

Project Evaluation of “Accelerate SDGs in East Africa” for the UN Association of Finland



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
HLPF	The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IATWG	The Inter Agency Technical Working Group
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TOR	Terms of Reference
TSDP	Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform
UN	United Nations
UNAFI	UN Association of Finland
UNA Tanzania	UN Association of Tanzania
UNA Uganda	UN Association of Uganda
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
VLR	Voluntary Local Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review
Wfuna	World Federation of UN Associations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation assessed the project *Accelerate SDGs in East Africa (2021–2026)*, implemented by the UN Association of Finland in partnership with the UN Association of Tanzania, the UN Association of Uganda and the SDGs Kenya Forum. The evaluation covered Phase I (2021–2024) and the first three years of Phase II (2023–2025), with the purpose of assessing the project's results, identifying foundations for future work, and examining the sustainability of achieved outcomes.

The evaluation was conducted between January and May 2026 by Veera Pensala (team leader) and Kristiina Mikkola. The evaluation applied a mixed-methods approach, combining document review, outcome harvesting, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. The assessment was guided by OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, focusing on relevance, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability.

The evaluation finds the project to be highly relevant to national SDG priorities and governance processes in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The intervention responded to clearly identified gaps in inclusive SDG implementation, monitoring, reporting, and stakeholder participation, while strongly aligning with national development priorities, Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes, and broader commitments to sustainable development and inclusive governance. By focusing on SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), the project addressed structural bottlenecks related to coordination, civil society engagement, data availability, and accountability.

The project contributed significantly to strengthening civil society participation and leadership in SDG implementation and reporting processes across all three countries. Civil society engagement became broader, more structured, and increasingly institutionalized, particularly in VNR processes. Project partners strengthened their role as trusted conveners and technical actors within national SDG governance systems. In Kenya and Tanzania especially, civil society actors gained formalized roles in national SDG coordination and reporting mechanisms, while Uganda demonstrated gradual but meaningful progress despite a more constrained civic environment.

A key achievement of the project was the strengthening of collaboration and trust between civil society and authorities. Relationships shifted toward more regular and strategic cooperation, contributing to improved dialogue, stronger multi-stakeholder coordination, and increased recognition of civil society expertise, including citizen-generated data. The project demonstrated that SDG processes can serve as a constructive and politically neutral entry point for collaboration, even in contexts where civic space is constrained.

The project also significantly advanced the inclusion and agency of marginalized groups, particularly youth, women, and persons with disabilities. Participation moved toward more meaningful engagement in national development and reporting processes. Young people increasingly assumed leadership roles as advocates, organizers, and contributors to policy discussions. Evidence from Uganda and Kenya suggests that some youth-led initiatives have continued independently, indicating promising signs of sustainability where local ownership is strong.

The evaluation found evidence that the project improved the quality, inclusiveness, and credibility of national SDG reporting. Civil society-generated evidence, grassroots perspectives, and citizen-generated data increasingly informed VNR processes and national dialogue. In Kenya and Tanzania, formal cooperation arrangements with national statistical systems strengthened the recognition and use of civil society data in official reporting, although systematic uptake into policy implementation remains uneven and continues to evolve.

The project also strengthened the institutional and technical capacities of partner organizations and broader civil society networks. Capacities in human rights-based approaches, inclusive facilitation, data

use, advocacy, and SDG reporting improved substantially. Regional peer learning and collaboration proved particularly valuable, enhancing credibility, knowledge exchange, and joint advocacy across countries.

Sustainability prospects are generally positive. Several project results have become embedded in formal structures and processes, including VNR coordination mechanisms, partnerships with authorities, and strengthened institutional roles of partner organizations. Skills, networks, and relationships developed through the project are likely to endure beyond the project period. At the same time, sustainability is challenged by external risks, including shrinking civic space, political changes, staff turnover, declining donor funding, and the inherently dynamic nature of youth engagement.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that *Accelerate SDGs in East Africa* has been a highly relevant, effective, and strategically influential initiative. While the project alone cannot drive SDG achievement, it has created important enabling conditions for sustained progress through stronger data systems, improved coordination, inclusive participation, and enhanced accountability mechanisms. Its most significant contribution lies in strengthening the role of civil society as a credible and influential actor in SDG governance and in fostering stronger connections between local realities, marginalized voices, and national planning systems.

The evaluation recommends consolidating institutionalized civil society participation in SDG governance, strengthening the systematic use of civil society-generated data, sustaining meaningful inclusion of marginalized groups, diversifying funding and partnerships to improve resilience, and strengthening monitoring of higher-level outcomes and sustainability.

1. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

1.1 Objectives

In accordance with the Terms of reference (ToR in Annex 1), the purpose of this assignment was to conduct an external evaluation of the on-going project “Accelerate SDGs in East Africa”, covering the Phase I (2021-2024) and first three years from the Phase II (2023-2025).

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the project and to provide recommendations for the future work. The objectives of the evaluation were:

- To assess the changes brought about by the project
- To identify the key components on which future work can be built
- To assess the sustainability of the project in terms of what will remain after the project ends

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation was carried out by Veera Pensala (team leader) and Kristiina Mikkola in January-May 2026.

The evaluation examined the project from the perspective of the evaluation questions defined in the Terms of Reference, reflecting the evaluation criteria of OECD-DAC (relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability). It was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines for evaluations by the UNEG (United Nations Evaluation Group) and the principles of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland’s assessment practice.

The evaluation combined findings from document review with online workshops and interviews. The evaluation applied mixed methods for collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data to enable triangulation in the identification of key findings. The following methods were used in the evaluation:

a) **Document review.** A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the project documents was carried out from the perspective of the evaluation questions. The materials reviewed are listed in the Annex 2.

b) **Outcome harvesting (2 workshops).** The main method used in the evaluation was the outcome harvesting, which was used to identify and document the most significant changes generated by the project at both outcome and impact levels. The workshops were carried out jointly with all project partners. The platform used for online collaboration was Miro.

c) **Focus groups (4 focus groups discussions).** Focus group discussions were conducted with each project partner. These discussions gathered information related to the evaluation questions that were not covered through the outcome harvesting method. The discussions followed a semi-structured format.

d) **Interviews (11 persons).** Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the key informants from Finland, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (see Annex 3).

e) **Validation workshop (1 meeting).** An online workshop for project partners was organised to validate the evaluation findings and gather feedback and comments.

2. THE PROJECT

The UN Association of Finland (UNAFI) is a non-governmental organization that promotes and supports the actions and principles of the United Nations. UNAFI has been engaged in development cooperation in East Africa since 2003.

