



Steps of Youth Participation Towards Sustainable Futures

Taksvärkki ry's Development Cooperation Programme 2026–2029



Table of contents

Summary.....	1
1. Introduction.....	2
2. Programme Principles	4
3. Operating Environment.....	7
3.1 Young People Around the World	7
3.2 The Operating Environment in the Programme Countries.....	8
4. Theory of Change: Steps Towards Youth Participation for a Sustainable Future	16
4.1 The Logic of the Theory of Change	17
4.2 The Programme’s Vision	20
4.3 Actor-Specific Pathways to Change.....	21
4.3.1 Young People Take an Active Role and Develop Their Communities.....	21
4.3.2 Decision-Makers Safeguard Young People’s Rights.....	24
4.3.3 Civil Society Actors Defend Young People’s Rights.....	28
5. Implementation of the Programme	31
5.1 Strengthening Young People’s Active Citizenship Skills.....	34
5.2 Strengthening Youth Groups and Supporting Independent Action.....	35
5.3 Strengthening Youth-Friendly Operating Models Among Stakeholders.....	37
5.4 Learning, Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation and New Innovations	38

Cover photo: Members of youth groups at a mental wellbeing workshop in Makanjira, Malawi in October 2024. Harison Nkhoma.

Summary

Taksvärkki ry's Development Cooperation Programme for 2026–2029, *'Steps of Youth Participation Towards Sustainable Futures'*, focuses on strengthening young people's active citizenship and participation in line with the 'youth-to-youth' principle. The programme aims to promote just, sustainable societies in which youth can live free from discrimination and grow into responsible citizens. Another objective is to strengthen the knowledge and agency of those in positions of responsibility, so that youth rights are realised and their meaningful participation in communities is enabled. At the same time, civil society's capacity to support this development is strengthened.

Taksvärkki strengthens youth rights and participation by combining best practices in development cooperation and global education. During the programme period, cooperation will continue in Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Guatemala and Nepal. Small-scale cooperation opportunities in Ukraine may also be explored during the programme period. In development cooperation, Taksvärkki engages in long-term cooperation with local civil society organisations working on rights-based youth work. The work is based on local ownership, mutual learning and strengthening the enabling environment for civil society.

Each year, around 2,700 youth in vulnerable situations are actively involved in youth groups supported by the programme. Through peer education, events and campaigns, development cooperation reaches around 26,000 children and youth a year, including young women and girls in rural areas, Youth with Disability, and youth living and working on the streets.

In Finland, the programme supports young people's development as active global citizens. Key actors include youth in upper secondary schools and secondary education institutions, educators working with youth, and young adults volunteering. Every year, around 15,000 youth and 1,000 educators in Finland take part in global citizenship education workshops, training courses, partner school cooperation and the Taksvärkki campaign.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has granted a total of €3,180,250 in programme support to Taksvärkki's Development Cooperation Programme for the years 2026–2029. The programme, drawn up in early 2025, was adjusted to the state grant awarded in February 2026.

1. Introduction

Taksvärkki is one of Finland's first youth-led development cooperation movements and has been implementing development cooperation projects since 1967. Taksvärkki has received programme support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs since 2014. Taksvärkki plays a valued role among Finnish development organisations in both development cooperation and global citizenship education in Finland. Although Taksvärkki's activities have evolved alongside society over the decades, its guiding principle has always been **'from youth to youth'**.

The core of Taksvärkki's programme work is to strengthen young people's active citizenship and participation, so that they can act as promoters of sustainable development within their communities. Through its programme work, Taksvärkki aims to strengthen human solidarity, and in line with Agenda 2030, its guiding principle is that no one is left behind. The programme work creates space and opportunities for all young people to be themselves and to make a difference. *'Steps of Youth Participation Towards Sustainable Futures'* is Taksvärkki's fourth development cooperation programme. Between 2026 and 2029, the programme will promote just and sustainable societies where youth can live free from discrimination and grow into responsible citizens. The aim is also to strengthen the knowledge and agency of those in positions of responsibility, so that youth rights are realised and their meaningful participation in communities is enabled. At the same time, civil society's capacity to support this development will be strengthened.

Taksvärkki strengthens youth rights and status by combining best practices in development cooperation and global education. Taksvärkki's values – **justice, equality, equity and hope** – are at the heart of everything we do. Taksvärkki is a close-knit and agile organisation where lessons learnt and insights are constantly shared. The programme is based on cooperation between Taksvärkki and its partners. Synergies between development cooperation and activities in Finland are sought and utilised among all organisations implementing the programme, and cooperation between different actors is inspiring.

Taksvärkki works actively with diverse youth and the responsible adults who work with them. Taksvärkki takes a stand for a sustainable and just world, particularly from the perspective of youth. Taksvärkki has the courage to highlight injustices, power structures and root causes, and to change attitudes and behaviour together with youth. Taksvärkki is a pioneer in encouraging youth to become active global citizens and to engage in inspiring activities that generate stories of positive change. Every year, tens of thousands of youths and adults take part in Taksvärkki's programme work and provide positive feedback on the effectiveness of the collaboration and the impact of the results. Taksvärkki's participatory and rights-based programme work creates a more sustainable and fairer future.

During the 2026–2029 programme period, cooperation will continue in Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Guatemala and Nepal. In development cooperation, Taksvärkki engages in long-term collaboration with local civil society organisations carrying out rights-based youth work. The work is based on local ownership, shared learning and strengthening the enabling environment for civil society.

The key actors in the programme's development cooperation projects are active youth working in youth groups, who share information and good practices related to human rights, equality and sustainable development within their communities. Youth activities organised by youth groups reach a wide range of children, youth and adults in communities. The work is carried out in particular with local stakeholders, such as decision-makers, public authorities and community leaders, as well as civil society actors, to support youth rights and participation and a diverse civil society. The key actors in the programme in

Finland are youth in upper secondary schools and secondary education institutions, educators working with youth, and young adults acting as volunteers. In its activities in Finland, Taksvärkki collaborates with education professionals, educational institutions and youth sector actors.

Programme activities are carried out with a critical approach, for example by challenging stereotypes, examining root causes and encouraging youth-led agency. The programme highlights diverse perspectives and examines the harmful norms and power structures underlying social injustices. The activities involve young leaders and civil society actors reflecting together on different futures and the change already achieved, as well as reinforcing faith in the future. The activities also explore the emotions that guide thought and action as part of strengthening young people's resilience. Taksvärkki's communications highlight youth as active agents and change-makers.

In both Finland and the programme countries, the active involvement of the youth taking part is a key element in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all activities. The activities strengthen young people's ability to adapt and influence their own future and societal changes, independently and in a way that is meaningful to them. Based on the outcomes achieved during previous programme periods, regular dialogue and cooperation with decision-makers, as well as support from civil society actors, create the conditions for youth to achieve their own goals.

Between 2022 and 2024, youth within the sphere of influence of Taksvärkki's development cooperation programme have gained a better understanding of global development issues and the Sustainable Development Goals and have gained experience of active engagement. Youth have succeeded in changing attitudes and ways of working within their communities, particularly by advocating for the rights of vulnerable youth. In 2023, around 32,000 youth developed their skills with the programme's support and influenced issues important to youth. Over 7,000 decision-makers gained knowledge and learnt new approaches, thereby increasing their understanding of the observations youth have made within their communities.

In previous programme cycles, the development of Taksvärkki's programme work has focused particularly on promoting the inclusion of Persons with Disability, participatory monitoring practices, and the harmonisation and clarification of the programme-level monitoring system. Significant progress has been made in both areas, creating an even more effective foundation for ongoing programme work.

The latest programme-level evaluation of Taksvärkki's development cooperation from 2024 noted that programme partners had successfully strengthened the capacity of youth, particularly in vulnerable situations to organise themselves and demand their rights at the local level and, in some cases, at the national level as well. The evaluation recommended that Taksvärkki continues its long-term partnerships, utilising an actor-centred and systems change focused Outcome Mapping approach, and strengthen local networks and dialogue between different actors to bring about sustainable change.

The 2026–2029 programme is a continuation of Taksvärkki's previous development cooperation programme and is based on the strengths of Taksvärkki and its partners and their long-term cooperation as promoters of youth rights, equal participation and active citizenship. The programme builds on the lessons, good practices and outcomes achieved in previous programme periods, with a particular focus on strengthening community-level structures, the independent activities of youth groups and local multi-stakeholder cooperation. The quality and impact of the work will be developed by learning from previous outcomes and new experiences.

New initiatives and development objectives for the programme period are:

- Supporting youth-led advocacy work and sharing the outcomes and good practices of such work both locally and among development cooperation partners, as well as with Finnish actors.
- Supporting the independent operation, sustainability and networking of youth groups, including strengthening local funding and self-funding practices.
- Collaboration with businesses in implementing a disability project to promote inclusive education.
- Developing the network formed by Taksvärkki and its development cooperation partners, as well as practices for collaborative learning, by drawing on each partner's specific strengths and innovative solutions to benefit others. Partner forums will address shared challenges and topical global issues relating to inclusive, rights-based youth work, such as supporting young people's mental wellbeing, fostering hope for the future and responding to climate change.
- Taksvärkki's development of global citizenship education will be needs-based, accessible and emphasises the participation of youth living in different countries, as well as through a closer global cooperation than before.

At the end of the programme period, current development cooperation projects will come to an end. During the programme period, new partnerships may be piloted and prepared either in the current programme countries and/or in Ukraine.

The second chapter of this programme document presents the basis and operating principles of Taksvärkki's programme work. The third chapter describes the programme's operating environments. The fourth chapter presents the programme's Theory of Change, first the logic of change and then the programme's vision and actor-specific pathways to change, along with their assumptions. The fifth chapter provides more detail on the programme's implementation, priorities and selected operational strategies.

2. The Programme's Basis

The fundamental premise of the programme is to promote sustainable development on a human rights basis in collaboration with youth.

The **UN Sustainable Development Goals** are global in nature and are promoted in all activities, including development cooperation, global citizenship education, communications and advocacy work. The development cooperation programme aims for sustainable change, taking into account the various dimensions of sustainability. Socially sustainable development is emphasised in the objectives of most development cooperation projects and in work in Finland, but ecological sustainability and climate action are also considered in our activities. To ensure economic and institutional sustainability, our work does not create structures that would require major investments or continuous external funding; instead, we utilise existing local practices, cultural models and community structures.

A key objective of the Taksvärkki programme is SDG 16, which promotes peace, justice and good governance; under this, the aim is, in particular, to work with stakeholders to ensure that all young people have meaningful opportunities to participate in the development of their communities.

The programme also makes a key contribution to SDG sub-goal 4.7, which aims to ensure that all learners have the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development. Furthermore, SDG 5, on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, and SDG 10, on reducing inequalities,

are central to the programme. The programme's work also broadly promotes the goals of good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), climate action (SDG 13) and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17).

Figure 1: The UN Sustainable Development Goals that Taksvärkki's programme specifically promotes.



Genuinely listening to young people's views and encouraging them to engage in advocacy work in their own way are the cornerstones of Taksvärkki's operations, through which it aims to promote the Sustainable Development Goals. Unless people of all ages across the world understand the nature of global challenges and their cause-and-effect relationships and are motivated to take active steps to address them, it will not be possible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Taksvärkki identifies, builds and strengthens these skills in collaboration with youth, decision-makers and other civil society actors, both in Finland and in its programme countries globally.

Taksvärkki and its partner organisations adopt a **human rights-based approach** in their work. The work is guided by the human rights defined in international agreements, particularly the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the rights defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding participation and association, quality education, health, safety and protection. The rights of children and youth, particularly girls, young women, Youth with Disability and those in the most vulnerable positions, such as indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups, are at the heart of the programme. The programme strengthens the knowledge, skills and interaction of both rights holders and duty bearers to promote youth rights. Rights are kept at the forefront, and their realisation is monitored in all activities in collaboration with partner organisations, youth participating in the activities, duty-bearers and civil society actors. The implementation and content of the programme are guided by the principles of participation and inclusion, non-discrimination and equality, as well as accountability and transparency.

Gender equality and non-discrimination, particularly the inclusion of Persons with Disability, are key objectives of Taksvärkki and underpin all its activities. These themes affect youth across the globe. All youth, both in the Global South and in Finland, must have the opportunity to work towards promoting equality and equity, to defend human rights, and to demand that those in positions of responsibility remove structural barriers to equality and equity. This often requires encouragement and support, for example for girls or youth belonging to minority groups. To act as active citizens, youth need the ability to understand the world and its phenomena, as well as the belief that their own actions have an impact both locally and globally.

