in sustaining processes like SAM (Social Accountability Mechanism) without requiring continuous financial support, enhancing the programme's sustainability.

In terms of management quality, the programmes prioritize effective service delivery through well-structured capacity-building initiatives. Training OPDs allows for a multiplier effect, as representatives disseminate knowledge within their communities, improving SRHR and family planning outcomes for persons with disabilities. Qualified teams and adequate staffing contribute to

the delivery of quality care services, and structured time management aligns project activities with the overall plan. Notably, taskforces, such as the one comprised of LGBTIQ+ persons, play a critical role in advocacy and legal reform. By conducting research into laws and policies that impact SRHR, these taskforces aim to identify barriers and develop advocacy briefs to influence lawmakers, forming new alliances to advance inclusive legal protections for marginalized groups.

The use of volunteers is a critical component of human and time resource management, as these individuals are readily available within communities and do not require additional pay. This approach is particularly effective in outreach clinics, which are scheduled alongside other activities to maximize efficiency. Additionally, capacity-building for community structures enhances the delivery of services, particularly in promoting the rights of adolescent girls and young women and addressing sexual and gender-based violence.

While the programmes demonstrate strong cost-effectiveness and quality management, there is room for further optimization. Enhancing partnerships with relevant institutions and organizations can further strengthen advocacy efforts, and expanding the reach of capacity-building initiatives may help address gaps in service delivery. Overall, the programmes effectively combine cost-efficiency with robust management practices to deliver impactful, sustainable results for diverse beneficiary groups.

### **3.4. Advocacy of all partners**

Participation in programmes with like-minded organizations is cost-effective, as it advances solidarity and allows for joint advocacy efforts while optimizing resources. Developing materials and resources that can be shared widely is another cost-effective approach, as it ensures a broader reach at a relatively low cost. Leveraging existing planned meetings and collaborative opportunities, such as engaging with technical working groups and civil society organization networks, enhances cost-efficiency by minimizing additional resource needs even further.

However, some challenges undermine cost-effectiveness and management quality. For example, producing inclusive materials can create unexpected expenses, and limited human resources, such as an over-reliance on executive directors for advocacy, hampers efficiency. The bureaucracy involved in organizing roundtables and meetings also consumes significant time and effort. Staff turnover sometimes causes delays in communication, which further impacts operational efficiency.

Information production, including fact sheets and speeches, is identified as cost-effective and resource-efficient, as it enables the teams to condense key messages for stakeholders while enhancing internal capacity. Meetings and regular consultations with policymakers, although impactful, are resource-intensive, requiring significant preparation and follow-up. The process benefits from multiple team members' participation, yet the need for consistent and regular engagement adds to the workload.

Written and oral statements, while essential for advocacy, are subject to externally dictated schedules and require careful planning, which demands time and effort. Public consultations for CSOs, though low-impact in terms of results, are valuable for visibility and networking.

Overall, the activities are generally cost-effective when leveraging collaborations and existing structures. However, the lack of sufficient human and time resources, along with the challenges posed by bureaucracy and communication inefficiencies, limits the potential for maximizing impact. Additional training in advocacy, resource mobilization, and time management would help address these gaps and enhance both cost-effectiveness and the quality of management.

### **3.5. Learning and capacity building of programme partners**

Some activities, such as capacity-building sessions and engagement with sexual rights and LGBTIQ+ networks, stand out as highly cost-effective. They leverage existing resources, expertise, and partnerships to achieve impactful outcomes without significant financial or time investments. Capacity-building sessions benefit from the low-cost expertise of partners, while the networks require minimal resources and facilitate goal-oriented collaboration. Internal advocacy also operates with minimal financial input but requires persistence to deliver visible results.

Joint field visits and partnership meetings, though costly due to travel expenses, are deemed essential. These activities maximize learning, expose partners to new cultural and contextual perspectives, and foster critical personal connections. While expensive, the long-term benefits of relationship-building, capacity enhancement, and stakeholder engagement justify the investment.