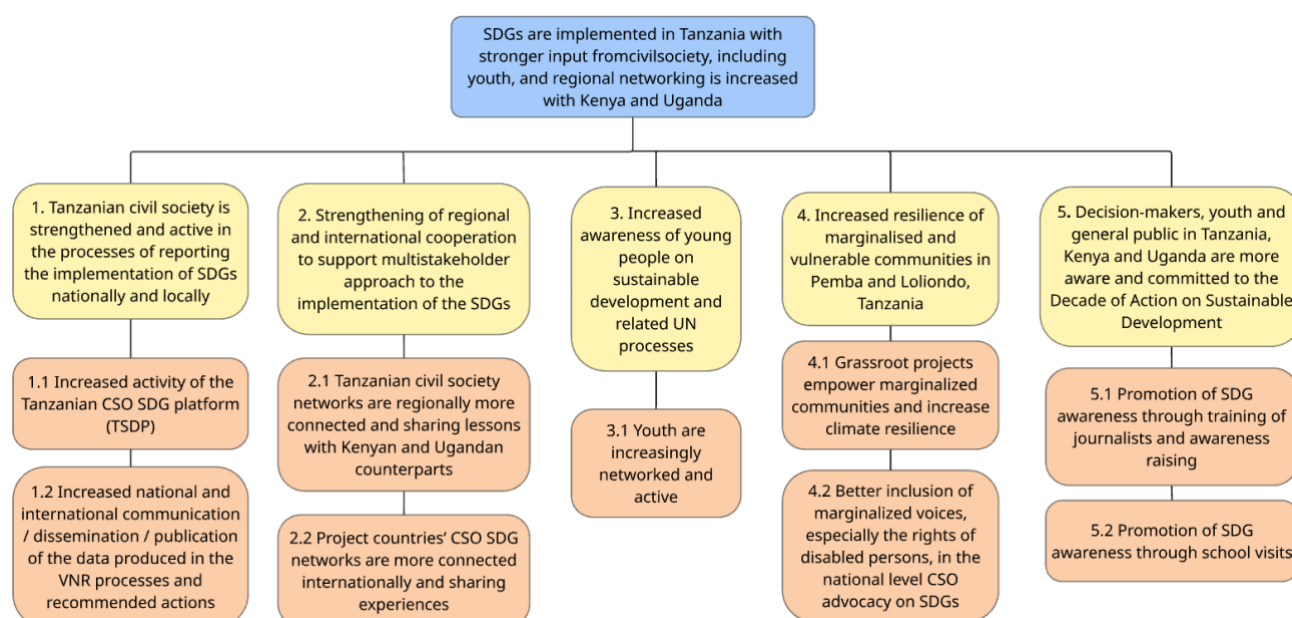
Accelerating SDG Implementation in East Africa (Phases I and II, 2021–2026) is a regional project covering Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. The project is implemented by UNA Tanzania as the lead partner, in partnership with UNA Uganda and SDGs Kenya Forum. The project is funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The budget for Phase I was EUR 779 290 and for Phase II EUR 924 700.

A context assessment of institutional and policy framework for SDGs in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda was published in 2021 (UNA Tanzania, 2021). The study justifies the project by drawing attention on:

- importance of multi-sectorial approach and resource mobilisation for integration of SDGs,
- data, monitoring and reporting challenges to monitor progress on SDGs,
- strength of multi-stakeholder engagement and partnerships in the countries and,
- civil society capacity and engagement in the sustainable development processes in the countries.

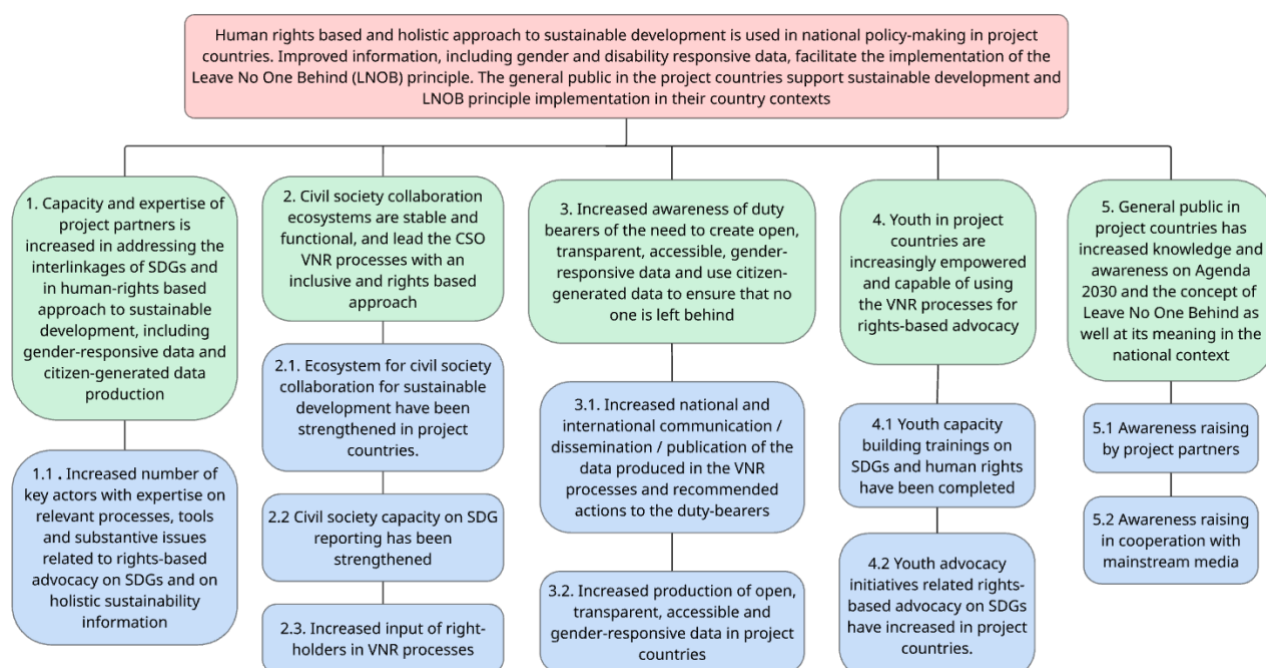
During Phase I (2021–2024), the project aimed to strengthen the capacity of decision-makers to identify integrated solutions and advance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at both national and local levels. The target groups included parliamentarians, municipal leaders, key civil servants, civil society organizations, youth and journalists. The planned results of Phase I are depicted in the result chain below (Table 1).

Table 1. SDGs in Eastern Africa, Phase I 2021-2024



Phase II (2023–2026) started parallel to Phase I and has focused on strengthening the capacity and expertise of project partners in applying human rights–based and gender-responsive approaches to sustainable development, including the use of gender-responsive data and citizen-generated data. Table 2 presents the planned results of Phase II.

Table 2. SDGs in Eastern Africa, Phase II 2023-2026



Overall, the project (Phases I and II) seeks to enhance the effective and inclusive local implementation of the SDGs. It also empowers civil society organizations and youth to meaningfully influence SDG implementation, monitoring, and reporting, ensuring that national progress better reflects community priorities and leaves no one behind.

The expected results include strengthened SDG implementation in Tanzania through more active engagement of civil society, including youth. In addition, regional networking is enhanced, and inclusive, civil society-led processes are utilized to voice the priorities of marginalized groups to duty-bearers in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. In particular, the human rights-based approach is further integrated into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Relevance

When the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was approved, the countries committed to engaging in systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of the Agenda. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF, established in 2016) is the central United Nations platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda also encouraged the Member States to conduct regularly country-led and country-driven reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels. This process is known as Voluntary National Review (VNR). The VNRs are presented annually at the HLPF meeting in New York. By the end of 2025, nearly 150 countries had presented two or more VNRs.