As an organisation, Taksvärkki has developed and gained recognition both as a promoter of the rights of Persons with Disability in development cooperation and in matters of accessibility and barrier-free environments within the field of global citizenship education in Finland. According to the conclusions of the disability inclusion assessment carried out in 2024, Taksvärkki's expertise and practices in supporting the rights and participation of Persons with Disability are at a commendable level.

Climate justice and climate sustainability are taken into account in Taksvärkki's programme work as a key cross-cutting objective that defines and shapes a sustainable future for youth. Climate justice and sustainability are promoted, in particular, as part of the youth agenda by supporting the local-level

initiatives they undertake, through community-focused campaigning and information sharing, as well as through practical local-level climate actions and movements organised by youth groups in collaboration with decision-makers, civil society actors and communities.

The programme is based **on the Outcome Mapping (OM) approach**. Outcome Mapping is an actor-driven approach to the planning, monitoring and learning of development cooperation projects, originally developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). According to Outcome Mapping, development is social change that arises from changes in the attitudes, behaviour, relationships, practices and structures of individuals or groups. Taksvärkki's programme logic is based on the three fundamental principles of Outcome Mapping: 1) change in social and political systems arises from changes in people's behaviour, 2) people contribute to their own well-being provided they have the knowledge, skills and opportunity to influence, and 3) lasting improvements in people's lives and environments depend on the relationships between actors within the social system – individuals, groups and institutions.

The programme's Theory of Change is based **on systems thinking**, recognising the complexity of pathways to change and the interplay between actors. Taksvärkki's development cooperation programme aims for sustainable social change in which young people's human rights are realised. The changes contributed by the programme are viewed as complex wholes: change is non-linear and is influenced simultaneously by numerous different actors and factors. The programme supports key actors within its sphere of influence in their transition towards actor-centred objectives for change, which together contribute to broader social change towards the programme's vision.

At the heart of the programme are **the social actors** within the local operating environment and social system – that is, individuals and groups – the change arising from their own motivation, and their evolving roles and mutual interactions within the local social network. The programme supports systemic change linked to strengthening the capacity of key stakeholder groups (youth, decision-makers, civil society actors) and their mutual relationships. In development cooperation projects and global citizenship education activities in Finland, these groups have their own important roles, which are defined in the programme's outcome objectives. The programme's outcome monitoring focuses on the changes taking place among these actors. In the programme, socially sustainable development is viewed as changes in the behaviour of individuals and groups that support youth rights and active citizenship, as reflected in their **actions, relationships, practices and shared norms**.

Through the work **of partner organisations in the programme countries**, the programme supports local actors in bringing about changes that collectively promote the programme vision. An essential part of Taksvärkki's working methods is the pursuit of an equal, genuine partnership, which is evident both in Taksvärkki's work with its partners and in the partners' work with local stakeholders. The collaboration between Taksvärkki and its partner organisations emphasises mutual and shared learning, as well as the development of organisational capacity. At the heart of the systemic approach lies learning, the continuous re-evaluation of activities, and adaptive management. Taksvärkki and its partner organisations are also aware of their roles and the benefits and limitations of their activities when operating as part of social systems.

The broad involvement of stakeholders is a key value in ensuring the sustainability, quality and transparency throughout Taksvärkki's programme. The programme's Theory of Change serves as a framework for project-level planning, monitoring and evaluation. The detailed planning of each project is a participatory process involving representatives of key local stakeholder groups. Implementation,

monitoring, evaluation and learning are also carried out in collaboration with individuals representing key local stakeholders. The role of Taksvärkki's partner organisations and global citizenship education actors is to guide change through continuous learning, adapting the strategies and monitoring processes in line with what has been learned.

The programme strengthens youth agency by improving their equal opportunities to act within their own communities and by strengthening their participation in the structures of society. Ensuring that youth's diverse voices are heard and genuinely listened to, mutual organisation, initiative and civic engagement as part of their communities' development and decision-making processes are integral to the operating models of Taksvärkki and its partners. The aim is to offer youth the space and opportunities to be themselves and to influence matters affecting them and their peers in ways that suit them best. Through this cooperation, the aim is to respond locally to the special needs of diverse youth and to issues relating to the realisation of their human rights, with a particular focus on justice, inclusion of Persons with Disability and gender equality. The programme leaves room for local priorities and specific needs, focusing on key issues affecting young people that the youth themselves raise.

3. Operating Environment

3.1 Youth in the World

Youth are always at the core of Taksvärkki's work. In the programme, 'youth' generally refers to those aged 13–29, although the age range varies by country depending on local definitions and partners' priorities. There are an estimated two billion youth in this age group worldwide. In every Taksvärkki's development cooperation programme countries, over half of the population consists of children and youth.

Youth are often seen as the workers and members of society of the future, rather than as a valued group in the present. From an adult perspective, youth can also be seen as a burden or a risk, or sometimes as vulnerable individuals in need of help. Youth are not actively involved in societal decision-making, even if they have reached voting age. Furthermore, they do not have the same social and political networks as adults. Declarations and guidelines have been drawn up to support youth agency. The purpose of the UN resolution 'Youth, Peace and Security', adopted in 2015, has been to involve youth in peacebuilding. According to UN reports, one of the challenges has been the perception in some countries that youth pose a security threat, which has led to their unfair treatment by security authorities. Youth who are ignored, left without prospects for the future and with nothing meaningful to do, pose a significant risk to the stability of communities and states.

Youth must be involved in the pursuit of a sustainable future at every stage.¹ If we want genuinely participatory processes, youth should be seen as active agents and their capacity to influence should be utilised. Despite the dismissive attitudes they face or the barriers to participation, youth have been able to achieve significant results in areas such as climate action, particularly through innovative approaches.² Youth have enormous potential to bring new perspectives to development.

¹ <https://maailmankuvalehti.fi/2019/1/pitkat/nuoria-tarvitaan-ainakin-jos-tavoitteena-on-maailmanrauha/>, 25 February 2025.

² <https://plan.fi/artikkelit/planin-tutkimus-nuoret-globaalissa-etelassa-ovat-suunnannayttajia-ilmastotoimissa/>, 25 February 2025.

However, the flip side of this hopeful vision is that there are also threats which cannot be ignored, either on a global scale or locally. Threats affecting young people's lives include a lack of prospects, concern about the future of the world, insufficient livelihood opportunities, youth unemployment, a lack of inclusion in society, and the impacts of climate change. Girls and young women face inequality, sexual harassment, violence and exploitation. Child marriage, harmful cultural traditions, inadequate sexual and reproductive health rights, teenage pregnancies and the resulting school dropout rates limit the realisation of girls' rights. The extent and forms of discrimination are often compounded, particularly in the case of Persons with Disability and other marginalised groups. The risk of exclusion, insecurity and the potential mental health impacts these cause limit youth's full potential and their capacity to contribute to social development.

The challenge for young people's future is to build resilience amidst the upheavals of an ever-changing world. Youth make life choices based on their own experiences and the information available to them, as well as on their hopes and fears. Efforts are also made to consciously influence young people's worldviews and their ability to cope with uncertainty, based on various aims. It is important for those working with youth to pay attention to critical thinking amidst the flood of information, whilst also striving to maintain an optimistic view of the future, one in which youth have the opportunity to play an active role. Amidst the turmoil of the world, it is also important to take young people's emotions into account and provide them with the tools to manage them.³

Solutions that promote young people's well-being and human rights include social inclusion, being taken into account, having one's voice heard, peer support, belonging to a group, inspiring role models, opportunities for participation and representation in decision-making on matters affecting youth themselves. At the same time, they counteract the effects of various risk factors. Taksvärkki's development cooperation programme for 2026–2029 promotes the implementation of these solutions in Finland and in the programme countries.

3.2 Operating Environment in Programme Countries

Taksvärkki's development cooperation programme is implemented in Guatemala, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal and Sierra Leone in collaboration with local partner organisations. All these countries are classified as either the poorest or most fragile, as can be seen from the summary compiled in Table 1. Poverty and economic insecurity generally affect young women living in rural areas the most, particularly those who identify as belonging to indigenous peoples or other marginalised communities, for example due to a disability. The programme takes into account the operating environment of each country, the associated challenges, and the vulnerability factors and specific needs of local youth. Furthermore, Taksvärkki's global citizenship education in Finland is a significant part of the programme.

³ <https://tulevaisuus.fi/artikkeleita/nuoret-ja-globaali-murros/>, 25 February 2025.

Table 1. Indices describing the operating environments of Taksvärkki's programme countries.

	Guatemala	Kenya	Malawi	Mozambique	Nepal	Sierra Leone	Finland
Income and development level ⁴	MIC	LMIC	LDC	LDC	LDC	LDC	HIC
The state of civil society ⁵	sup-pressed	sup-pressed	re-stricted	suppressed	restricted	restricted	free
Corruption ⁶ Rank - Points	142 26/100	130. 30/100	109 34/100	161. 21/100	109. 34/100	109. 34/100	2. 88/100
Fragility of the State ⁷ Rank - Score	65 74.9	36 86.5	52. 80.5	25. 92.5	57. 78.0	45 82.6	178. 14.3
Freedom of the press ⁸ Rank - Score	138 40.32	117 49.41	76. 59.20	101 52.63	90. 55.20	56. 66.36	5. 87.18
Human Development Index (HDI) ⁹ Rank - Value	137 0.662	143 0.628	172. 0.517	182. 0.493	145. 0.622	185. 0.467	12. 0.948

According to the CIVICUS Monitor classification, **the state of civil society** in 2025 was restricted in Malawi, Nepal and Sierra Leone, and suppressed in Guatemala, Kenya and Mozambique. There are concerns regarding the state of civil society in the programme areas, as described later in the sections outlining the situation in each country, but so far there have been no indications of restrictions on activities related to the promotion of children's and youth's rights. Taksvärkki's partners are organisations engaged in youth work, for whom restrictions on civil society are mainly evident in the form of increased bureaucracy, such as registration and reporting obligations. The partners have reported little harassment directed specifically at them. The programme assumes that the situation will remain at least unchanged. With the programme's support, Taksvärkki's partner organisations and youth groups are better equipped to operate and exert influence as part of civil society, thereby maintaining and strengthening an operating environment favourable to civil society and local democracy.

Legislation promoting **youth participation, social inclusion and gender equality** largely exists in the programme countries, but its implementation is largely inadequate. The consultation and participation of youth are largely overlooked. Even sound and progressive national policies are not implemented in practice, as implementation at the local level varies greatly depending on the interests, political will and priorities of those in leadership positions. The resources and expertise allocated to implementation are limited, and institutions and coordination between them are weak. Social, cultural and economic factors

⁴ Classification: LDC = Least Developed Countries, LMIC = Lower Middle-Income Countries, MIC = Middle-Income Countries, HIC = High-Income Countries. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/oda-eligibility-and-conditions/dac-list-of-oda-recipients.html#oda-recipients-list>, 25 February 2026.

⁵ CIVICUS Monitor, 2025. Civil society status scores for 198 countries: 39 countries are open, 37 are shrinking, 39 are restricted, 50 are stifled and 33 are closed: https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings_2025/, 25 February 2026.

⁶ Transparency International 2025, ranking of 182 countries and scores. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2025>, 25 February 2026.

⁷ OECD, *States of Fragility 2025*: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/states-of-fragility-2025_81982370-en.html. Countries classified as fragile according to the country-specific infographic 2.2. In addition, data from The Fund for Peace Fragile States Index for 2024. Ranking of 179 countries and a maximum score of 120 points: <https://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/>, according to which Malawi and Nepal are also fragile states, and Mozambique is an alarmingly fragile state.

⁸ Reporters Without Borders 2025 Press Freedom Index: Ranking of 182 countries with a maximum score of 100 points. <https://rsf.org/en/index>, 25 February 2026.

⁹ *Human Development Report 2025*: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks>, 25 February 2026.

also act as barriers to practical implementation. An adult-centric approach to social participation and decision-making is common in the programme countries and can manifest as a reluctance to involve youth. There are significant challenges, particularly in realising the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalised population groups. Youth have risen up to oppose the old power elite in many countries. The mobilisation of Generation Z and the protests can be seen as part of democratic development and demands for good governance, but, for example, the associated rioting and the often violent suppression of protests present their own challenges to the movement.¹⁰

By strengthening cooperation between public administration and civil society, the programme supports the implementation of national development programmes and improves access to services for the most vulnerable groups. The programme pays particular attention to strengthening the participation and leadership of young women at regional and local levels.