Effective management practices underpin many of these activities, but challenges like staff turnover and limited human resources occasionally hinder planning and execution. For instance, organizing partnership meetings is time-intensive, and gaps in human resource capacity in project areas necessitate additional training and support. Nevertheless, online platforms improve communication and facilitate coordination, while the structured implementation of activities ensures adherence to timelines.

Capacity-building efforts benefit from well-qualified teams and accessible service delivery points, enabling outreach to diverse participants with minimal costs. Partnership meetings, although resource-intensive, deliver multiple outcomes, including enhanced stakeholder networks and skills in results-based management. Additionally, team motivation and sufficient time allocation contribute to the timely execution of project plans.

While certain activities require significant time and financial resources, their long-term impact on capacity-building, stakeholder engagement, and advocacy justifies the investment. Cost-effective approaches, such as leveraging existing networks and low-cost training, complement these efforts by optimizing available resources. Challenges related to resource limitations and planning can be addressed by investing in systematic capacity-building and improving internal management processes. Ultimately, the balance between cost and quality ensures that these activities contribute meaningfully to project goals.

## **4. Sustainability**

### **4.1. Capacity building of rights-holders**

The sustainability of the programme's benefits varies across different activities and approaches. Capacity building for rights-holders has long-term potential as individuals retain knowledge and skills that can be shared within their communities. Some peer educators transition to other projects or are hired by partner organizations, ensuring continued engagement. Similarly, project-trained leaders have become advisers on disability issues in local governments, indicating sustained impact at a policy level. Additionally, trained trainers are expected to continue educating others on SRHR, which extends the project's reach beyond its official duration.

However, certain activities, such as peer support groups and training programmes, are heavily reliant on external funding. Without continued financial support, these initiatives risk discontinuation, limiting their long-term effectiveness. Camps, CSE, and awareness-raising activities face similar challenges due to restricted funding making them less sustainable unless alternative funding sources are secured.

Printed materials such as manuals and guidelines offer a more lasting impact, as they can be used for training even after the project ends. The involvement in building the capacity of persons with disabilities and community health workers ensures that trained individuals will continue to provide SRHR services and guidance beyond the time span of the funding period. The knowledge gained by persons experiencing vulnerability empowers them to make informed decisions, reinforcing sustainability at the individual level.

Implementation strategies emphasize community participation and ownership, which strengthen sustainability by fostering local engagement. Approaches to involving beneficiaries throughout the programme ensures that rights-holders take ownership of the process, contributing to a paradigm shift and changing narratives around SRHR. The engagement of young people eager to share knowledge further reinforces the long-term impact.

Security and safety measures require continuous updates, which poses a challenge to sustainability unless mechanisms for ongoing training and support are established. However, the involvement of facilitators who remain available for consultation ensures ongoing guidance for rights-holders.

Work on economic justice for LBQT+ persons highlights the interconnectedness of SRHR and poverty reduction, adopting a holistic approach that enhances sustainability. Linking project structures with existing government and development partners further ensures continuity, as local actors continue supporting community initiatives. The transfer of knowledge and skills to local structures strengthens long-term sustainability by embedding expertise within the community.

Overall, sustainability is strongest where knowledge, skills, and structures are integrated into local communities and institutions, while activities reliant on external funding face greater risks of discontinuation.

#### **4.2. Awareness raising**

The sustainability of awareness-raising methods varies depending on the medium, target audience, and available resources. Media engagement, while useful in spreading awareness, faces sustainability challenges. Although media personnel are invited to core activities, their coverage is often limited, and once the project ends, project-specific content may no longer be prioritized. The publication of high-quality articles remains infrequent, and future media coverage may shift focus to broader issues rather than SRHR. Additionally, videos developed for awareness campaigns may struggle to effectively capture their intended message due to the sensitivity of the target group.

However, some aspects of awareness-raising have long-lasting benefits. Information shared through newspapers and online platforms remains accessible, contributing to sustained knowledge dissemination. Structural changes, such as clinics adopting assistive devices, indicate that some messages lead to tangible improvements in service provision. The training of journalists fosters continued awareness, as they can integrate SRHR issues into future reporting. Similarly, awareness sessions contribute to long-term changes in perceptions among persons with disabilities, enabling them to share their knowledge and advocate for their rights within their families and communities.