The project is very relevant to national SDG priorities. This is demonstrated by the following:

1. The governments in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are committed to SDGs and they have shown a demonstrated commitment to Voluntary National Reviews already before the project started. Government of Kenya has presented three VNRs (2017, 2020 and 2024), Government of Uganda similarly three (2016, 2020 and 2024) and Government of Tanzania is working on its third VNR in 2026 (previous VNRs in 2019 and 2023). In addition to supporting VNRs, the project engaged with the City Council of Mwanza in producing the first Voluntary Local Review in Tanzania. CSO VNRs were produced in Tanzania (2023), Kenya (2024) and Uganda (focus on youth, 2024).
2. The project partners (SDGs Kenya Forum, UNA Tanzania and UNA Uganda) are members of the national mechanisms for SDG implementation that were mostly in place when this project started. In each country the mechanisms, although government led, encourage and invite multistakeholder participation. The Inter Agency Technical Working Group (IATWG) was officially established in 2020, with SGT Kenya serving as its secretariat. The Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform (TSDP), of which UNA Tanzania is a co-founder and convener, was established in 2015. In Uganda, a multistakeholder coordination framework was established in 2016; UNA Uganda is indirectly engaged through Uganda National NGO Forum. The project has had both direct and indirect inputs to these national mechanisms, either by building the capacities of project partners (Tanzania and Uganda) or by strengthening the multistakeholder coordination mechanisms (IATWG in Kenya and TSDP in Tanzania).
3. Out of the 17 SDGs that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes, SDGs 1-16 are prominently sector specific focusing on issues such as decent work and economic growth, life on land, sustainable cities and communities, reduced inequality or gender equality. Each of these goals has drawn the interest and attention of various international stakeholders and governments to support their implementation. This project has targeted Goal 17 Partnerships for Goals. The project has explicitly contributed to several targets of this SDG (see table 3 below).

Table 3. SDG 17 with relevant targets

SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Examples of targets that the project has contributed to are:

- Target 17.9 Enhance SDG capacity in developing countries
- Target 17.h Encourage effective partnerships
- Target 17.i Enhance availability of reliable data

4. While the end of the SDGs era is drawing close, the ethos of sustainable development is not likely to go away. Principles of sustainable development have become increasingly embedded into policies, plans and actions at local, national and global level. For example, the governments in the partner countries are also committed to the African Union strategic framework for socioeconomic development in Africa (Agenda 2063) which may be a vehicle to carry some of the SDGs forward beyond 2030. The work of this project is very relevant also in this respect.

3.2 Impact and effectiveness: Results

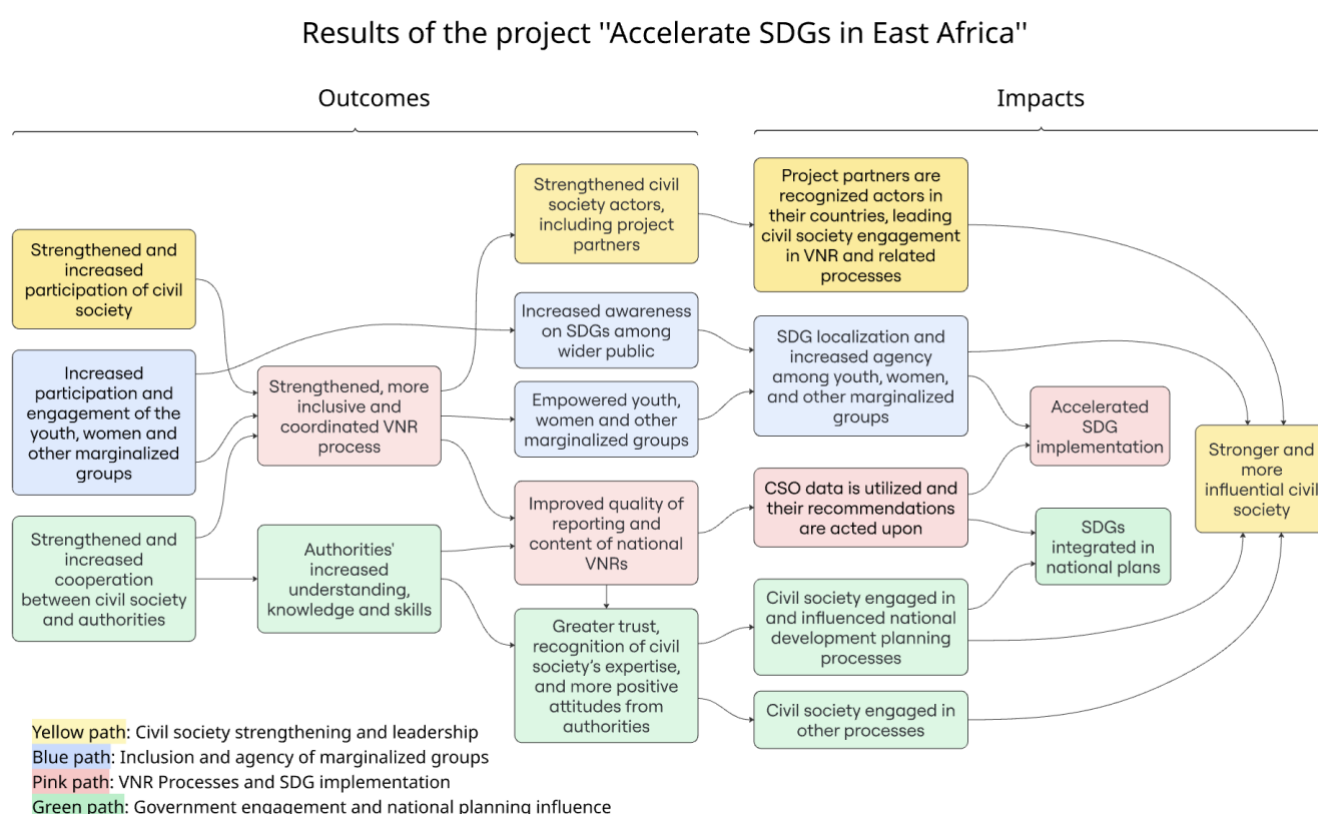
The evaluation identified a total of 18 results for the project. The methodology used was outcome harvesting, after which the results were linked into cause-and-effect pathways (see figure below).

The division between the project's outcomes and impacts is illustrated in the figure, where the outcomes correspond to the project's results framework outcomes and impacts to the overall objectives (see tables 1 and 2).

Taken as a whole, the project contributed to strengthening civil society, enhancing inclusion, and fostering cooperation with authorities across all three project countries. These changes contributed to improved national SDG reporting processes (namely VNR), which in turn supported the integration of SDGs into national planning and accelerated their implementation. At the same time, the role and influence of civil society were reinforced.

In this report, results are described according to the different pathways of change (yellow, blue, red, and green), which helps to highlight the causal relationships between them and illustrates how individual results contribute to broader, longer-term changes across the intervention pathways.

Figure 1. Results of the project "Accelerate SDGs in East Africa"



3.2.1 Civil society strengthening and leadership (yellow path)

Strengthened and increased participation of civil society

Strengthened and increased participation of civil society. The project significantly expanded and diversified civil society participation in SDG processes across all three countries. Broad-based consultations—especially around the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)—brought together a wide range of actors, including grassroots organizations and marginalized groups.

In Kenya, multi-stakeholder platform meetings enabled around 100 CSOs to engage directly with government, while civil society also produced its own VNR in 2024. Beyond preparing their own parallel report, civil society actors were also deeply involved in the national process itself.

In Tanzania, participation grew dramatically: the number of CSOs and CBOs involved in the VNR process in 2023 increased from around 500 (in 2019) to over 2 800, covering the entire country. Network of organisations of persons with disabilities, youth and women became also actively involved.

In Uganda, the project strengthened collaboration among CSOs, including through joint planning and collective SDG-related activities, despite a shrinking civic space.

Strengthened civil society actors, including project partners

Strengthened civil society actors, including project partners. The project substantially strengthened the capacities of civil society actors at both organizational and individual levels. Through the VNR processes, CSOs gained practical knowledge on how to engage in reporting processes and contribute evidence-based inputs to international mechanisms. In general,

CSOs improved skills especially in data collection, reporting and advocacy.

Across all project countries, partners developed their capacity to engage more effectively with youth, women, and other marginalized groups. They also strengthened their integration of human rights-based approaches and disability inclusion, while expanding their networks and participation in regional and global SDG forums.