Risks to the safety of young human rights activists must be considered in all programme countries. Youth are encouraged to adopt non-violent approaches and to promote the youth agenda peacefully through dialogue and advocacy. Taksvärkki's partner organisations promote youth rights and participation in decision-making, as well as their advocacy work, without a partisan political agenda, as part of a strong and diverse civil society.

The quality and accessibility of education in the programme countries are undermined by factors such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching materials and resources, and a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in rural areas. Teaching focuses on rote learning, and curricula do not foster critical thinking, practical skills or the application of what has been learnt. Pupils' learning needs are still often neglected, and there are few opportunities to meet special educational needs. Barriers to education for girls and young women, as well as for Children and Youth with Disability, early school leaving and dropout rates perpetuate inequality and undermine the realisation of other human rights. Underlying factors include cultural attitudes and the low socio-economic status of families. In rural areas in particular, families often cannot afford to send girls to school or have no interest in doing so. Child marriages, teenage pregnancies, sexual harassment of girls and young women in schools, a lack of awareness of menstrual health, and unsafe toilet facilities are barriers to girls' and young women's education. For Children and Youth with Disability, alongside discriminatory attitudes and socio-economic factors, journeys to school and school infrastructure are significant barriers to their school attendance. Capacities for inclusive education and the conditions for the education of girls and young women are being promoted in the programme countries of Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal and Sierra Leone. In Guatemala, support is being provided for democracy and human rights education, as well as school-specific plans that strengthen youth's critical thinking and agency. In Kenya, meanwhile, cooperation includes training to promote entrepreneurship and vocational skills.

In health services, limited access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services increases the number of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections¹¹. Awareness of sexual and

¹⁰ The causes and consequences of Generation Z's activism are analysed in more detail, for example, in the Journal of Democracy article <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/why-gen-z-is-rising/>, 25 February 2026

¹¹ The end of USAID funding for work combating HIV infections, among other things, threatens the positive development impacts of decades of work. The suspension of aid was immediately reflected in HIV infection statistics. The impact on, for example, the HIV prevention work of Taksvärkki's Mozambican partner ASSCODECHA could be significant.

https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2025/february/20250218_us-funding-people-affected-hiv-community-groups, 25 February 2025.

reproductive health and rights, as well as access to services, is being promoted in all programme countries. In addition, particular attention is paid to addressing, reporting, handling and sanctioning cases of gender-based and sexual violence and harassment, which are common in the programme countries, as well as to ensuring support measures for victims.

Physical and psychological violence, insecurity and an uncertain future affect **mental health** and the healthy development of youth. Other contributing factors include discrimination, social isolation, stigma, poverty and financial hardship, a lack of prospects, and the threatening and visible impacts of climate change. Access to mental health services is limited and stigmatised. Substance and drug misuse is partly a coping mechanism or an escape for youth in challenging circumstances. The theme of mental wellbeing and the need for psychosocial support has been raised by youth in almost all programme countries and is addressed as part of the programme's operational strategies.

The effects of climate change, and particularly the increase in extreme weather conditions, are evident in the programme countries in the form of, amongst other things, severe and recurrent storms and floods, periods of drought, disease epidemics and difficulties in predicting the weather. The impacts of climate change pose a serious challenge to the development of these countries, perpetuating and exacerbating poverty and the vulnerability of groups that are already marginalised. The programme supports the resilience of local communities and their adaptation to the impacts of climate change and creates opportunities for youth to promote climate justice.

Guatemala is classified as a middle-income country, but its levels of inequality and social problems are among the most severe in Latin America. According to UNICEF, in 2023, the allocation of public funds in Guatemala towards the well-being of children and youth was notably low in several sectors compared to neighbouring countries or the regional average.¹² Guatemala remains one of the most violent countries in Latin America. Statistics for 2022–2023 show that 53% of crimes were directed at girls and young women.

A lack of transparency has eroded public trust in institutions over decades. The persecution of socially active individuals has restricted civil society's freedom and the appeal of social engagement, thereby also limiting youth participation in decision-making. Widespread corruption, political polarisation and organised crime pose serious challenges to sustainable development. Much of the judicial system is controlled by the economic and military elite, resulting in high levels of impunity for crimes, particularly corruption and economic offences. Guatemala's International Commission against Impunity (CICIG) was dissolved in 2019.

In 2024, President Arévalo, who rose to power from outside the elite on a campaign platform of tackling corruption and improving security, is raising hopes for positive change, but resistance from the traditional power elite has slowed down reforms. At the same time, rapid price rises affecting citizens' purchasing power have weakened the president's support. However, the progressive political agenda offers Taksvärkki's programme a more hopeful operating environment than before and new opportunities to promote youth rights and collaborate with the authorities.

Legislation and official programmes relating to youth rights are at a good level in Guatemala, but there are many challenges in their implementation. Legislation safeguarding the rights of minorities, such as Persons with Disability or sexual and gender minorities, is, by contrast, weak. Structural discrimination

¹² <https://www.unicef.org/guatemala/inversion-infancia>, 25 February 2025.

against indigenous peoples and the underdevelopment of rural areas compared to cities are evident. Social problems such as insecurity, organised crime, violent street gangs, youth unemployment and a general lack of prospects particularly affect youth. This situation forces children and youth into migration, which leaves them vulnerable to human trafficking. There are very few leisure activities available to youth where they can meet their peers. Criminal gangs, on the other hand, are recruiting members and may appear an attractive option to youth at risk of social exclusion. In Guatemala, there is a huge need for human rights and democracy education, as well as youth work that builds peace and cooperation. The youth groups supported by Taksvärkki offer meaningful activities, a safe space to learn and develop together as part of a peer group, and solutions to break the cycle of fear and social passivity. Taksvärkki's programme approach supports a free civil society, whose advocacy work towards those in positions of responsibility is essential to ensure that the state also guarantees the rights of its most vulnerable citizens.

Kenya has a growing economy, but there are vast wealth disparities. Around 35% of the population lives on less than \$2.15 a day.¹³ The unemployment rate among youth aged 15–34 in Kenya is 67%. Every year, a million young people enter the labour market without the required basic or further education and employability skills. Of those who find paid work, 30% are in irregular or informal employment.¹⁴ The risks of becoming homeless or ending up on the streets, social exclusion, turning to substance abuse and crime, or radicalisation are significant.

In Kenya, there was a change of government in 2022, which raised hopes for greater inclusivity, democracy and the transfer of power. However, political tensions persist. In June 2024, youth mobilised in a mass movement to demand transparency and accountability and to express their dissatisfaction, not only with the current government but also with the entire parliament and the opposition. The protests were met with a heavy-handed response. Traditionally, youth have been recruited to cause havoc around election time, after which their cause has been forgotten. The collective voice of youth, expressed as a unified movement, creates political pressure and an atmosphere in which their demands and needs must be addressed in a new way.

The country's developing economic situation and local resources create opportunities for the allocation of public funds and local empowerment, including the consideration of the most marginalised population groups, such as youth living and working on the streets, as part of the country's sustainable development. They face discrimination and prejudice and are at risk of being exploited or abused. Police violence and arbitrary arrests are common among youth living and working on the streets. Without national identity documents, they face the risk of being excluded from all services and formal employment opportunities. National and county level policy frameworks and development programmes aimed at reducing poverty and ensuring affordable housing, health services, food security, youth participation and inclusive growth lay the foundations for new opportunities, even there are still shortcomings in their practical implementation, particularly with regard to marginalised groups.

Taksvärkki's programme addresses the above-mentioned challenges comprehensively by strengthening the agency and ownership of youth living and working on the streets, through advocacy work and with the support of networks and communities.

¹³ <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/kenya>, 25 February 2025.

¹⁴ <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000193960/report-raises-the-alarm-over-unskilled-youth-in-the-kenyan-job-market>, 25 February 2025.

Malawi is a landlocked country classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC), where over 70% of the population lives in poverty. High inflation and rising living costs have further exacerbated the economic vulnerability of children, youth and in particular girls. Structural inequality deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent droughts and cyclones have further increased the vulnerability of the rural population.

The poverty reduction strategy and other policy programmes set ambitious goals for the country's development. Similarly, laws and programmes concerning human rights, equality and non-discrimination, including *the Persons with Disabilities Act* updated last year and the national youth policy framework, are progressive. In addition to weak governance and limited funding, cultural factors are hindering developments favourable to the rights of children and youth and the achievement of the objectives of official programmes, particularly in rural areas, where early marriage and gender-based violence are serious problems and services are poorly accessible. Around 42% of Malawian girls marry before the age of 18, and as many as 29% give birth to their first child at the age of 13. Legislation concerning sexual and gender minorities is discriminatory and social stigma is strong.

Taksvärkki's programme work in Malawi supports the country's official development goals and programmes by addressing the factors hindering their implementation at grassroots level in rural communities, where official programmes rarely reach effectively. By strengthening interaction and cooperation between state actors and civil society, the programme also supports the implementation of state programmes and the provision of services to the most vulnerable groups, including children, youth and Persons with Disability in project communities. In line with the observations in the UPR report on Malawi, the programme reinforces the objectives of official programmes to reduce child labour, early marriage and gender-based violence, and increases youth activities in rural areas.

Mozambique is the most fragile, most corrupt and, by many measures, the least developed of the programme countries. In 2019, 63% of Mozambique's population lived in poverty,¹⁵ but the rise in the cost of living and internal displacement caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the effects of climate change and the armed conflict in the north of the country pushed a further million people below the poverty line. By 2022, an estimated 71% of the country's population was living in poverty.¹⁶ In Mozambique, following the October 2024 elections, which were accused of being fraudulent, a wave of nationwide protests witnessed disproportionate use of force, repression and restrictions on access to information. Youth, in particular, who felt marginalised and without prospects, were the key driving force behind the protests in Mozambique, spurred on by opposition politician Venâncio Mondlane, who had challenged the election results at an early stage. In early 2025, power passed to President Daniel Chapa, the successor candidate of the ruling Frelimo party, which has governed the country since independence. Since then, the situation in Mozambique has returned to normal. Political instability has affected the country's economy and further increased the cost of living, which has the greatest impact on vulnerable families and youth.

There is a critical need for psychosocial support and initiatives to improve economic opportunities. Sexual violence and harassment against girls and young women are widespread. Although child marriage was outlawed in 2019, half of young women marry before the age of 18.¹⁷ Taksvärkki's programme supports youth in difficult situations, including those with disabilities, in accessing services such as

¹⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mozambique/overview>, 25 February 2025.

¹⁶ <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-09/undp-dfs-the-cost-of-living-crisis-in-mozambique.pdf>, 25 February 2025.

¹⁷ <https://endgbv.africa/mapping/mozambique/>, 25 February 2025.

inclusive education and sexual and reproductive health services. It also supports youth participation in their communities and in local decision-making to promote sustainable social change.

Nepal is one of Finland's long-standing development cooperation partners. At the start of the programme period, Nepal is classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC), but it is set to become a lower-middle-income country by the end of 2026. Following a long post-civil war constitutional process and ongoing changes in government, democracy remains fragile. In autumn 2025, youth-led anti-corruption protests led to a change of government. The early elections scheduled for March 2026 will set the course for the country's democratic development.

Although poverty has decreased significantly, around one-fifth of Nepal's population still lives in extreme poverty. Dalit communities and indigenous peoples, in particular, face severe structural discrimination.¹⁸ The school system reflects the values and ideals of the dominant culture even in areas where the majority belong to marginalised groups.

Through its grassroots work, the Taksvärkki programme supports both Finland's regional development cooperation priorities and the Nepalese government's policy programmes aimed at promoting inclusive education, climate resilience and social inclusion. Good governance in Nepal's education sector is supported in particular by strengthening the transparency of school administration and by creating child- and environment-friendly learning environments. Local government is supported in activities that meet the criteria of the Child-Friendly Municipality Programme, particularly with regard to the education sector and the development of youth participation. Stakeholders in rural schools are supported in drawing up development plans through processes that involve youth, thereby improving their prospects of securing funding for their plans from the education sector's budget.

Due to its specific geographical characteristics, Nepal is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Unprecedented heatwaves and unpredictable extreme weather events associated with the monsoon season are disrupting community life, food security and transport links. Due to prolonged and heavier rainfall, diseases spread by mosquitoes, for example, are causing more widespread epidemics than before. Diseases linked to water quality and poor sanitation are also common. Taksvärkki's programme supports youth groups in their inclusive and anti-discrimination work. Through the campaigns run by these youth groups, knowledge and practices relating to climate resilience and health-safe practices, such as water purification, are becoming more widespread in the surrounding communities, supporting the objectives of state actors.