The development of IEC materials ensures sustainability through documented resources that audiences can continually engage with. While some messaging is tied to specific advocacy periods, such as the 16 Days of Activism, the themes remain relevant throughout the year, maintaining their impact beyond designated campaigns. Storytelling, particularly through narratives of rights-holders, offers an ongoing engagement strategy, as people can continuously interact with these stories and relate them to their own experiences.

Digital advocacy is highly sustainable due to its cost-effectiveness and the permanence of digital footprints. Online content serves as both documentation and an institutional memory that can be accessed indefinitely. Digital platforms also provide spaces for ongoing conversations where knowledge can be exchanged, and the evolution of rights-holders' experiences can be documented over time. Engagement with online feedback, both positive and negative, further refines messaging strategies and ensures relevance to the target audience.

Government collaboration and capacity-building efforts enhance sustainability by enabling government structures to integrate project models into their own initiatives. When trained government personnel take ownership of awareness activities, they can continue implementation beyond the project's timeline. However, mass awareness campaigns, including social media outreach, present sustainability challenges due to high resource demands and limited accessibility to digital platforms for some target groups. Without external funding, maintaining large-scale campaigns becomes difficult.

Overall, sustainability is strongest where awareness-raising efforts integrate knowledge into long-term structures, such as government agencies, community networks, and digital platforms. While media engagement and mass campaigns may be short-lived without ongoing support, documentation, digital advocacy, and trained local actors provide pathways for lasting impact.

#### **4.3. Capacity building in civil society**

The sustainability of capacity-building in civil society depends on factors such as institutional integration, knowledge retention, and the ability to secure ongoing funding. Some capacity-building efforts have strong long-term potential, particularly those that equip individuals and institutions with transferable skills and knowledge. Training for service providers is sustainable because trained individuals can continue delivering services regardless of job turnover. Similarly, training for caretakers, parents, and teachers ensures lasting benefits, as they apply their knowledge in everyday interactions. Strengthening disability networks also enhances sustainability by fostering collective advocacy and support structures.

However, high staff turnover among civil society actors presents a significant challenge, as the expertise gained through training may be lost when individuals leave. Without continued funding, activities such as peer support groups and training of trainers may not be sustained, limiting the reach of awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts for young women with disabilities and women with disabilities. Despite this, the skills and knowledge imparted to trainers and peer educators can continue to be used in other contexts, extending the impact beyond the project period.

Institutionalization of capacity-building initiatives strengthens sustainability. For instance, the Nepalese partner's scaling up of disability friendly services across its branches ensures long-term impact, as orientations for management and governance board embed these practices into the organization's structure. Organizations of persons with disabilities that have received training can train others, creating a multiplier effect. Additionally, skills and information provided to healthcare centers remain in use, benefiting service provision over time.

The work of advocacy-focused task forces contributes to sustainability by fostering policy and legal reforms that have long-term societal implications. For instance, when a task force of LBQT persons working on SRHR related legal advocacy has been done in collaboration with other organization, it ensures that research and policy engagement continue beyond the life of individual projects. Their efforts help influence legal frameworks, making structural changes that outlast specific funding cycles.

The use of existing structures, such as community volunteers and institutional partnerships, further enhances sustainability by embedding capacity-building efforts within local systems. The transfer of skills through training programmes ensures that knowledge remains within the community, even if direct project funding ceases.

In conclusion, sustainability is strongest when capacity-building efforts are integrated into established institutions, where knowledge is transferred through networks, and where advocacy efforts lead to policy changes. The main risks to sustainability include staff turnover and dependency on external funding, which could limit the reach of future initiatives. However, investments in training, institutional partnerships, and community-based approaches help mitigate these risks by ensuring that knowledge and advocacy efforts continue beyond the lifespan of individual projects.

#### **4.4. Advocacy**

The sustainability of advocacy efforts largely depends on institutional commitment, policy integration, and long-term partnerships. Some advocacy initiatives, such as orienting local government officials, have strong sustainability potential, as officials who commit to the goals can continue implementing these practices beyond the project's timeline. Similarly, advocacy wins of including SRHR of persons experiencing vulnerability to government plans ensures lasting impact, as these elements become embedded in national frameworks. Policy changes represent one of the most enduring outcomes of advocacy. Once policies and action plans are in place, they typically remain influential for extended periods, reinforcing advocacy achievements.