In Kenya, the SDGs Kenya Forum—already a strong actor—further strengthened its role as a national convener, enhancing its ability to bring together diverse stakeholders and coordinate civil society inputs into national and global processes.

In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania experienced organizational growth and strengthened its strategic and programmatic capacities. It also developed its ability to coordinate diverse stakeholders, including government actors and the private sector. In addition, it enhanced its capacity to strengthen the Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform (TSDP) platform and to manage the technical complexities involved in coordinating multiple partners.

In Uganda, UNA Uganda evolved from a largely volunteer-based organization into a recognized youth-sector actor with stronger systems, partnerships, and visibility. Its collaboration with government institutions and participation in media and public discourse increased significantly.

Project partners are recognized actors in their countries, leading civil society engagement in VNR and related processes

Project partners are recognized actors in their countries, leading civil society engagement in VNR and related processes. As a result of strengthened capacities and sustained engagement, project partners have become recognized and trusted actors in national SDG processes. They now play key leadership roles in convening civil society and facilitating engagement with governments.

In Kenya, the SDGs Kenya Forum is a recognized central platform for civil society coordination, leading engagement in VNR processes. It serves as co-chair of the Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee—the highest national advisory body on SDG implementation, monitoring, and reporting—thereby holding a formal role within government SDG structures.

In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania plays a leading role in coordinating civil society engagement in VNR processes through the Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform (TSDP). TSDP is formally recognized within the National SDG Coordination Framework as the official civil society entity on SDG matters and has been mandated by the government to coordinate civil society input to VNRs (including 2023 and preparations for 2026). UNA Tanzania also serves as a key partner in national SDG monitoring and reporting processes and represents civil society in integrating global commitments into national development frameworks.

In Uganda, UNA Uganda co-leads the youth thematic area within the national CSO SDG reference group. It has been entrusted with coordinating youth input to the VNR—including producing a Youth VNR report integrated into the national submission—and has served in advisory roles to the national VNR delegation. UNA Uganda is also selected as a key civil society partner in government evaluations on gender equality and SDG implementation and was selected as a key partner for the youth thematic area of the UN Human Rights Universal Periodic Review (UPR) planning process which further reinforce its institutional role and influence in the country.

Stronger and more influential civil society

Stronger and more influential civil society. Taken together, these changes have contributed to a stronger, more coordinated, and more influential civil society across the three countries. Overall, civil society actors are now more visible, better equipped and connected, and more influential in shaping SDG implementation and wider development processes.

Civil society has enhanced its effectiveness through stronger systems, collaboration, and targeted engagement, particularly in youth-focused work. Large, coordinated platforms have enabled nationwide engagement and strengthened collective advocacy, while improved dialogue and trust between civil society and authorities have further reinforced this role.

Across all three countries, civil society has moved beyond participation towards more strategic and influential engagement—providing evidence-based inputs, shaping national and parallel reporting processes, and contributing actively to broader development discussions. Civil society inputs are increasingly integrated into reporting frameworks, linking grassroots perspectives with policy-level decision-making.

3.2.2 Inclusion and agency of marginalized groups (blue path)

Increased participation and engagement of the youth, women and other marginalized groups

Increased participation and engagement of youth, women, and other marginalized groups. The project significantly increased broader and meaningful participation of youth, women, and marginalized groups in SDG implementation framework across all three countries, with UNA Uganda, UNA Tanzania, and the SDGs Kenya Forum playing a central role in creating inclusive spaces and mechanisms for engagement.

Across all three countries, youth participation increased substantially compared to previous years, when young people were rarely involved at this scale or recognized as credible contributors to policymaking. The project helped shift perceptions by strengthening youth voices and positioning young people as active contributors, content creators, and accountability actors rather than passive audiences or beneficiaries.

In Kenya, the project strengthened institutionalized youth participation through annual youth pre-conferences, representation in national SDG coordination structures, and engagement with grassroots communities, including women in informal settlements such as Kibera. Youth representatives became part of the Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee and were provided dedicated speaking opportunities in panels and plenary sessions. The Leave No One Behind Coalition further expanded participation of persons with disabilities, elderly people, indigenous communities, and vulnerable grassroots women. Collaboration with United Persons with Disability Kenya Network strengthened direct engagement of persons with disabilities in SDG processes and VNR consultations. Several youth leaders also advanced to regional and global platforms, including the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and the United Nations General Assembly.

In Tanzania, inclusive participation was promoted through structured consultations, dedicated Leave No One Behind hearings, and separate youth engagement processes linked to the Development Vision 2050 consultations. These processes reached tens of thousands of young people and included persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, women, and ethnic minority groups. As youth represent the largest demographic group in Tanzania yet have traditionally been overlooked in decision-making, the project played an important role in strengthening recognition of youth perspectives in national development discussions.

In Uganda, the project significantly expanded youth and other marginalized groups' participation and inclusion in SDG processes despite a shrinking civic space and increasing barriers to civic engagement. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening youth engagement and creating more coherent and organized channels for youth participation in SDG processes. Young people, especially out-of-school youth and those living in informal settlements, were supported to contribute to national policy and development discussions as active stakeholders rather than fragmented or isolated voices. This strengthened accountability by creating clearer mechanisms for tracking whether youth priorities and recommendations were reflected in national processes. The project also introduced more accessible and inclusive participation approaches, including targeted outreach, tailored community activities, and the use of interpreters and disability-sensitive engagement methods. Collaboration with the National Union of Persons with Disabilities helped identify and engage participants who are often left outside national consultation processes. These efforts strengthened the quality and legitimacy of participation by ensuring that marginalized groups were not only consulted symbolically but actively listened to in SDG discussions and reporting processes.

Empowered youth, women and other marginalized groups

Empowered youth, women, and other marginalized groups. The project empowered marginalized groups, especially youth, to move from passive participants to active agents of change, with project partners providing tools, platforms, and opportunities for leadership and advocacy. Across all countries, participants gained skills, confidence, and networks, enabling them to influence development processes and act independently beyond the project.

The project gave many young people their first exposure to the VNR process, helping them understand how SDG progress is reviewed and how reporting works. They were able to contribute ideas, take part in discussions shaping the reports, and bring youth perspectives into national-level processes. Overall, participation shifted from symbolic involvement to more structured and meaningful engagement, strengthening the credibility and influence of civil society contributions.

In Kenya, the SDGs Kenya Forum supported youth leadership and advocacy, enabling young people to organize, produce policy inputs, and even establish their own organizations. Grassroots women were also empowered to bring forward issues such as safety, economic participation, and gender-based violence into policy dialogues.

In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania strengthened youth empowerment through targeted engagement, capacity building, and dedicated reporting spaces. Youth perspectives were systematically included in VNR and UPR processes, and young people were supported to articulate their priorities and influence policy discussions.

In Uganda, UNA Uganda fostered strong ownership among youth, leading to the creation of youth-led networks and initiatives, including multiple self-organized projects without external funding. Young people increasingly engaged in advocacy, public debates, and community action, demonstrating behavioral change and long-term commitment to SDGs.

SDG localization and increased agency among youth, women, and other marginalized groups

SDG localization and increased agency among youth, women, and other marginalized groups. The project advanced the localization of SDGs by making them concrete, relevant, and actionable at the community level, while strengthening the agency of local actors—especially youth. Overall, the project helped shift SDGs from high-level policy frameworks to locally owned and implemented development actions.

Across all countries, localization was strengthened through accessible communication, peer learning, and community-driven solutions. As a result, people began to see the SDGs as relevant to their daily lives rather than abstract concepts. This fostered greater ownership and agency, as youth and marginalized groups not only understood the SDGs but actively applied them in their own contexts.