In Sierra Leone, 60% of the population lives in poverty. In rural areas, the proportion of people living in poverty is 74%. 70% of youth are unemployed, and 50% are illiterate and lack the skills needed for employment. Legislation passed in 2021 guarantees free basic education for all, from pre-school to secondary education. The law places particular intersectional emphasis on ensuring education for girls and young women, including pregnant and teenage mothers who have given birth, Children with Disability, children from low-income families, and children in rural and remote areas.

Child marriage has traditionally been common in Sierra Leone. In 2024, a law prohibiting child marriage came into force in Sierra Leone, and the programme supports its local implementation. Female genital mutilation has been culturally widespread. A law prohibiting and criminalising FGM has yet to be passed, but significant progress has been made in the programme areas towards eradicating this harmful

¹⁸ <https://finlandabroad.fi/web/npl/kehitysyhteistyö-maassa>, 25 February 2025.

practice. There remains a great need for advocacy work and raising awareness of the harmful effects of these traditions. Similarly, the programme work raises awareness of the rights of Persons with Disability and the services offered by national development projects. The promotion of the economic empowerment, inclusion and advocacy of Youth with Disability groups, for the realization of the rights of Persons with Disability, will continue within the scope of the programme.

The 2023 elections in Sierra Leone were marred by a lack of transparency, which caused widespread tensions. The incumbent President Bio declared himself the winner and was elected for a further term. To resolve the conflict and ensure peace, a National Unity Agreement was signed with the support of the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States. Youth groups supported by the Taksvärkki programme and other civil society actors have a key role to play in implementing the agreement's recommendations on transparency and participation at the local level ahead of the next elections in 2028.

Youth in Finland feel insecure in the face of global and local threats. The war of aggression launched by Russia in Ukraine has also affected youth in Finland. Many youths feel a sense of uncertainty regarding issues such as racist violence and growing inequality.¹⁹ These concerns are shared by youth in Finland and in the Global South. In an interdependent world, global developments affect us all.

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education defines global citizenship education as a fundamental task for schools. The curriculum encourages schools to collaborate with external organisations, which creates a solid foundation for cooperation between organisations engaged in global citizenship education and schools.²⁰ However, not all youth currently have the opportunity to participate in global citizenship education as set out in the curriculum. Primary schools in Finland are diverse, and some schools would benefit more than others from the additional resources offered by organisations, for example, to implement accessible and plain-language global citizenship education. Global citizenship education should be part of the school's operating culture and not merely individual workshops or training sessions. There is indeed a demand for long-term and systematic partnerships with schools in the field of global citizenship education. Taksvärkki carries out advocacy work in relation to both the development of school operating cultures and teacher training. Both trainee teachers and university lecturers have highlighted that the global citizenship education work carried out by organisations is also needed as part of teacher training, so that upon graduation, teachers have sufficient capacity to implement global citizenship education in line with the curriculum.

Youth's views on the future have also diverged. Whilst some youth in Finland feel they can influence the future of society and the world and achieve their professional and family-related dreams, a large proportion of youth feel they have no choice whatsoever regarding their own future.²¹ High-quality, nationwide and accessible global citizenship education that takes different learners into account can also strengthen the sense of participation and belief in the future among youth in the latter group.

¹⁹ Youth Barometer 2023. https://tietoanurista.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/nuorisobarometri-2023_uusin.pdf, 25 February 2025.

²⁰ National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014. https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/perusopetuksen_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2014.pdf, 25 February 2025.

²¹ Ramos Lobato, I., Kosunen, S. & Bernelius, V., 2024, *School and Inequality*. Kosunen, S., Juvonen, S., Huilla, H. & Peltola, M. (eds.). Helsinki: Gaudeamus, pp. 175–191. <https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/publications/koulutuksellinen-eriarvoisuus-ja-tarveperusteinen-resursointi>, 25 February 2025.

Youth may have a great deal of knowledge about various sustainable development themes, but their ability and confidence to apply this knowledge and take action, as well as their trust in their own capacity to make a difference, may be weak. Finnish youth feel that, for example, climate action should be taken quickly, but at the same time they feel that adults are not doing enough to address the issues and that the responsibility is being shifted onto youth. However, young people's opportunities to influence are not supported, and climate education in schools, for example, is perceived as one-sided and in need of a reform.²² Youth participating in Taksvärkki's global citizenship education activities and advocacy workshops gain knowledge, skills, support and opportunities to influence matters from a youth perspective. Through self-guided activities, young people's self-confidence is strengthened.

Addressing a sustainable future and promoting youth participation in schools requires educators to have the right tools and schools to have structures in place to support these activities. The vast majority of teachers report that the demands of their work have increased in recent years. Tight resources, fragmented work, the diverse challenges faced by pupils and families, and broader societal uncertainty are evident in everyday school life.²³ Promoting a sustainable future requires the ability to manage large-scale issues, to examine information critically, and to respond in a changing and unstable world. This may feel like a heavy and additional burden for overworked teachers. However, building a sustainable future requires everyone's involvement, and schools cannot exclude themselves from this work. Sustainability issues are also highlighted in the curriculum's value framework.²⁴ To promote a sustainable future and participation, it is important to take into account the everyday reality of schools and the opportunities for the third sector to support schools in this work. The multi-professional cooperation recommended by the curriculum also supports the learning of sustainable lifestyles in schools.

Youth participation can also be increased through well-organised opportunities for voluntary work. According to a study produced by Kansalaisareena in 2024, youth in Finland expect to participate in voluntary work a great deal in the near future: just over a third of both 15–24-year-olds and 25–34-year-olds estimate they will participate as much, and nearly a third would participate more than they do now.²⁵ Volunteering is seen as a way to find meaning in life, and volunteering opportunities designed from the youth perspective contribute to their well-being and bring added value to both the community and society at large.²⁶ During the 2026–2029 programme period, Taksvärkki will develop youth-led volunteering by involving young people.

²² <https://www.tuni.fi/fi/ajankohtaista/eurooppalaiset-nuoret-kaipaavat-nopeaa-toimintaa-ilmastonmuutoksen-ehkaisemiseksi-ja>, 25 February 2025.

²³ <https://www.oaj.fi/ajankohtaista/uutiset-ja-tiedotteet/2025/yhdeksan-kymmenesta-opettajasta-kertoo-tyon-vaativuuden-lisaantyneen/>, 25 February 2025.

²⁴ https://kouluajaymparisto.fi/wp-content/uploads/nakokulmia_kekeen.pdf, 25 February 2025.

²⁵ https://kansalaisareena.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Vapaaehtoistoiminta_Suomessa_Raportti_2024.pdf, 25 February 2025.

²⁶ <https://kansalaisareena.fi/nuorten-vapaaehtoistyon-kasikirja/mika-motivoi-nuoria-mukaan-vapaaehtoistoimintaan/>, 25 February 2025.

4. Theory of Change: Steps of Youth Participation Towards Sustainable Futures

4.1 The Logic of the Theory of Change

The programme's theory of change on strengthening of young people's active citizenship and agency as promoters of sustainable development in their communities is based on the long-term experience and lessons accumulated through Taksvärkki and its partners' cooperation.

Developing the theory of change has been a process involving Taksvärkki staff and programme partners. The theory of change of the previous programme period was refined and updated together with partner organizations in online workshops applying elements of the *Outcome Mapping* intentional design process. Particular attention was paid to describing actor-focused change pathways. Based on the workshops, a programme level theory of change was created to describe the shared change logic of development cooperation projects and global citizenship education work. The result, completed by Taksvärkki's programme team, is a programme-level framework for the change logic of projects prepared in local contexts.

The core of the theory are active youth whose strengthened agency as part of local civil society acts as a driving force for sustainable development in their communities. The theory of change also emphasises the role of broader civil society in promoting and safeguarding young people's rights and in strengthening youth activity as an important part of local civil society. In addition to strengthening young people's agency, the programme aims to foster strong agency among duty-bearers as guarantors of young people's rights and as enablers of meaningful youth participation.

The development of active citizenship requires behavioural change. The theoretical assumption underlying the theory of change is based on the COM-B model developed by Susan Michie²⁷, according to which behavioural change requires the capability, opportunities and motivation to act. Taksvärkki's programme work focuses on strengthening young people's knowledge and skills, motivation and, on the other hand, the structures that enable youth participation.

The programme objectives rely on the model introduced by Kania, Kramer and Senge in their article "*The Water of Systems Change*"²⁸ presenting the six conditions of systems change, which typically play a central role in maintaining prevailing challenges. Achieving sustainable systemic change requires change across all six interconnected conditions: policies, practices, resource flows, relationships and connections, power dynamics and mental models. Structural changes at the levels of policies, practices or resource flows remain temporary unless they reflect shifts in people's thinking. Changes in relationships and power dynamics create shifts in mental models as well as in formal structures and resource flows. Invisible changes in mental models are essential for systemic change and accelerate changes at other levels when individuals and critical masses begin to act in demanding structural changes. Conversely, changes in other areas also contribute to shaping mental models. Taksvärkki's programme aims to promote change across all the conditions of systemic change.

²⁷ e.g. Michie et al. 2011, *The Behaviour Change Wheel*.

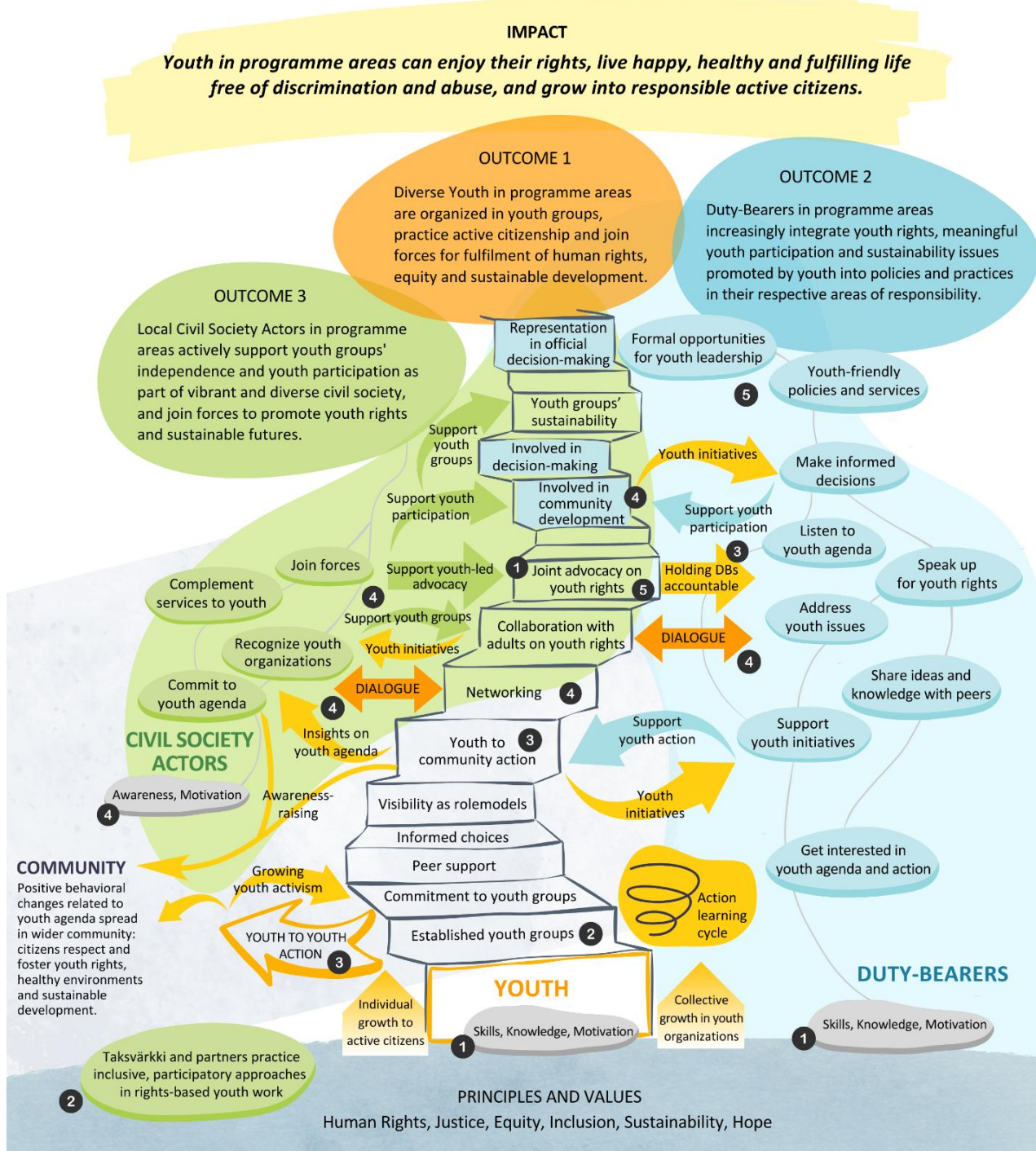
<https://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42>, 25 February 2025.