Sustainability is further strengthened by an inclusive advocacy coalition and partnership approach, which allows for broader impact in a shorter time frame. When key stakeholders responsible for SRHR themes gain knowledge and integrate it into their work, they continue promoting these issues independently. Moreover, once trust-based relationships are established with decision-makers, communication and collaboration can persist beyond the programme's duration.

However, some challenges to sustainability exist. While the structure for knowledge production remains, the content of advocacy outputs may become outdated over time, requiring periodic updates to remain relevant. Additionally, advocacy meetings and direct engagement with policymakers risk discontinuation if funding is lost, potentially weakening sustained advocacy efforts.

Sustainability of advocacy efforts is strongest when policies are changed, indicators are institutionalized, and key stakeholders internalize advocacy messages. The main risks lie in the reliance on external funding for ongoing engagement and the need for periodic content updates to keep advocacy materials relevant. However, partnerships, government buy-in, and the embedding of advocacy outcomes into policies help mitigate these risks, ensuring lasting impact.

#### **4.5 Learning and capacity building of programme partners**

The sustainability of capacity building and learning among programme partners depends largely on the long-term availability of funding and institutional commitment to maintaining these initiatives. Activities such as partnership meetings and systematic capacity-building sessions are highly dependent on financial support, particularly from Väestöliitto. Once funding ends, these activities are unlikely to continue, though the knowledge and skills acquired by participants will persist and be applicable in future work.

Monitoring through core support provides some sustainability, ensuring that oversight continues even after specific project funding ends. The integration of SRHR capacity-building into broader

institutional strategies also enhances sustainability. For example, the inclusion of SRHR for persons with disabilities in the Afghan partner's projects and the incorporation of family planning and SRH indicators into project strategies ensure long-term impact, as these elements become embedded in organizational policies and practices.

One of the major risks to sustainability is staff turnover. Trained employees, particularly project leads and staff who rely on project funding, may lose their positions, leading to a potential loss of institutional knowledge. Similarly, awareness sessions and operational activities such as monitoring and communication may not continue without dedicated funding, weakening ongoing capacity-building efforts.

However, peer-to-peer learning and mentorship strategies offer a cost-effective way to sustain capacity building beyond the funding period. This method allows knowledge to be transferred continuously among staff and volunteers, ensuring long-term impact.

Some initiatives, such as the Sexual Rights Network and the LGBTIQ+ advocacy group coordinated by Väestöliitto, are not fully dependent on programme funding, allowing them to continue even if financial support from the programme ends. In-house advocacy is also described as an ongoing effort, suggesting that some internal capacity-building efforts will persist regardless of external funding availability.

Overall, while formal capacity-building activities are highly dependent on funding, sustainability is strengthened through knowledge retention, peer-learning mechanisms, and institutionalization of SRHR strategies. Risks include staff turnover and the potential discontinuation of monitoring and operational activities, but integrating learning into long-term policies and leveraging cost-effective peer education approaches can help mitigate these challenges.

In conclusion, sustainability varies across components. Capacity building of rights-holders is strong as individuals retain knowledge and share it, but funding-dependent activities like peer support groups may not last. Awareness raising has mixed sustainability: digital advocacy and printed materials endure, but media coverage and mass campaigns need ongoing resources. Civil society capacity building is sustainable when integrated into institutions, but high staff turnover and funding reliance pose risks. Advocacy is the most sustainable, with policy changes and trained officials ensuring long-term impact, though continuous engagement requires funding. Programme partner learning is lasting through knowledge retention, but training sessions and meetings end without funding. Embedding skills in local structures and securing independent funding enhance sustainability.

## **5. Coherence**

### **5.1 Capacity building of rights-holders**

The coherence of the capacity-building for rights-holders is strong, as the project aligns well with national policies, international frameworks, and existing organizational efforts. It fits within the broader landscape of SRHR and disability rights, ensuring that its interventions complement rather than duplicate existing programmes.