In Kenya, the SDGs Kenya Forum advanced localization through community-level engagement, including SDG festivals and dialogues in informal settlements. These initiatives connected global goals to real-life challenges such as safety, livelihoods, and urban development. They also encouraged more active participation in governance and empowered young people to use social media to raise awareness on issues like climate change and social justice.

In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania contributed to the global recognition of localization efforts, particularly through the Mwanza Voluntary Local Review—the first of its kind in Africa. This initiative demonstrated how multi-stakeholder collaboration can effectively translate the SDGs into local planning and action.

In Uganda, UNA Uganda played a key role in translating the SDGs into local languages and practical community actions. Youth and local leaders integrated SDG principles into everyday activities, including community dialogues, local governance processes, and grassroots initiatives addressing health, the environment, and livelihoods. The project also established a Youth–CSO Advocacy Network, which led to 18 youth-led projects launched in 2025 without external funding, as well as the creation of active university SDG clubs where students continue implementing initiatives independently.

Increased awareness
on SDGs among
wider public

Increased awareness of SDGs among the wider public. The project has increased public awareness and understanding of SDGs in all three countries – journalists, youth and other actors playing a key role in translating global agendas into accessible and relevant messages. Overall,

SDGs shifted from being abstract global concepts to widely understood and publicly discussed development priorities.

Across all countries, UNA Uganda, UNA Tanzania, and the SDGs Kenya Forum utilized media, digital platforms, and public campaigns to reach wide audiences. By 2024, their combined social media reach exceeded 1.6 million followers, while broader campaigns reached tens of millions through traditional media.

In Kenya, the SDGs Kenya Forum played a central role in shaping public discourse, working closely with media and recognizing journalists through SDG awards. This strengthened accountability and made SDG issues more visible and understandable to the public.

In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania supported the establishment of the SDG Journalist Club, strengthening media capacity to communicate SDGs and increasing nationwide visibility through radio, television, and social media.

In Uganda, UNA Uganda achieved strong digital and media visibility, reaching millions through campaigns such as #MySDGsMyVoiceUG. It also trained youth and journalists, resulting in more consistent and relatable SDG coverage and increased public engagement.

3.2.3 VNR Processes and SDG implementation (pink path)

Strengthened, more
inclusive and
coordinated VNR
process

Strengthened, more inclusive and coordinated VNR process. The project significantly strengthened the inclusiveness, coordination, and institutionalization of VNR processes across all three countries. Civil society participation became broader, more inclusive, more structured, and increasingly influential, with marginalized voices more actively reflected in

national SDG monitoring and reporting processes. Civil society actors were engaged earlier, more systematically, and in larger numbers throughout the VNR process—from data collection to drafting and validation.

In Kenya, civil society actively participated across all stages of the 2024 VNR, including data discussions, drafting, and submission. SDGs Kenya Forum also played a central coordinating role through its co-chair position in the Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee, the country’s highest SDG advisory body.

In Tanzania, civil society engagement became institutionalized. Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform was officially mandated to coordinate CSO inputs to the VNR, marking the first time civil

society had a formal role in national SDG coordination structures. Participation expanded significantly and became more structured nationwide.

In Uganda, although civic space is more constrained, the project improved coordination and trust between civil society and government. Civil society actors—particularly youth representatives—gained more formal and meaningful roles in VNR processes, including leadership of thematic areas.

Improved quality of reporting and content of national VNRs

Improved quality of reporting and content of national VNRs. The project improved both the depth and credibility of VNR reporting by strengthening data systems, analytical capacity, and multi-stakeholder engagement. Capacity building on data use, human rights-based approaches, and reporting methodologies further improved the quality, relevance, and analytical depth of contributions.

Across all three countries, the inclusion of civil society perspectives and citizen-generated data enriched reporting with grassroots insights and community-level evidence. Overall, VNR reports became more inclusive, evidence-based, and better reflected the realities and challenges experienced by different population groups. In practice, the experiences, perspectives, and data collected from marginalized communities were documented in civil society shadow reports and background materials, and were also brought directly into policy dialogues with decision-makers.

In Tanzania, the 2023 CSO VNR report was significantly more comprehensive than the 2019 report, incorporating stronger human rights-based analysis and more detailed, evidence-based recommendations. The contributor base also expanded from a small number of individuals to a broader team of experts and stakeholders. Youth perspectives were more systematically reflected in reporting, including through dedicated sections on the situation of young people in Tanzania.

In Kenya, the integration of civil society inputs alongside government data contributed to more balanced and context-sensitive reporting in 2024 by combining official statistics with lived experiences and evidence from grassroots communities.

In Uganda, the project strengthened understanding of VNR reporting processes in 2024 and supported more evidence-based civil society contributions, particularly through youth-led reporting and participation.

CSO data is utilized and their recommendations are acted upon

CSO data is utilized and their recommendations are acted upon. A key achievement of the project was the increased recognition and institutional use of civil society-generated data in national SDG processes.

In Kenya and Tanzania, formal agreements (MoUs) between civil society platforms and national statistical offices enabled the use of citizen-generated data in official reporting, provided quality standards are met. This represents a major shift toward more inclusive and evidence-based national data systems.

In Uganda, a similar MoU was signed between CSOs and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, establishing frameworks for data collection, validation, and use. While the integration of CSO data into official reporting is still developing, trust and collaboration have clearly improved.

Concrete examples of influence are visible. In Kenya, the civil society VNR report was formally annexed to the national VNR presented at the UN High-Level Political Forum, marking a clear step toward institutionalized multi-stakeholder reporting. In Tanzania, CSO recommendations have contributed to policy developments such as the National Youth Development Policy (2024).

At the same time, while progress is clear, the systematic use of CSO data in decision-making is still evolving, particularly in Uganda and at local government levels across countries.

Accelerated SDG implementation

Accelerated SDG implementation. By strengthening VNR processes, improving data quality, and increasing the influence of civil society, the project contributed to more effective and coordinated SDG implementation. Overall, while the project alone does not drive SDG implementation, it has created important enabling conditions—stronger data systems, better coordination, and more inclusive processes—that support the acceleration of SDG progress.

In all three countries, improved multi-stakeholder coordination has helped align actors, reduce duplication, and support more strategic implementation efforts. Strengthened national coordination mechanisms—such as Kenya’s Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee—have enhanced collaboration between government, civil society, and other stakeholders.

In Kenya, the alignment of civil society and government reporting, combined with stronger coordination structures, has supported more coherent implementation efforts and policy dialogue.

In Tanzania, institutionalized civil society participation and the uptake of recommendations have contributed to tangible policy developments and strengthened implementation frameworks.

In Uganda, progress has been more gradual due to a more restrictive environment, but the project has improved the effectiveness and coordination of civil society contributions, particularly in youth-focused SDG work.

3.2.4 Government engagement and national planning influence (green path)

Strengthened and increased cooperation between civil society and authorities

Strengthened and increased cooperation between civil society and authorities. The project strengthened cooperation and dialogue between civil society and authorities across all three countries. Cooperation shifted from ad hoc engagement to more regular, structured, and strategic collaboration.

In Kenya, the SDGs Kenya Forum strengthened multi-stakeholder coordination through its convening role, particularly within the Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee, enabling government and civil society to work together more systematically.

In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania established strong working relationships with key institutions such as the National Planning Commission, the President’s Office for Regional Administration and Local Government, and the National Bureau of Statistics leading to more frequent invitations to national planning processes.

In Uganda, UNA Uganda helped build regular engagement with the Office of the Prime Minister and line ministries, creating a rare space for open dialogue and joint review of SDG progress. This reduced traditional tensions and enabled more constructive collaboration.