²⁸ https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/, 25 February 2025.

The visualisation (Figure 2) of the theory of change illustrates the interaction between the programme's key actor groups and their respective pathways towards programme outcomes and overall vision (programme impact). The narrative description begins with the programme vision, which the programme contributes to by supporting the change of key actors identified as essential for systemic change. Thereafter, actor-focused outcome objectives and the change pathways supported by contribution of the programme are presented separately for youth, duty bearers and civil society actors. The programme's assumptions are based on Taksvärkki and its partners' experience, monitoring, context analyses, and evaluations.

Figure 2 (p. 19): Visualisation of the theory of change for Taksvärkki's 2026–2029 programme.

TAKSVÄRKKI 2026–2029 PROGRAMME THEORY OF CHANGE



PROGRAMME STRATEGIES

- 1 Trainings and personal support
- 2 Supporting organizational capacity
- 3 Supporting youth-led activities
- 4 Facilitating connections and networking
- 5 Advocacy

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- Civic space allows youth groups' and CSAs' active participation in programme areas.
- In communities there are adults who encourage youth to question and stand against the harmful norms in their communities.
- National policies require Duty-Bearers to listen to youth perspectives in decision-making.
- There are Duty-Bearers who are proactive and open to meaningful youth participation.
- There are Civil Society Actors providing services relevant to youth complementing the official ones.
- Established local Civil Society Actors objectives align with youth groups' interests.
- Civil Society Organizations have willingness and resources to join the youth initiatives and cooperation.

4.2 Programme Vision

Impact: *Young people in the programme areas can enjoy their rights, live a happy, healthy and fulfilling life free of discrimination and abuse, and grow into responsible, active citizens.*

The long-term development goal of the programme is to contribute to just, socially, economically and ecologically sustainable societies where every young person can enjoy human rights, live a happy, healthy and fulfilling life free from discrimination or abuse, and grow into responsible active citizens. In such communities, young people and adults **collaborate**, deepen their understanding and **challenge the structures that maintain inequality**. Together, they **promote wellbeing and the realisation of rights for all the people**.

Guided by the human rights norms and principles, duty-bearers committed to their roles **cooperate** with other stakeholders, including young people and civil society actors, to support the youth's healthy development and participation. They seek collaboration with **youth from different backgrounds** — including Youth with Disability and other marginalised groups — **to make inclusive and just decisions** for the common good. They **create space for young people to act** confidently and actively **as change-makers** in their communities both in development cooperation programme countries and in Finland.

It is essential to systematically promote these objectives by strengthening the capacities of young people themselves, duty-bearers and civil society actors in the programme areas. It is possible to transform the lack of future prospects and limited opportunities for participation experienced by young people into meaningful and active participation in community development. Adult-centrism and a lack of support from duty-bearers can also be influenced. When young people are genuinely heard, communities become more responsive to youth agendas, and services become youth-friendly and more inclusive. Through joint efforts it is possible to find right based solutions to the major challenges young people face. Organised youth action and broad collaboration among actors strengthen active civil societies and their roles in the social and sustainable development of the programme areas.

For the actor-focused change objectives to lead to the desired development impact, the following assumptions must hold true during the programme period:

- National level legislative and policy frameworks support youth-friendly decision-making and improving services.

Currently, the legislation and policy frameworks in programme countries generally recognise the significance of youth rights and participation. The programme assumes these frameworks will remain at least stable and advocates that duty-bearers enhance the implementation at local levels.

- The civic space continues allowing youth groups and other Civil Society Actors to actively promote youth rights, equity, and sustainable development in programme areas.

Although concerns exist, there have been no indications of restrictions on youth or civil society activities promoting child and youth rights.

- Positive developments in programme areas are not hindered by major conflicts or other large-scale disasters

The threat of conflicts and natural disasters is always present and these are monitored in programme and project risk management plans. The programme logic assumes no insurmountably large conflicts or disasters arise during the programme period in its operating areas.

- Duty Bearers involved in the Programme remain committed to youth rights and youth participation and related policy reforms.

The programme continues engaging with duty-bearers and assumes there will remain enough key duty bearers committed to youth rights in programme areas.

4.3 Actor Focused Change Pathways

4.3.1 Youth are active and develop their communities

Outcome 1: *Diverse youth in programme areas are organized in youth groups, practice active citizenship and join forces for fulfilment of human rights, equity and sustainable development.*

YOUTH

In Taksvärkki’s programme, youth consist of **active youth**—mainly those aged 13–29 who have active roles in the programme as youth facilitators, peer educators, volunteers, youth leaders and members of youth groups—and **participating youth**, meaning students and other community youth who take part in activities organised by the active youth in their respective communities. Depending on the programme area, target groups include youth at risk of marginalisation, such as teenage mothers, school dropouts, street-connected youth, Youth with Disability, young people living with HIV, youth from Indigenous or Dalit communities, and students residing in remote areas. In Finland, active youth include “student champions” of the partnering Global Citizenship Schools and youth volunteers such as peer educators in global citizenship education. Participating youth in Finland are mainly students in secondary and upper secondary schools and vocational schools, as well as youth reached through youth work.

The ideal situation the programme wants to contribute to is that young people have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to be involved in developing socially and ecologically sustainable communities. Young people understand the cause-and-effect relationships of global challenges and can propose ways to address them. They **take action** to achieve the changes they desire to see. Young people **find ways to solve challenges** at the local level, act together and influence as change-makers in their communities. They know their rights and **actively defend** their own and other young people’s rights, particularly those of youth in vulnerable situations, such as Youth with Disability or those representing other marginalised groups.

Active youth are role models for others in their communities. They **create more space and opportunities to act, support and collaborate** with young people in their communities who are not directly reached by the programme. Active youth **advocate** and **seek dialogue** with duty-bearers and other adults in their communities, regionally and nationally, working together to advance youth rights, equity and sustainable development goals.

THE YOUTH’S CHANGE PATHWAY

The change in youth occurs simultaneously at the individual and collective levels within youth groups. These levels of change reinforce and advance each other. Individual growth into active citizens strengthens youth groups, and at the same time, youth groups strengthened by their members’

personal growth support individuals' development into active citizens, role models and leaders in their communities.

Young people's individual growth as active citizens is supported through trainings that strengthen their **knowledge and understanding** of human rights, equity (including disability inclusion), gender equality and harmful cultural norms, as well as legislation related to youth rights. Young people's **abilities and skills** develop in leadership, group dynamics, active citizenship, advocacy and life skills. Increased knowledge and confidence help them make **informed life choices**. Youth learn and gain practical tools for promoting climate and ecological sustainability. Their abilities and skills in critical thinking and analysis also improve through *Outcome Mapping* and *Outcome Harvesting* methodology trainings and related participatory monitoring and evaluation processes. These skills are essential for youth to be able to systematically proceed with the youth agenda, monitor the changes achieved and learn from them for future action.

The programme supports **youth organisation**, strengthening the **capacity and conditions** of youth groups to operate at the grassroots level in their local context, villages, schools and other communities. In the programme countries, youth groups are essential for **enabling young people's collective voice** to be heard and gaining recognition as civil society actors. Youth groups provide a safe space for members to gather and experience participation and acceptance as they are. This is especially important for the youth in marginalized or vulnerable positions who often feel excluded due to structural discrimination.

Youth group activities support youth-led **learning processes** through *action learning* principle. Reflection on new knowledge and skills informs further planning, and the resulting experiences help refine and improve practices. Through these processes, youth learn to observe their environment, identify problems and demand improvements in conditions affecting their lives and futures. They become aware of structural power relations, adult-centrism, root causes of inequality, the importance of education and critical thinking, social inclusion, livelihood opportunities and climate resilience.

Youth organise **peer support** and **dialogue sessions** with different stakeholders on themes they identify being important. Topics may relate to gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, harmful traditional practices such as child marriage or female genital mutilation, access to youth-friendly services, healthy lifestyles, substance abuse, climate issues, disability rights, equity and other issues linked to social and ecological sustainability. Through dialogues and trainings, youth gain knowledge of advocacy opportunities and ways to contribute to community development. The safe space created through peer support and group cohesion, as well as positive experiences from meaningful youth activities and advocacy, **motivate youth to remain engaged** and bring forward new ideas for developing their groups and communities. Participatory monitoring of changes in communities achieved with youth contributions helps them realise their impact, **reinforcing motivation** to continue their active involvement.

Organised youth activity demonstrates strengthened commitment to change and the growing legitimacy of youth groups as **recognised actors in the civil society**. With programme-provided training and support, youth independently share knowledge and **peer support** in their communities. Youth groups **organise peer trainings** and establish peer support groups. Increased knowledge, skills and confidence, along with peer support, enable active youth to take leadership roles in different social contexts, and **act as role models in their communities**. As part of youth groups' annual plans, active youth **organise community campaigns and events** for peers and the wider public—often supported by duty-bearers and civil

society actors. Visibility and campaigning **enhance youth activism** as more young people join youth groups and engage with youth agendas.

The programme strengthens youth groups' societal influence by **building connections** with duty-bearers and civil society actors. Through these connections and **dialogue**, youth groups' **networks** with other civil society actors expand. Increased visibility and strengthened networks lead to **new collaborations** with civil society actors and adult **support to youth initiatives**. Increased dialogue and youth groups' visibility enhance duty-bearers' **commitment to supporting youth agendas**. Youth groups **collaborate with duty-bearers** and **civil society actors** and **call on duty-bearers to fulfil their roles in ensuring youth rights**.

Youth and youth groups' activity and visibility in communities, along with increased dialogue and collaboration with duty bearers and civil society actors, form the foundation for their **integration into local decision-making and community development**. At the level of transformative change, youth and youth groups **hold established** roles within local systems and **participate in community decision-making**, such as village or district development committees and community structures. They make **proposals** in these forums, and duty-bearers support them. Established practices for youth consultation and policies and structures enhancing meaningful youth participation formalise youth agency within community development processes and governance across the programme areas.

With the support of duty-bearers and civil society actors, youth groups develop and identify solutions to **ensure their organisational sustainability**, enabling them to remain impactful civil society actors after the programme ends.

In the long term, youth have gained knowledge, skills and motivation to act as active citizens. This has led to opportunities to promote their rights and wellbeing in collaboration with different stakeholders, which is possible through the facilitated relationships with these stakeholders. Youth receive recognition for their significant work in community development and take on roles in decision-making structures, influencing and potentially advancing to new challenges and expanding their impact. As adults, some youth become influential change-makers in their communities and society more broadly. Societies flourish when every young person's rights are realised and their potential is positively harnessed for sustainable community development. Learned values and principles, such as responsibility, justice, equity, inclusion and empathy, along with awareness of the importance of respecting human rights as a foundation for socially sustainable development, are passed on to their children. With more stable starting points for younger generations to grow into responsible citizens, intergenerational cycles of human rights violations and discrimination can be broken, reducing inequality.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS RELATED TO THE YOUTH'S CHANGE PATHWAY

For the programme's strategies to lead to expected outputs and contribute to youth-related change objectives, the following assumptions must hold true during the programme period:

- There is civic space in programme areas for youth groups to take action.

Although concerns exist, there has been no evidence of restrictions on activities promoting child and youth rights. The programme assumes conditions remain at least stable. Strengthening civil society actors and their collaboration also supports the free civil society.

- Cultural and political environment in target areas allows young people to organize. Adults are open to dialogue with young generations, which supports gradually overcoming the culture of adult-centrism.

Adult-centrism exists in all programme countries, but Taksvärkki and partners' experience shows it is not an insurmountable barrier for youth active citizenship. Youth organisation is possible, groups can operate and their activities have received positive attention. No major resistance has been encountered, and this is assumed to continue.

- There are local level authorities willing to support youth participation, and there are adults in communities who encourage youth to question and stand against the harmful norms in their communities.

Authorities in the programme contexts have legal obligations to hear youth in matters concerning them and promote their right to meaningful participation. The programme assumes sufficient numbers of supportive decision-makers, authorities and other adults whose positive interactions and support encourage youth to remain active.