The programme aligns with government guidelines and policies in multiple countries. In Nepal, the government's development of specific SRHR guidelines for persons with disabilities supports the project's relevance. Similarly, in Tajikistan, the initiative is consistent with national laws and the State programme on "Accessible Environment" for 2021-2025. In Afghanistan, the project fits within the

disability department of the Ministry of Public Health's activities, while in Zambia and Malawi, it is in line with national strategies addressing SRHR, gender-based violence, and child marriage.

Collaboration with local and regional organizations enhances coherence. For instance, the Nepalese partner collaborates with various disability-focused organizations which ensures that the interventions are integrated into existing community structures. In Tajikistan, the project works with the Network of Women with Disabilities to share knowledge and expand reach. Additionally, partnerships with organizations like Ipas, Marie Stopes, and SRHR Africa Trust Zambia indicate strong alignment with key stakeholders in the SRHR field.

The project is also connected to international commitments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (UNCRPD), CEDAW, the Maputo Protocol, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These alignments demonstrate that the project is well-embedded within global human rights and development frameworks.

However, there are some areas where coherence could be improved. Collaboration with UNFPA is described as insufficient, indicating a potential gap in engagement with a key SRHR partner. Additionally, certain structural and policy setbacks, such as challenges related to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and restrictive government pronouncements, may hinder full integration of the programme's objectives. Moreover, the lack of full inclusion of LGBTIQ+ persons in SRHR discussions presents another gap that needs to be addressed for a more comprehensive approach.

Overall, the project exhibits a high level of coherence by aligning with national policies, international commitments, and established networks. Strengthening partnerships with key institutions and addressing policy-related challenges would further enhance its effectiveness and long-term impact.

## **5.2 Awareness raising**

The coherence of awareness-raising efforts is generally strong, aligning with societal trends and leveraging various media platforms to combat stigma and discrimination. The use of media houses ensures widespread dissemination, reinforcing public trust in information sources. However, journalist motivation is hindered by media house priorities, which favor high-engagement content over disability-related issues. While traditional FM/radio and print media are declining, digital platforms are increasingly relevant, aligning with global media consumption patterns.

Partner organizations tailor awareness efforts to local cultural contexts, ensuring acceptability and impact. Awareness-raising is further supported by advocacy initiatives, legal frameworks, and commemorative events, reinforcing its alignment with broader social justice efforts. Despite strong coherence, reliance on media approval and shifting media landscapes pose challenges, necessitating adaptive strategies for sustained impact.

## **5.3 Capacity building in civil society**

The coherence of capacity-building efforts within civil society is relatively strong, aligning with national policies, local government commitments, and broader international frameworks. For instance, Nepal's development of SRHR guidelines for persons with disabilities provides a formal foundation, reinforcing the relevance of project activities. Collaboration with OPDs, schools, and media ensures integration across multiple sectors, fostering a supportive environment for SRHR awareness.

However, while many organizations work on disability issues, fewer focus on disability-inclusive SRHR, highlighting a gap in comprehensive service delivery. Engagement with Handicap

International and other stakeholders suggests ongoing but underdeveloped networking efforts. The alignment with national health strategies and international commitments, such as the Maputo Plan of Action and ESA Commitments, strengthens coherence by linking local interventions with global human rights principles.

Overall, the programme partners are well-integrated within civil society structures, but improved coordination with key disability-focused organizations and expanded disability-inclusive SRHR efforts would enhance its coherence and impact.

#### **5.4. Advocacy**

The project partners engage effectively with key national actors, such as ministries, government authorities, and organizations, in its advocacy efforts. Notably, the collaboration with ministries like health and social protection, along with reproductive health centers, strengthens the coherence of the project's advocacy work within the broader policy framework.

The project is aligned with several important national and international policy frameworks which ensure that the projects' advocacy is grounded in relevant, widely accepted frameworks, enhancing its legitimacy and long-term impact. Additionally, participation in for instance CEDAW reports further reinforces the project's connection to global advocacy efforts.