Authorities' increased understanding, knowledge and skills

Authorities' increased understanding, knowledge and skills. The project strengthened authorities' understanding of the SDGs, data systems, and inclusive development approaches through joint processes. Across all three countries, government actors were introduced to multi-stakeholder coordination and more integrated approaches to data use.

As a result, authorities gained practical knowledge and skills that support more effective, coordinated, and inclusive SDG governance. The project also increased awareness of the limitations of siloed working methods and highlighted the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration, human rights-based approaches, and meaningful engagement of diverse stakeholders in SDG implementation and reporting processes.

Greater trust, recognition of civil society's expertise, and more positive attitudes from authorities

Greater trust, recognition of civil society expertise, and more positive attitudes from authorities. The project contributed to a shift in attitudes and relationships between authorities and civil society across all three countries. A key factor behind this change was the project's strong alignment with national development priorities and SDG commitments, which increased its relevance and legitimacy in the eyes of government actors and encouraged stronger collaboration. The SDG framework also helped shift discussions toward broader socioeconomic development challenges, creating a more neutral and constructive space for cooperation.

At the same time, both authorities and civil society increasingly recognized that national development goals cannot be achieved without collaboration between different sectors and stakeholders. This helped build mutual trust and commitment to shared processes and outcomes. Authorities also became more aware of the value of civil society expertise, grassroots access, and citizen-generated data, while attitudes toward youth participation and inclusive approaches became more positive.

In Kenya, SDGs Kenya Forum established itself as a trusted convenor, with government actors increasingly viewing it as a reliable partner rather than an adversary. Its convening power, technical expertise, and ability to coordinate diverse stakeholders are now widely recognized.

In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania strengthened its position as a key coordinator of civil society engagement, leading to increased recognition by government institutions and direct requests to contribute to national and international SDG-related processes. Even within a constrained civic space, authorities demonstrated growing openness toward cooperation.

In Uganda, UNA Uganda helped strengthen mutual trust between civil society and government actors, particularly in SDG-related processes. Authorities became more receptive to civil society analysis and contributions and increasingly recognized the important role civil society plays in reaching marginalized communities that government structures often struggle to access.

Civil society engaged in and influenced national development planning processes

SDGs integrated in national plans

Civil society engaged in and influenced national development planning processes. Project partners have helped connect SDG monitoring and civil society evidence to national planning processes and they have been increasingly involved in the formulation of their countries' national development plans. Tanzania demonstrates the clearest formal integration of civil society into national planning structures; Kenya shows strong institutional influence through SDG coordination mechanisms connected to Vision 2030; and Uganda shows expanding consultation and policy dialogue, even if the role is less explicitly formalized.

In Tanzania, this participation appears especially strong and formalized. UNA Tanzania and the Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform (TSDP) were consulted in the preparation of major national planning frameworks, marking a change in government practice. They contributed to the Tanzania Development Vision 2050, participated in the Third Five-Year Development Plan, and are part of the National Steering Committee for the formulation of the Five-Year Development Plan 2025–2030. They also worked with the National Planning Commission (NPC) to align civil society input and SDG priorities with the Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (2025/26–2029/30). In addition, UNA Tanzania has been involved, as a civil society representative, in integrating Pact for the Future commitments into the Tanzania Development Vision 2050 and the country's five-year plans. This shows that civil society is no longer treated as external to planning, but as a recognized participant in national development strategy processes.

In Kenya, participation is more embedded through SDG mainstreaming and national coordination mechanisms. The SDGs Kenya Forum, through its leadership role in the Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee, contributes civil society perspectives to national SDG implementation, monitoring, and reporting, and these in turn inform planning linked to Kenya Vision 2030. The SDGs are now widely understood as embedded within Vision 2030, and civil society evidence from VNR-related processes help shape policy interventions and planning discussions. Kenya shows a institutionalized multi-stakeholder model in which civil society influences development planning through advisory, coordination, and reporting structures.

Uganda shows growing, though still relatively informal, civil society engagement in national development planning. The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), which coordinates SDG implementation, has regularly invited civil society, including UNA Uganda, to share views on the SDGs, circulated draft documents, and engaged CSOs in discussions on reforms and national priorities. This engagement is linked to Uganda's National Development Plan III. While civil society is not typically part of formal planning bodies, its role is strengthening through increased access, consultation, and influence in SDG-related policy dialogue, creating entry points into both national and local development discussions.

Civil society engaged in other processes

Civil society engaged in other processes. Beyond SDG reporting, civil society engagement has expanded into other national and international processes, demonstrating broader influence.

In Kenya, the SDGs Kenya Forum played a key role in mobilizing civil society around the Public Benefit Organizations (PBO) Act and its regulations (2024), contributing to an important milestone in the legal and regulatory framework for civil society. In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania coordinated the first Youth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2024, expanding civil society engagement into human rights monitoring processes and linking SDGs with broader accountability frameworks. In Uganda, UNA Uganda contributed to UPR-related processes and strengthened civil society's role in international reporting and advocacy, particularly in youth-focused areas.

All partners have participated actively in the HLPFs in New York. Also, organizations have collaborated on African Union SDG processes and the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. Partners have utilized these forums to present joint position papers and influence the broader African regional stance.

3.3 Effectiveness; partners' capacity development

Under effectiveness the evaluation has also looked at how the capacities or practices of project partners have been strengthened during the project. Partners highlighted several capacity development measures that they found particularly valuable to their organisations.

3.3.1 Capacity development and strengthened practices

Training has been well planned and implemented. The project has applied a model where a training event has been followed up by practical implementation; this has reinforced learning. Training topics were carefully considered and have met the needs of the partners. As particularly useful, the partners cited the events that focused on HRBA and data management.

UNAFI has successfully drawn on the strength of its Finnish, Nordic and international SDG advocacy networks in the selection of resource persons for various programmes and events. The World Federation of UN Associations (Wfuna) contributed to workshops where a wide range of experts representing reputable organisations from Finland and Denmark were invited to serve as resource persons at the events, including Aalto University, Statistics Finland, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the Cities of Tampere and Espoo, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights. Wfuna also convened coordination for the Pact for the Future process. The partners appreciated that the resource persons grapple with similar challenges in their daily work – they practice what they preach.

3.3.2 Peer learning and regional collaboration

Project support has been instrumental to the partners for them to participate in regional events and conduct joint campaigns. This has greatly facilitated peer to peer learning which has been a key element of regional collaboration in the project.

The partners have shared their experiences, for example, on how to organize inclusive dialogues and consultations for VNRs or other national policy processes with project partners, what are the challenges of organising national multistakeholder conferences or how to engage media in SDGs advocacy work. For example, Tanzania has shared useful experiences about VNR processes, Kenya the example of the annual multistakeholder forum, and Uganda, about media collaboration. This has allowed the partners to consider and improve their own practices in engaging with national and local stakeholders.

The Annual Multistakeholder forum that SDGs Kenya organises has been a particularly important event for all partners (UNAFI included) to come together. It can be considered a best practice for regional cooperation. It has been a key event in network strengthening and learning together. The forum meetings have given both UNA Tanzania and UNA Uganda an opportunity to share their best practices and learn from experiences of Kenyan organisations and have contacts with like-minded actors across the region.

The partners also considered the monitoring visits and oversight provided by UNAFI useful to strengthening their project management and financial management capacities.

3.3.3 Strengthened networks and increased credibility

Engagement of project partners in national, regional and international networks has improved. At national level, the partners have now stronger networks with other civil society actors as well as with duty bearers. Solid partnerships with government entities exist in Tanzania and Kenya and are emerging in Uganda. This is reflected in the growing membership of the TSDP Coalition (UNA Tanzania taking the lead), MoUs for citizen-generated data (Tanzania and Kenya), SDG Kenya's role as the co-convenor of the Inter Agency Technical Working Group (Kenya) and UNA Uganda's role as the NGO Forum Youth lead (Uganda).