- Youth (including the ones in positions of vulnerability) have motivation and time to participate in capacity building activities and commit to youth groups. Parents / caregivers allow and support youth participation.

These assumptions are essential for strengthening youth participation and group activity in their communities but are also supported through programme work. Current conditions and past programme experience indicate these assumptions are realistic.

4.3.2 Duty-Bearers Ensure Youth Rights

Outcome 2: *Duty-Bearers in programme areas strengthen policies and practices to ensure youth rights, sustainable development, equity and meaningful youth participation in their respective areas of responsibility.*

DUTY-BEARERS

Duty-bearers relevant in the programme include decision-makers, authorities, officials and providers of public services. They hold power and responsibility for safeguarding the wellbeing, healthy development and participation opportunities of children and youth. These actors include teachers, school administration, youth workers, health professionals, police and social workers and officials of these sectors. Political decision makers, local authorities, community structures as well as parents and guardians of children and youth are also focal duty bearers having responsibilities concerning youth rights, education, protection and wellbeing in their areas, municipalities and families. In Finland, the focal duty bearers are teachers in the cooperation schools, and other education sector workers whose skills and knowledge on global issues the programme aims to strengthen.

The ideal situation aimed for by the programme is that the duty-bearers responsible for young people's rights understand the global and local challenges affecting younger generations. They seek to hear youth perspectives on these challenges and use this information in their work and in decision-making within their areas of responsibility. They take active measures to prevent discrimination and social exclusion,

collaborate with civil society actors, including youth groups, and other local stakeholders, and strengthen youth participation and active citizenship. By expanding their networks, listening to youth from diverse backgrounds, and creating space for youth-led initiatives, duty-bearers broaden young people's opportunities and capacity to contribute to positive change in their communities.

THE DUTY BEARERS' CHANGE PATHWAY

In theory, the legislation and official government programs support youth participation in the program countries. They are supposed to guarantee the services necessary for healthy and safe growth and development of all children and youth. Official regulations also require that specific groups of citizens are consulted on matters that concern them. In practice, however, laws and programs are rarely implemented in a way that is meaningful to young people. In rural areas in particular, those responsible often lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of the official regulations and processes that guide their work.

Strengthening the **knowledge, skills, and motivation of duty-bearers** is the critical foundation for advancing the rights and perspectives of young people in formal decision-making processes, as well as for improving the quality, accessibility, and inclusiveness of the relevant services such as education and healthcare. Through trainings and dialogue on youth participation, youth-led approaches, equity and non-discrimination, duty-bearers engaged in programme activities enhance their understanding of both global and local challenges affecting young people and their well-being, as well as of the importance of meaningful youth participation. In programme countries, particularly in remote and underserved areas, it is essential to strengthen the capacity of local-level duty-bearers, including community leaders, members of development committees and school management structures, regarding the national legislation, policies, practices, and budgetary frameworks related to the rights and equity of children and young people.

The advocacy work and dialogue sessions carried out by the youth groups and civil society actors strengthened with the programme's support enhance the duty-bearers' understanding on issues like the challenges faced by young people, accessibility and inclusion, and good practices for meaningful youth participation. Youth themselves define the content and priorities of the dialogue events they organise. By participating in these events, duty-bearers gain grassroots-level insights on the concrete issues and challenges young people face in their context, such as police violence, gender-based violence, gaps in equitable and accessible youth-friendly services, substance abuse, and other risk factors identified in the communities.

Dialogue and genuine listening to the youth agenda increase duty-bearers' willingness to learn and to better understand young people's perspectives. Greater visibility for the issues raised by young people, together with strengthened relationships and networks built through youth-led action, increases duty-bearers' **interest in youth initiatives**. As a result, it becomes easier for young people to engage them in events they organise or in other discussions related to youth issues. Motivated duty-bearers **share reflections with their colleagues** and **support youth participation** and active citizenship in various ways, for example by listening to and taking young people's views into account. They **identify shortcomings affecting youth** within the areas of their formal responsibility and use their authority to address these **through responsible decision-making**, in order to safeguard the rights and a sustainable future for younger generations.

Strengthened understanding of and interest in young people's rights and perspectives enables duty-bearers to **take active roles** as champions of issues that matter to young people. Duty-bearers keep the youth agenda visible within their own forums. They organise opportunities to hearing young people and use their authority to advance the priorities identified by youth and to address the issues raised by the youth. The duty bearers increase cooperation and coordination with other actors, for example by establishing concrete structures or networks to promote youth rights and participation. For the authorities, local leaders and government representatives, this includes not only various **practices for consulting young people**, but also **supporting youth initiatives and youth activities organised by youth groups** where possible. Ultimately, systematic consultation of young people requires that duty-bearers **create and facilitate space for youth representatives in bodies and processes** related to local governance and community development.

In Finland, participation in global citizenship education activities enables educators to deliver high-quality, up-to-date global citizenship education in line with national curricula, and to support young people's meaningful participation in their work. Genuine listening to young people and collaboration with them also increase educators' willingness to learn and better understand young people's perspectives in the Finnish context. As a result, educators share their reflections and support youth participation within their own spheres of influence. Teachers responsible for World Citizen Schools (Taksvärkki partner schools), together with pupils, promote a school culture that supports sustainable futures and inspire other actors to drive change by listening to young people and promoting youth participation.

Increased awareness among parents and guardians of underage children about youth rights encourages peer discussion on these issues within communities. Dialogue events strengthen intra-family and intergenerational relationships and communication. Experience from previous programme phases has shown that, as peer dialogue is strengthened and communication within families improves, and as young people's argumentation skills develop through active engagement, parents are better able to understand, listen to, **support and encourage** their children to make positive life choices for their future. Improved educational outcomes among young people active in youth groups, together with more positive attitudes at home, reduce parents' prejudices towards youth activities and increase their willingness to support young people's active citizenship.

At a transformative level, strengthened action by duty-bearers to reinforce young people's rights and participation supports the **systematic integration** of these perspectives and practices **into local decision-making and structures**. Duty-bearers **safeguard young people's rights and provide youth-friendly, inclusive services**; they understand the local and global challenges affecting young people and systematically **take these into account** in their work with children and youth. For example, teachers apply learning materials and methods that support young people's active citizenship or develop institutional structures that strengthen youth participation. Health professionals take into account the accessibility needs of specific groups, such as youth living on the streets or Youth with Disability. School stakeholders improve the accessibility of school environments and inclusive education practices. In an ideal situation, duty-bearers treat organised youth, such as youth groups supported by the programme, as full-fledged civil society actors and as relevant stakeholders in their communities. They cooperate with youth groups, draw on their experiential expertise in youth-related issues, and systematically consult youth group representatives through formal channels for youth participation and influence.

Building on dialogue with young people, the knowledge and perspectives on equality and youth-related challenges adopted by duty-bearers are reflected in their actions as decision-makers and providers of services that are central to youth. By creating space for systematic youth participation in formal forums, duty-bearers **have institutionalised** practices for consulting youth and support initiatives raised by youth. As a result of dialogue and advocacy led by youth and other civil society actors, duty-bearers implement and further develop **youth-responsive policies, programmes and services**. This may include, for example, allocating resources to inclusive education, taking concrete steps to lower barriers for young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services, or strengthening child protection structures within communities. Cooperation between public authorities and youth groups, as well as responsibilities entrusted to youth groups within communities, support their independent action and thereby strengthen **the position and sustainability of youth groups** at different levels.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS RELATED TO THE DUTY BEARERS' CHANGE PATHWAY

For the programme's strategies to lead to the expected outputs and contribute to actor-focused change objectives, the following assumptions must hold true during the programme period:

- National policies require Duty Bearers to listen to youth perspectives in decision making

At the national level, the legislation and policy frameworks of the programme countries currently take citizen participation in decision-making concerning specific groups into account reasonably well. The programme assumes that these frameworks will remain at least at their current level and, in its local-level advocacy related to youth consultation, draws on and refers to existing national laws and policy programmes.

- Civic space allows youth groups' and civil society actors' active participation in programme areas

There are concerns related to the state of civil society in the programme areas, but so far there have been no indications during programme implementation of restrictions on the activities of youth groups or civil society actors working to advance the rights of children and young people. The programme assumes that the situation will remain at least at its current level and, on the other hand, seeks to promote a free and enabling civil society by strengthening civil society actors and coordination among them.

- The context is receptive for duty bearers to stand up for child and youth rights.

The programme is based on the assumption that national legislation and prevailing public opinion value the wellbeing and rights of children and young people. To date, there have been no indications of active opposition to these objectives in the programme areas.

- The relevant duty bearers in programme area are motivated and available to participate in program activities. There are duty bearers who are proactive and open to meaningful youth participation and dialogue with youth.

The programme builds on national legislation and official frameworks that guarantee young people's rights and participation. In practice, however, effective implementation requires motivated duty-bearers who are genuinely engaged with youth issues. Initiating the changes sought by the programme depends on the continued presence, within the programme areas, of duty-bearers who can be reached by the programme activities and are open to dialogue with young people, and who are therefore, within their roles, motivated to learn, develop, and act to advance the realisation of youth rights and participation.

4.3.3 Civil Society Actors Stand for Youth Rights

Outcome 3: *Local Civil Society Actors in programme areas actively support youth groups' independence and youth participation as part of vibrant and diverse civil society and join forces to promote youth rights and sustainable futures.*

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Strategic partners for Taksvärkki partner organisations and the youth groups supported by the programme are the other local and international organisations operating in the programme areas, including organisations of Persons with Disability. These organisations play an important role in monitoring the realisation of the human rights of children and young people and in providing services to the programme target groups, complementing gaps in public programmes, thereby supporting the work of Taksvärkki's partners to advance youth rights. In Finland, key civil society actors for the programme include NGOs working in youth work, development cooperation and global citizenship education, with whom cooperation is carried out to promote youth rights, free civic space, and high-quality global citizenship education.

In rural communities, youth groups' key allies include community-based organisations and other formal and informal community structures such as mothers' groups, disability groups, and community committees responsible for overseeing the implementation of community rules, safety and child protection. Gaining access to these structures is a crucial pathway for youth group representatives to have their voices heard and to influence the development of their communities.

Other important civil society actors for the programme include traditional leaders of the communities, churches and religious leaders, as well as local business communities. Through their support and acceptance, these actors enable youth group activities within communities and enhance the visibility and operating space of the youth groups.

Taksvärkki and the project partners in the programme countries are the most central civil society actors in the programme. The programme supports the technical capacity of their staff, peer learning, the sharing of good practices, networking and organisational development. With strengthened capacity, organisations further develop their strategies and practices to function more effectively as part of a diverse local civil society and to support the realisation of the rights and youth participation of the ones in most vulnerable situations.

The ideal situation envisioned by the programme is that civil society actors, as part of their expanding networks and cooperation models, recognise youth groups as equal partners and as members of a diverse and vibrant civil society. They promote practices for youth participation at the local level, provide high-quality and inclusive services that improve young people's wellbeing and future prospects, and coordinate both among themselves and with formal duty-bearers to strengthen the coverage of service networks that are important to young people.

Civil society actors support the sustainability of youth groups, invite young people to participate in their activities, and carry out joint communication and advocacy with youth groups in support of youth rights and youth agenda.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS' CHANGE PATHWAY

Civil society actors play a central role within local networks in which it is important for youth groups to be included. The programme's support for changes in civil society actors focuses on strengthening the capacity of partner organisations and youth groups, as well as on expanding their networks. Taksvärkki partner organizations are part of the key civil society networks and working groups, through which they **share expertise and good practices** more broadly with other civil society actors. The participation of youth group representatives in local civil society networks and working groups is strengthened in order to increase opportunities for youth to influence, while also reinforcing the sustainability of youth groups and local support for their work.

As a result of dialogue with young people in various events and networks, and the increased visibility of youth groups within their communities, civil society actors' **commitment with youth and to the issues they consider important** is strengthened. The civil society actors get interested on the youth agenda through the examples set by role models who have grown up within youth groups and are visible in communities, as well as through young people's good argumentation skills and collective ideas generated by youth groups. The civil society actors find meaningful forms of cooperation with youth groups. Collaboration emerges both by the youth initiatives and by the initiative of civil society actors themselves. The innovative activities of the youth groups add value to the work of civil society organisations, and joint communication and campaigning with youth groups reach new target groups in communities.