While there are strong national connections, it's also highlighted as a challenge that there is a complex political landscape, including rising opposition to sexual rights and human rights. This opposition could complicate advocacy efforts but also presents an opportunity for closer cooperation between organizations. Also, challenges related to limited funding, competition among organizations, and a more rigid decision-making process within civil society were noted. Despite these challenges, the programme maintains its focus on including diverse, vulnerable groups in advocacy, which ensures that marginalized voices are represented in national dialogues on SRHR.

The challenges posed by a polarized society and the opposition to sexual rights indicate a need for strategic, coordinated advocacy efforts, particularly in engaging with stakeholders and coordinating among organizations. The mention of networks and potential subgroups suggests avenues for improved collaboration. This collaborative approach, if pursued, could mitigate some of the external challenges by fostering stronger, more unified advocacy efforts. However, this collaboration must also consider reputational risks that come with visible advocacy cooperation.

Overall, the project aligns well with policy frameworks and advocates effectively for SRHR for women with disabilities, but it must navigate a challenging political environment with careful coordination and strategic collaboration.

### **6. Overall conclusions of the self-assessment**

The programme demonstrates strong **relevance**, addressing the intersection of persons experiencing vulnerability and their SRHR by aligning with national policies, international frameworks, and the lived realities of persons experiencing vulnerability. Their inclusion reflects a needs-based and rights-based approach. However, while the programme is inclusive, gaps remain in fully integrating LGBTIQ+ persons and other marginalized groups into SRHR discussions, limiting its reach and impact.

The **efficiency** of the programme is evident in its strategic use of partnerships, leveraging the expertise of programme partner organizations. This approach strengthens capacity-building efforts

and ensures contextually appropriate interventions. However, limited financial and human resources pose constraints, affecting the scalability of activities. Logistical challenges, such as accessibility barriers and high turnover among trained personnel, also impact the programme's ability to maximize its efficiency. Strengthening coordination mechanisms and optimizing resource allocation would enhance overall effectiveness.

The programme shows **moderate sustainability**, particularly through efforts to institutionalize trainings within local structures, strengthen advocacy networks, and align with national and international commitments. In several countries, the adoption of SRHR guidelines for persons with disabilities supports long-term integration into national frameworks. However, financial sustainability remains a challenge, with heavy reliance on external donors. Without diversified funding sources and strengthened local ownership, the long-term continuation of interventions may be at risk. Strengthening engagement with national institutions and exploring alternative financing models could bolster sustainability.

The **coherence** of the programme is generally strong, as it aligns well with national strategies, international conventions, and ongoing civil society initiatives. The programme effectively integrates SRHR into rights advocacy and ensures that interventions complement, rather than duplicate, existing efforts. Collaboration with government agencies, OPDs, and civil society organizations further enhances coherence. However, gaps in engagement with key stakeholders, such as UNFPA, and challenges posed by restrictive political environments limit the programme's overall effectiveness. Addressing these gaps through stronger partnerships and adaptive advocacy strategies would further reinforce coherence and impact.

While the programme is well-designed and effective in many aspects, targeted improvements in inclusion, resource allocation, long-term funding, and stakeholder collaboration are needed to maximize impact and ensure sustainability.

## **Key recommendations**

### **Relevance**

- Strengthen the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ persons and other underrepresented groups within SRHR programming.
- Deepen engagement with government agencies and OPDs to institutionalize disability-inclusive SRHR policies.
- Increase integration of SRHR within broader health and education frameworks to enhance long-term impact.

### **Efficiency**

- Improve coordination among various partners to optimize resource allocation and reduce redundancy.
- Invest in digital tools and alternative media strategies to reach wider audiences.
- Address accessibility barriers and logistical constraints that hinder participation in training and advocacy activities.

## **Sustainability**

- Develop long-term funding strategies, including diversified donor engagement and local fundraising mechanisms.
- Strengthen local ownership by embedding training and advocacy initiatives further within national organizations.
- Enhance advocacy networks to ensure continued policy influence beyond project funding cycles.

## **Coherence**

- Improve collaboration with key stakeholders, including UNFPA and disability and SRHR-focused organizations.
- Develop adaptive strategies to navigate political and policy challenges, particularly in restrictive environments.
- Foster stronger cross-sector coordination to enhance impact and reduce duplication of efforts.