The partners and their organisations have been able to build stronger networks also at regional and international level and are considered technically credible and experienced organisations. This is demonstrated, e.g. by partner staff being recognised regionally as resource persons. The staff have attended to HLFs in New York and to preparatory, main or side events of other international meetings. Increased engagement at regional and international level has increased the visibility and credibility of the partners. It has provided them opportunities for strategic engagement with potential future partners.

3.4 Sustainability

The evaluation identified several key sustainability-related achievements and factors strengthening sustainability. At the same time, it also found challenges—particularly those stemming from external factors—that partly put the sustainability of some results at risk.

3.4.1 Key sustainability elements

1. **Institutionalization of civil society data, structures, and processes in SDG framework.** The project strengthened the integration of civil society-generated data into official SDG reporting and development planning through formal cooperation with national statistical offices in Tanzania and Kenya. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) established frameworks for data collection, validation, and use, improving trust and collaboration between civil society and government institutions. This significantly strengthens sustainability, as project-generated knowledge has been embedded in official systems, documents, and planning processes that can continue to shape government priorities and implementation beyond the project period. In addition, structures and tools created through the project—such as cooperation mechanisms and the open data repository developed in Kenya—have the potential to remain in use beyond the funding cycle, particularly where they are locally owned and not dependent on continued external support.
2. **Civil society engagement in VNRs and related national development processes has become more established.** Participation of civil society in VNR and other national development processes has moved beyond one-off project activities toward a more normalized practice of involving CSOs in reporting, consultation, and planning across the three countries. A shift toward collaboration and away from siloed work also supports longer-term sustainability. It is linked to the fact that actors now recognize the value of collaboration and have institutional frameworks that allow members to

step in and support continuity. This kind of shared ownership makes outcomes less dependent on one actor alone.

3. **Partners' institutional positions within national SDG frameworks have strengthened and are likely to outlast the project.** The clear sustainable result is the stronger position of partner organizations within national SDG structures. In Kenya, SDGs Kenya Forum has become a recognized platform for civil society coordination and holds a formal role in SDG governance through co-chairing the national Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee and leading civil society engagement in VNR processes. In Tanzania, UNA Tanzania plays a leading role in coordinating civil society participation in SDG processes through the Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform (TSDP), which is formally recognized within the National SDG Coordination Framework and mandated to coordinate civil society inputs to VNRs. In Uganda, UNA Uganda co-leads the youth thematic area within the national CSO SDG reference group and has been entrusted with coordinating youth contributions to VNR processes and other national policy and review mechanisms. These strengthened institutional roles reinforce partners' credibility, influence, and access to national decision-making processes, increasing the likelihood that their engagement in SDG implementation, monitoring, and advocacy will continue beyond the project period.
4. **Skills, capacities and working methods developed through the project are likely to remain.** The project strengthened partner capacities in areas such as LNOB, HRBA, data use, reporting, inclusive facilitation, and organizing consultations at national and local level. These are durable assets to the extent that they have become part of how organizations work. Knowledge and experience gained by staff in partner organisations, participating CSOs and individual actors are seen as a tangible result that does not disappear easily.
5. **Relationships, credibility, and networks built through the project.** Sustainability is not only about the continuation of activities; it also concerns the strengthened positioning of partners in relation to governments, civil society networks, and other stakeholders. Through the project, UNA Tanzania, UNA Uganda, and SDGs Kenya Forum increased their visibility, credibility, and legitimacy as actors in the sector. While UNA Uganda notably strengthened its public profile and standing, UNA Tanzania and SDGs Kenya Forum further consolidated their established roles. The project helped partners become recognized and trusted actors in the eyes of governments and civil society organizations. These reputational gains, relationships, and networks can support continued collaboration, partnerships, advocacy, and resource mobilization beyond the project period.
6. **The project strengthened adaptive capacity and resilience,** especially where organizations are used to operating with limited resources. UNA Uganda in particular is described as resilient because of its strong volunteer ethos and ability to continue some work even with minimal funding. There are also signs that partners are adapting through digital, hybrid, and lower-cost modes of engagement, which may help sustain advocacy and participation under tighter resource conditions.
7. **Some youth-led and low-resource activities are continuing without direct project support.** Especially in Uganda and Kenya, there is evidence that young people and youth groups continue activities after training and engagement through the project. Examples include university clubs, youth-led initiatives, continued advocacy, social media engagement, and practical community-level actions. This suggests that where ownership is strong and activities are relatively low-cost, continuation is more likely. These continued efforts contribute to advancing and accelerating SDG implementation in the project countries.

3.4.2 Practices to build future work on

The project has developed and applied a number of practices on which the partners can build their future work. It stems from partner selection which was spot on in this project. UNA Tanzania and SDGs Kenya were already recognised actors supporting SDG implementation, filling the coordination gap and collaborating with duty bearers and stakeholders. The experience from UNA Tanzania and SDGs Kenya has been of tremendous value to UNA Uganda.

Working with a regional network of like-minded actors has been conducive to peer learning. The Annual SDGs Conference in Kenya has been instrumental for annual co-creation and sharing together with other events that the partners were able to attend (virtually or in person). In all the countries, not just in Kenya, the project has demonstrated the value of multistakeholder engagement and benefits of building wider partnerships and collaboration beyond civil society networks. Mixed participation, bringing all actors together - government, civil society, youth and others - supports cross-learning.

Innovative tools and activities, e.g. hackathons, UN model meetings, etc. are well suited for wider adoption and replication in the future. The fact that these events have targeted youth is of tremendous importance. Their engagement supports emergence of new generation of actors and future leaders and decision makers across the region.

The partners have also co-created methods to effectively utilise media (social, print, tv, radio), journalist networks and collaboration with journalists to showcase work.

Learning from actors engaged in SDGs implementation in Finland has provided additional credibility to capacity building events. Staff from e.g. Aalto University, Municipal Association of Finland, Statistics Finland, etc. have been able to circulate their experiences from hands-on work to project partners.

Also, the innovative partnership to support the Voluntary Local Review in Mwanza comprising of international (UN Habitat), national (Finnish Ministry of the Environment, Municipal Association of Finland, UNAFI, UNA TAN) and local partners (City Council of Mwanza, Tampere City) provided an excellent platform for cross-fertilization of ideas, also for wider international circulation.

3.4.3 Sustainability challenges

1. **Shrinking civic space and regulatory restrictions remain a structural threat.** Especially in Uganda and more broadly across East Africa, tightening regulation of civil society can discourage donors, restrict participation, and reduce room for advocacy. Even where SDG work is somewhat safer politically than other forms of engagement, the wider civic environment still shapes what can realistically be sustained.
2. **Sustainability is vulnerable to political change, staff turnover and shifts in official attitudes.** Results are closely tied to the political environment, legislation, and government openness to civil society. Staff turnover in public administration is a risk: when supportive individuals leave, momentum can be lost and processes may have to be rebuilt.
3. **The broader funding environment for civil society has become much more difficult.** Shrinking donor funding, including major external cuts, has weakened the resource base of civil society in all countries. This affects not only the continuation of activities but also the ability of CSOs to participate meaningfully in national processes. The project may have improved partners' fundraising capacity to some extent, but one project cannot offset a major structural contraction in civic funding.