Dialogue with the active young people strengthens civil society actors' commitment to youth-centered thinking and practices. As a result, **youth groups are increasingly recognised as integral part of civil society**, and their members are valued as experts by experience on youth-related issues. Through dialogue, **cooperation between civil society actors and youth groups** is reinforced, particularly in campaigning for youth rights and equity, joint communications, and advocacy work. Civil society actors support youth initiatives, encourage youth groups, and provide various opportunities to enhance the reach and visibility of their activities. They also **collaborate with each other to promote youth rights and youth-centered social inclusion** through the networks and established connections they have built, **thereby strengthening the participation of youth groups** as part of a vibrant and diverse civil society.

By listening to young people's perspectives, civil society actors strengthen their work in monitoring the realisation of children's rights and in supporting individual cases, as they gain information on the challenges young people observe and experience in their communities. Learning from youth perspectives, civil society organisations **improve the quality and accessibility of the services they provide**, particularly for young people in vulnerable situations. As part of informal community-based child protection and safety structures, young people bring forward their own experiences and those of their peers in the planning, implementation and development of committee activities. Civil society actors **coordinate** services related to the realisation of children's rights, support for victims of crime, and other services for young people in need, while also strengthening referral pathways to public services and institutions.

Strengthening of the role and space of a diverse and pluralistic civil society is a prerequisite for transformative change. Enhancing the sustainability of youth groups, with the support of other civil

society actors, is essential to ensuring a lasting space for youth voices and youth-led action within communities. Information, communication and advocacy carried out jointly and separately by youth groups and other civil society actors increase the sensitivity of both communities and duty-bearers to identify, prevent and address shortcomings that threaten the wellbeing and rights of children and young people. Over the long term, prevailing attitudes towards harmful practices, discrimination and impunity shift, and the conditions for the realisation of young people's rights within communities improve.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS RELATED TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS' CHANGE PATHWAY

For the programme's strategies to lead to the expected outputs and contribute to the change objectives related to civil society actors, the following assumptions must hold true during the programme period:

- Civic space allows youth groups' and civil society actors' active participation in programme areas.

There are concerns regarding the state of civil society in the programme areas, but to date there have been no indications during programme implementation of restrictions on activities aimed at advancing the rights of children and young people. The programme assumes that the situation will remain at least at its current level and, at the same time, seeks to promote an enabling space for a free civil society by strengthening civil society actors and coordination among them.

- There are civil society actors (e.g. NGOs, INGOs) providing services complementing official ones such as rehabilitation, victim support, health, education etc.

Taksvärkki's programme focuses on strengthening the capacity of civil society actors in relation to youth rights and supporting their communications and advocacy work. The service provision components in the programme are very limited, even though many of those are required to enhance the participation of young people in vulnerable situations. Instead, the programme relies on local service delivery networks, in which services provided by the third sector constitute a significant part, especially in remote areas. Such services include, for example, rehabilitation services, support services for victims of crime, healthcare, formal and non-formal education, as well as various entrepreneurship and employment programmes. In addition to public services, the programme draws on services provided by larger civil society actors, referring cases identified through programme activities to the appropriate services. The underlying assumption is that other civil society actors will continue to provide and develop high-quality services in the programme areas.

- Capacity of the local CSAs is good enough to support youth groups. Civil society actors are willing/ motivated to participate in youth led activities. Civil Society Organizations have willingness and resources to join the youth initiatives and cooperate.

The programme logic relies on youth receiving support by civil society actors at the local level. The programme strengthens local collaboration between youth groups and civil society actors, but its implementation depends on local civil society actors having sufficient resources of their own to operate, as well as aligned interests with the programme and the youth groups. There is collaboration with civil actors that broadly promote child and youth rights, as well as human rights in general. Based on the previous programme experience, these assumptions regarding the civil society actors' interests and capacity are strong.

- Established local Civil Society Actors objectives align with youth groups' interests.

The programme is based on a strong assumption that the local civil society actors most relevant to youth groups are organisations whose own priorities already place child and youth rights at the centre.

- Taksvärkki and partners have sufficient external funding to complement the MFA programme-based support.

A broad funding base is essential for the sustainable operation of organisations. Support for organisational development provided by Taksvärkki must be complemented by other funding sources to ensure that partner organisations' operational capacity rests on a stable foundation. During the previous programme phase, Taksvärkki's contribution to partners' funding base ranged between 7% and 27%. The programme assumes that this proportion will remain roughly similar, but the risk management plan considers possible changes in the priorities and funding opportunities of both international and national donors. The programme can support partners in broadening their funding base, for example by mapping regional funding opportunities and providing recommendation letters to their funding applications to other donors as needed.

5. Programme Implementation

The pathways to change described in the previous chapter are supported by the programme's key strategies, which include thematic and methodological training offered to youth, decision-makers and staff of organisations implementing the programme; personalised support for youth in their life situations; strengthening the organisational capacity of civil society organisations and youth groups implementing the programme; support for youth-led voluntary youth activities; facilitating and strengthening networks and partnerships; and advocacy work towards decision-makers and public authorities. The implementation of the programme during the 2026–2029 programme period is described in sections 5.1–5.4.

The programme's activities, together with the youth work and campaigns organised by youth groups, are expected to reach a total of around 40,000–50,000 children, youth and adults annually in project communities and across Finland. At least half of the youth actively involved in development cooperation projects are girls and young women, and the aim is that by the end of the programme period, 10% of the active members of youth groups involved in the programme will be Youth with Disability. Table 2 breaks down the youth and adults involved in the programme, as well as the children and youth in the project areas who benefit indirectly from the programme's results. Participant numbers vary from year to year.

Table 2: Programme actors, participants and indirect beneficiaries.

Youth	Target number per year
Active youth operating in development cooperation youth groups	2,400–3,000
Other children and youth reached in communities in development cooperation (audiences of peer training sessions, events and campaigns; ordinary members of youth groups)	26,000
Children and youth in programme areas who benefit indirectly from development cooperation	300,000
Active youth in Finland	100
Other children and youth reached in Finland (youth participating in workshops, events and campaigns)	10,000–15,000
Adults	Annual target
Stakeholders and civil society actors participating in development cooperation projects	4,000
Teachers and educators targeted in Finland	500–1,000

The change sought by the programme’s key actors is supported by projects based on priorities and methods for achieving objectives defined by local actors and facilitated by project partners. Local actors retain ownership of the development work from start to finish, meaning that the primary role of Taksvärkki and its partner organisations is to strengthen the capacity and opportunities of youth and other community members to act as agents of change and maintain positive development trajectories. Table 3 presents the projects included in the programme. Global citizenship education activities carried out in Finland are considered as a single project within the programme. During the programme period, opportunities will be explored to pilot new small-scale cooperation projects in the programme countries or in Ukraine with local youth work organisations. Any new pilots will be funded from the unallocated budget.

Table 3: Development cooperation projects and local partner organisations supported by the programme.

Country and region	Partners	Project description
Guatemala Chimalte-nango, San Martín Jilotepeque	Programa de Atención, movilización e incidencia por la niñez y la adolescencia (PAMI)	The project supports the continuity of youth groups, independent youth activities and representation in local working groups. Year-long courses on human rights and civic skills enhance young people’s ability to critically examine their environment, engage in active citizenship and influence decision-making. Delivered as peer education, the courses provide youth groups with a means of recruiting new active members. The role and agency of parents in enabling young people’s active citizenship are supported through intergenerational dialogue and peer activities.
Kenya Nairobi, Kisumu	Undugu Society of Kenya (Undugu)	The project supports the opportunities for youth living and working on the streets to act as agents of change in their communities and defend their rights. Youth leadership and advocacy work are supported so that youth can participate in decision-making that affects them, access the services they are entitled to, and bring about changes to legislation, policies and programmes that prioritise the empowerment of youth living and working on the streets and their protection from discrimination, poverty, violence and exploitation.
Malawi Salima	Centre for Youth Empowerment and Civic Education (CYECE)	The project improves opportunities for youth in rural communities – particularly girls and Youth with Disability – in terms of education, income generation and active participation in their communities. The capacity, networking and representation of youth groups supported by the project in local forums will be strengthened. The root causes of school dropout will be addressed through, for example, SRHR training, support for peer groups and the strengthening of community child protection structures.
Mozambique Maputo, Matola, Boane	Associação Comunitária para o Desenvolvimento Humano (ASSCODECHA)	The project strengthens the active agency and participation of youth, including those in vulnerable situations and Youth with Disability, within their communities to promote sustainable social change. The project supports youth’s access to health services, particularly sexual and reproductive health and HIV care, and advocates to ensure that inclusive education is taken into account and to create a learning environment in schools free from discrimination and harassment.
Nepal Morang, Dhankuta, Jhapa	Environmental Camps for Conservation Awareness (ECCA)	The project promotes the inclusivity, child-friendliness and climate resilience of learning environments in local partner schools, extending the good practices of the model schools supported by the project to schools in neighbouring areas. The development work focuses on school stakeholders and student councils, supporting the sustainability of their structures and their community-oriented advocacy work. A regional peer trainer group of young adults acts as a support for the student councils and a coordinator of civil society work, and its capacity is being strengthened.
Sierra Leone Bo, Port Loko	Centre for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA)	The project strengthens youth participation and leadership at local and national levels. Youth groups work within their communities through multi-stakeholder collaboration to reduce sexual violence and harassment, teenage pregnancies, child marriage and female genital mutilation. The leadership and entrepreneurial skills of Youth with Disability groups are supported to strengthen their livelihoods and advocacy work. Fundraising and links with stakeholders are supported to implement youth initiatives and ensure the sustainability of youth groups.
Finland	Taksvärkki ry	Global citizenship education promotes opportunities for youth in Finland to work towards global justice and sustainable development in a way that suits them. Educators are provided with accessible tools for implementing global citizenship education within their own spheres of influence.
Malawi and Nepal	CYECE, ECCA and Riesa Consultative Oy	The Inclusive Education and Youth Work project involves, among other things, testing an accessibility mapping tool developed by a Finnish company in collaboration with Malawian and Nepalese partners and local schools. The results will be used in schools’ development plans and in advocacy work to promote inclusive education.

5.1 Strengthening Youth's Active Citizenship Skills

For youth at risk of social exclusion and in vulnerable situations, **strengthening life skills** is a prerequisite for achieving inclusion and active citizenship. As in previous programme periods, life skills training will be organised for youth, voluntary peer group activities by youth groups will be supported, and personal advice and support will be offered in various life situations, for example by referring them to services provided by official bodies and other civil society organisations. Youth in vulnerable situations are guided, for example, towards programmes that support their studies or strengthen their entrepreneurial skills, as well as towards sexual and reproductive health services. Life skills include, for example, menstrual health, safety skills for preventing abuse, mental wellbeing skills, health and safety skills, life management and sobriety, strengthening financial literacy, and skills related to self-esteem, group dynamics, leadership and positive life choices. The majority of the work to strengthen life skills is carried out as voluntary activities by youth groups through peer education and role-modelling. Through **global citizenship education materials** produced by Taksvärkki and its partner organisations, which showcase the activities and ideas of active youth, young people are inspired by the positive examples and ideas of their peers in other countries. The realisation that adolescence and youth everywhere in the world can involve similar challenges and sources of joy can be an important, comforting and encouraging insight at an individual level.

Thematic and methodological training on human rights and advocacy skills will continue as in the previous programme period, as active citizenship among youth requires an understanding and recognition of the rights and responsibilities that apply to themselves and others, as well as the mechanisms by which society functions. Key training topics include international human rights standards and legislation, the obligations of those in positions of responsibility, and the structures that perpetuate inequality in society and harmful cultural norms, which will be addressed particularly from the perspectives of children and youth, Persons with Disability, gender equality and non-discrimination. The 2026–2029 programme period will focus on skills that support the sustainability and advocacy work of youth groups, such as communication skills, social auditing processes, and the independent application of planning and monitoring tools in the monitoring, evaluation and development of the youth groups' own activities. Knowledge and skills relating to climate justice, slowing down climate change and adapting to its impacts will also be strengthened.

In Finland, Taksvärkki's **global citizenship education activities** with Finnish schools are nationwide and reach thousands of youths every year through hundreds of workshops. Global citizenship education encourages youth in upper secondary schools and secondary education institutions to act responsibly for a just and sustainable world. **In the guided workshops held during Taksvärkki's school visits**, young adults use active methods to strengthen youth's skills in social influence and critical thinking, as well as their ability to promote sustainable development. The workshops align with the core curricula for primary and upper secondary education, as well as the qualification requirements for vocational education. During the 2026–2029 programme period, the aim is to reach youth from diverse backgrounds living in Finland more comprehensively than before. Cooperation will be developed with vocational schools, youth work organisations and special needs teachers. Plain-language and accessible global citizenship education materials will be produced so that global citizenship education can reach a wide range of learners.

A workshop and resource pack is prepared for Taksvärkki's **global citizenship education campaign**, which changes each academic year, focusing on a topical issue affecting youth in the Global South and in Finland. The campaigns explore the global challenges faced by youth, examine the causes and

consequences of these challenges at both local and global levels, and teach ways to influence in society. The campaigns' diverse materials, lesson activities and workshops enhance youth's understanding of global development issues and enable a critical examination of global phenomena. The campaigns are designed and implemented through collaboration between staff members and youth involved in the development cooperation projects and in Finland.

To enhance effectiveness and sustainability, **synergies between different projects and partners are identified**. Common ground has already been established through cooperation between development cooperation partner organisations and Finnish actors during the 2022–2025 programme period. Taksvärkki's development cooperation and global citizenship education are linked by the connections created between youth. During the 2026–2029 programme period, we will continue with proven forms of cooperation and create new and diverse ways of crossing national borders, with youth and decision-makers working together to promote youth rights and a sustainable future. Through direct cooperation and joint projects carried out remotely, youth and decision-makers will share their thoughts, learn from one another and gain ideas for their own local campaigns and other activities.

5.2 Strengthening Youth Groups and Supporting Independent Action

The programme supports **the organisation of youth groups**, as well as the planning, monitoring and evaluation **of their independent activities**. Youth groups operate with the programme's support, in accordance with annual plans they have drawn up themselves. During the 2026–2029 programme period, development cooperation projects will primarily support youth groups that were already established or activated during the previous programme period, with **support now focusing on strengthening their independent operations and local sustainability structures**. The programme work will focus on developing the groups' organisational structures, as well as the internal division of responsibilities, information sharing and mechanisms for renewal. Similarly, support is provided for youth groups' connections and methods of cooperation with other local actors, including the development of fundraising strategies and the search for local sponsors. During the programme period, opportunities for public sector support for youth group activities will be explored, for example in the form of premises, resources, training and grants. Youth groups will be supported in strengthening their own fundraising strategies. Local and international organisational funding will also be explored, and groups will be supported in independently applying for funding for the small-scale projects they have planned.

Through **participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation** processes, local actors – particularly youth – are empowered to critically examine their own environment and the changes taking place within it, and to analyse the cause-and-effect relationships underlying their observations. Through participatory monitoring and the analysis of ongoing change processes, youth become more aware of their own role and that of others within local social systems, as part of a complex process of change. Participatory monitoring practices also ensure transparency, local ownership and the sustainability of outcomes. In line with the recommendations of the programme evaluation carried out in 2024, during the 2026–2029 programme period, active members of youth groups will be supported and trained to carry out monitoring based on Outcome Mapping independently and to document their observations of change using the *Outcome Harvesting* method.

Youth activities carried out independently by youth groups will be supported in the same way as in the previous programme period. Active members of the groups will lead peer support and discussion groups and organise training sessions and dialogue events for both other youth and adults. Through discussion

sessions, community gatherings, theme days and campaigns, youth will increase people's knowledge and understanding and stimulate discussion on the themes they consider important, which were presented in the context of the Theory of Change in Chapter 4. Youth groups also **support the establishment of new youth groups and capacity building** within local communities in their own areas, for example by organising training sessions and study visits.

In line with the Theory of Change, a key objective of the programme is **to strengthen youth groups as part of a diverse and vibrant local civil society**. Through dialogue meetings and cooperation initiatives, efforts to build relationships between youth groups and local actors will continue. As the sustainability plans of youth groups are strengthened, **local actors and ideas for cooperation will be identified** to support the continuity of the youth groups' activities. The programme supports **the networking** of youth groups with both other youth organisations and local adults and strengthens the groups' opportunities to participate in local networks and working groups.

With the support of Taksvärkki's partner organisations and other civil society actors, youth groups also engage in **advocacy work** directly with decision-makers, for example through various **social audit processes**. In the run-up to elections, youth groups challenge candidates at election panels on youth policy issues and campaign for responsible voting.

Across Finland, **young volunteers** aged 13–29, living in different parts of the country and from diverse backgrounds, form smaller groups of active youth, such as global citizenship education trainers. Task-specific volunteer groups **devise and carry out activities**, such as school visits, communications and events. These activities raise awareness among active youth themselves, other youth and the general public about youth rights and sustainable development. Through **safe spaces, peer support, meaningful activities and opportunities to make a difference**, youth become committed to the work and proactively put forward their ideas.

The programme supports the learning of youth volunteer groups, particularly global citizenship education trainers, through **in-depth meetings, training sessions and materials** throughout the academic year. The training sessions draw on the expertise of Taksvärkki's global citizenship education specialists as well as that of partner organisations. The skills of global citizenship education trainers are also developed by providing tools and support for monitoring and evaluating their own learning. Youth continuing from the previous programme period support newer trainers by, for example, acting as peer trainers during induction trainings and taking on more responsible roles in tailoring workshops to the needs of different groups.

The group of student representatives from Global Citizen's Schools consists of pupils from Finnish schools committed to long-term cooperation. The development of the student leaders' agency is supported **through training and materials** that introduce global themes and encourage them to reflect on and develop their own solutions to global and local challenges. The student representatives **shape and implement their groups' activities, such as events**, together with Taksvärkki and other youth and their teachers. Through long-term school partnerships, the quality and impact of global citizenship education are enhanced, and **best practices are modelled** for use by other schools, both in Finland and globally through networks. **Cooperation** with youth from other schools and development cooperation projects supports mutual learning and networking among groups.

5.3 Strengthening Youth-Friendly Operating Models Among Those in Positions of Responsibility

Training sessions, workshops, peer learning events, study visits and advocacy events for decision-makers will continue as in the previous programme period. Local decision-makers and authorities will be invited, for example, to training sessions on disability and equality, or support will be provided for the development of child- and youth-friendly learning environments and the use of teaching methods that engage youth. In Finland, the knowledge and skills of teachers, trainee teachers and youth workers in leisure-time youth work will be strengthened in promoting global development issues related to youth rights.

Intergenerational dialogue and parental support for youth will be strengthened by training, for example, young people's parents, representatives of parent associations and mother groups, together with youth or through youth groups, on topics such as sexual rights or harmful traditional practices. Intergenerational dialogue sessions encourage more open discussion, peer support among carers, and the breaking down of taboos related to, for example, menstruation or family planning, or the addressing of harmful traditions within families and communities.

Decision-makers and authorities are also influenced through various networks and expert working groups, in which Taksvärkki's partner organisations and youth groups operate with the programme's support. Youth-led advocacy events, such as service evaluation processes using the *Community Score Cards* tool or dialogues with police representatives on the dignified treatment of youth living and working on the streets, encourage decision-makers and authorities to develop more youth-friendly services, taking into account recommendations received from youth themselves.

In Finland, **global citizenship education materials** are **produced for teachers and educators** to support the curricula for primary and secondary education and the qualification requirements for vocational schools. Materials that meet users' current needs complement existing textbooks and learning materials produced by other organisations.

Educators have highlighted the need for, among other things, global citizenship education that is written in plain language, accessible, takes into account the needs of different pupils, and is available in Swedish. Thematically, educators have highlighted in the needs assessment that they require support in their teaching, for example, in addressing the realities and power structures of youth in the Global South, as well as in highlighting the impacts of climate change on the lives of youth in the Global South. During the 2026–2029 programme period, materials and training courses that take into account the needs of different learners and in various languages will be produced on key themes. More accessible global citizenship education has also been at the heart of Taksvärkki's activities during the previous programme period.

For almost a decade now, Taksvärkki has been engaged in long-term **'Global Citizen's School' partnerships** with Finnish educational institutions. Through **the training and activities** carried out as part of the programme, **as well as peer support and interaction**, the lead teachers at Global Citizen's Schools are able to identify and address issues affecting young people's lives and futures, such as inequality, structural power dynamics, climate awareness, opportunities for influence and meaningful youth participation. The lead teachers, **both individually and together with the student representatives, promote a school culture that supports a sustainable future, encourage youth to become responsible global citizens, and inspire other stakeholders** to bring about change in order to promote youth rights.

The Global Citizen's School initiative is developed from the perspective of both schools' current needs and youth's agency. During previous programme cycles, joint activities between different schools have proven to be useful and effective. Furthermore, cooperation with development cooperation project partners or other forms of connection to the global context have been considered important. New, appropriate models for implementing global citizenship education and global cooperation will be developed in collaboration with partner schools and development cooperation partner organisations during the 2026–2029 programme period.

5.4 Learning, Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation and New Innovations

The expertise and position of Taksvärkki and the partner organisations implementing development cooperation projects are directly linked not only to the quality of the work and the programme's effectiveness, but also to the organisations' broader impact and the sustainability of the results. The programme **supports the organisational development and operational stability of partner organisations** so that they can act ever more effectively as advocates for the rights of children and youth within their own contexts. The organisations' capacity is supported **through training and peer learning sessions** that strengthen thematic and methodological expertise, and, where possible, through learning visits.

Through programme cooperation contribution, partner organisations **expand their networks** by participating in regional and national working groups, multi-stakeholder projects and advocacy networks, where information and results from the work carried out by each actor are coordinated and shared, as well as the regional situation and cooperation needs. As part of these networks and working groups, organisations engage **in advocacy work** directly with decision-makers, for example by participating in the preparation of legislation and policy programmes or reform processes, or in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of human rights and the drafting of related civil society shadow reports.

The Taksvärkki Partner Forum is a joint learning community, operating mainly online, between Taksvärkki and the local partner organisations implementing the programme's projects; in which annual learning objectives and plans are defined jointly with the participants. **Partner webinars** are accessible opportunities for shared learning, where partners take turns presenting their own good practices. External experts may also be invited to these events to train organisations on topics related to the shared learning objectives. During the 2026–2029 programme period, capacity building for partner organisations will focus on remote training and peer learning events organised within the framework of the partner forum. The learning objectives relate, among other things, to effective advocacy work and its monitoring, climate expertise, and the sharing of good practices in youth-led monitoring methods. During the programme period, some partner organisations will be given the opportunity to gain a closer insight into the work of Taksvärkki and other partner organisations. Face-to-face meetings reinforce the lessons learnt from webinars, encourage the deepening of networks between partner organisations, and also provide space for informal exchange of experiences and peer learning. During the programme period, practices **for joint and peer evaluation** conducted remotely will also be developed and piloted. At the end of the programme period, the lessons learnt and good practices gained during the multi-year collaboration will be compiled for sharing within the partner network and more widely among development cooperation actors.

During the programme period, an accessibility mapping tool created by the Finnish company Riesa Consultative Oy will be tested and developed **in a disability project** aimed at developing inclusive learning environments and youth work in Malawi and, initially, also in Nepal. Cooperation with

Taksvärkki and its local partners supports Riesa Consultative's ability to adapt its accessibility mapping tool to the operating environments of the Global South. For Taksvärkki and its partners, the project is first and foremost a learning process, which also strengthens the accessibility expertise of stakeholders at local partner schools. At the local level, the results of the assessments are used as a tool for advocacy work promoting inclusive education.

During the 2022–2025 programme period, Taksvärkki has carried out **a user-led needs assessment covering, among other things, materials and training provision for volunteering and global citizenship education**. Young adults were surveyed as part of a service design thesis on forms of volunteering in the 2020s, and a needs assessment was carried out among educators regarding, for example, the formats and themes of printed and digital materials where educators feel they need support. When producing materials, workshops or training for the school sector, and when developing a volunteering model that meets the needs of youth and the organisation's current situation, Taksvärkki will increasingly take user-driven development models into account during the 2026–2029 programme period.

During the previous programme period, **cooperation between operations in Finland and partner organisations** was strengthened. In both cases, Taksvärkki's development cooperation and global citizenship education are linked by the connections created between youth. A key focus of the entire programme is to support mutual activities among youth through the sharing of common inspiration and interactive learning. During the 2026–2029 programme period, interaction and dialogue between development cooperation partners and activities in Finland will be further developed. In collaboration with youth groups in development cooperation projects and Finnish youth, global citizenship education content will be produced and cooperation established between youth groups and educators. Activities will be planned together with partners to ensure they also align with the objectives of development cooperation projects. Partners utilise the activities and materials in their own work with youth. Based on previous lessons, new and increasingly effective ways are developed to put the 'youth-to-youth' principle into practice between youth in Finland and youth in the various countries involved in development cooperation projects, with the aim of strengthening global citizenship skills. In this way, youth gain an experience of shared global citizenship in a shared world and of sustainable development as a common goal for all.