4. A large share of activities remains funding-dependent. Many local, national, regional, and international activities depend heavily on project funding, and there is no similar funder currently supporting SDG advocacy and capacity building in all three countries in the same way. While capacities may remain, sustained implementation still requires financial support. E.g. Regional collaboration between project partners is less likely to continue in strong practical form without dedicated funding. It may continue informally through networks, consultation, and personal contacts, but not at the same intensity without project support.
5. Youth engagement is inherently dynamic and requires continuous renewal. Youth participation is promising and in some cases self-sustaining, but youth turnover is also a built-in challenge. Young people move on, and new cohorts need onboarding and training. This means that sustaining youth engagement requires repeated investment, even if earlier cohorts remain active in some form.

4. CONCLUSIONS

1. Strong relevance and alignment with national and regional SDG priorities

The project is highly relevant to the SDG implementation priorities of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. It successfully addressed clearly identified gaps in SDG implementation, monitoring, and stakeholder participation across Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. Its focus on strengthening civil society engagement, inclusive participation, and evidence-based SDG processes was well aligned with national development priorities, VNR processes, and broader commitments to inclusive governance.

2. Enhanced government–civil society collaboration

A notable achievement was the creation of trustful, structured cooperation between authorities and CSOs. Government actors in all three countries now regard project partners as credible, technical counterparts rather than advocacy outsiders. This shift facilitated joint planning, improved data integration, and more coherent national SDG coordination—laying foundations for continued collaboration beyond the project timeline. The project demonstrated that SDGs can provide a politically constructive entry point for collaboration even in constrained civic contexts. By aligning activities with national priorities and focusing on practical development issues, the project helped reduce tensions and build trust between actors that have traditionally worked separately.

3. Strengthened civil society engagement and more inclusive SDG reporting

The evaluation found strong evidence that the project contributed to more structured, inclusive, and institutionalised civil society engagement in SDG implementation, monitoring, and reporting across all three countries. Civil society participation evolved toward stronger coordination and more formalised engagement in national SDG and Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes. Key achievements include the formal recognition of civil society coordination mechanisms, broader participation in VNR processes, and strengthened cooperation between governments and civil society actors. In Tanzania and Kenya, civil society engagement has become increasingly embedded in national SDG governance structures, while Uganda has demonstrated gradual but meaningful progress despite a more constrained civic environment. These changes suggest that the project moved beyond short-term capacity building and contributed to strengthening enabling structures for longer-term participation and accountability.

The project also contributed to improving the inclusiveness and quality of VNR processes. Civil society participation became broader and more systematic, while citizen-generated data and grassroots perspectives increasingly informed national reporting. As a result, SDG reporting became more reflective of local realities and strengthened accountability by linking national processes to community experiences. While significant progress has been made, the systematic use of civil society-generated evidence in policy-making and local implementation remains uneven and continues to evolve.

4. Improved inclusion and empowerment of marginalized groups

The project effectively advanced inclusion and agency, especially among youth, women, and persons with disabilities. It moved beyond token participation toward genuine empowerment—providing marginalized communities the tools and confidence to influence national policy dialogues. The strongest evidence concerns youth engagement, where the project contributed to greater ownership, leadership, and sustained participation. Young people increasingly acted as advocates, organizers, and contributors to national discussions rather than passive beneficiaries. Evidence from Uganda and Kenya further suggests that some youth-led initiatives have continued independently beyond direct project support, indicating signs of sustainability where ownership is strong. At the same time, sustaining

inclusive participation requires continuous investment, particularly because youth engagement is inherently dynamic and marginalized groups continue to face structural barriers to participation.

5. Strengthened capacities, legitimacy, and influence of partner organizations and civil society actors

The project strengthened partner organizations not only operationally but institutionally. UNA Tanzania, UNA Uganda, and SDGs Kenya Forum improved their technical capacities, networks, visibility, and credibility, positioning them as recognized actors in national SDG processes. Capacity development was a major success factor. Training on human-rights-based approaches, gender-responsive data, and results-based facilitation proved practical and transformative. Regional peer learning—through forums, mutual visits, and annual multistakeholder conferences—strengthened cross-country collaboration and contributed to the partners’ overall effectiveness and credibility.

The project partners increasingly shifted from being implementers of activities to convenors, coordinators, and trusted intermediaries between civil society and government institutions. Their strengthened legitimacy created opportunities to influence national planning, reporting, and policy discussions beyond the immediate project framework. Importantly, strengthened capacities extended beyond partner organizations to broader civil society networks, including grassroots actors and youth organizations, improving the overall ecosystem for SDG engagement.

6. Strong foundations for sustainability, despite external risks

Sustainability prospects are promising because project results are institutionalized in formal structures and processes (e.g., MOUs, SDG coordination bodies, VNR frameworks). Skills, relationships, and networks gained are durable assets. However, sustainability is threatened by external factors: narrowing civic space, political volatility, declining donor funding, and natural turnover of staffs in institutions, but also among youth actors. Continued support, diversified funding, and adaptive strategies will be necessary to preserve and deepen results.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consolidate and deepen institutionalized civil society participation in SDG governance processes

Target group: UNAFI, project partners, national authorities

Future programming should prioritize consolidating the institutional gains achieved in VNR processes and national SDG coordination structures. The project has successfully created entry points for civil society participation; however, continued support is needed to ensure these mechanisms become durable and embedded beyond individual project cycles.

Particular attention should be given to maintaining formal cooperation arrangements, structured consultation mechanisms, and regular dialogue platforms between governments and civil society. Future work should increasingly focus on the quality and influence of participation, not only the number of participants.

2. Strengthen the systematic use of civil society-generated data in national planning and decision-making

Target group: Project partners, national statistical offices, UNAFI

The project should move beyond supporting data production toward strengthening the institutional uptake and use of civil society-generated evidence in decision-making and implementation. Existing Memoranda of Understanding with statistical offices provide a strong foundation but require operationalization and continued technical support.

Future efforts should focus on improving data quality assurance, strengthening local-level data collection capacities, and creating clearer pathways for how citizen-generated data informs national planning, budgeting, and SDG implementation processes.

3. Maintain and expand meaningful inclusion of marginalized groups through targeted approaches

Target group: Project partners

The strong progress achieved in engaging marginalized groups—including youth, women and persons with disabilities—should be sustained and further strengthened. At the same time, more attention could be given to measuring the quality and influence of participation, including whether marginalized groups' priorities are reflected in policies and implementation.

4. Strengthen resilience and sustainability through diversified funding and partnerships

Target group: UNAFI and project partners

Given the increasingly constrained donor environment, sustainability requires stronger resource diversification strategies. Project partners should be supported to strengthen fundraising capacities, diversify partnerships, and identify complementary funding sources for SDG-related work.

Future programming should also prioritize approaches that are less resource-intensive and more locally owned, particularly for youth engagement, advocacy, and peer learning. Low-cost and hybrid models may improve resilience in contexts of shrinking civic space and reduced external funding.

5. Strengthen monitoring of higher-level outcomes and sustainability

Target group: UNAFI and project partners

Future programming should strengthen monitoring systems to better capture institutional change, influence pathways, and sustainability of results. While many important changes were identified, several outcomes remained difficult to systematically evidence. Particular attention should be paid to tracking how civil society recommendations influence policy decisions, how citizen-generated data is utilized, and whether strengthened participation translates into lasting institutional change.

Terms of Reference for the project evaluation of “Accelerate SDGs in East Africa”

I. Background to the evaluation

The UN Association of Finland (UNAFI) is a non-governmental organization that promotes and supports the actions and principles of the United Nations. UNAFI has been engaged in development cooperation in East Africa since 2003.

Accelerating SDG Implementation in East Africa (Phases I and II, 2021–2026) is a regional project covering Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. The project is implemented by UNA Tanzania as the lead partner, in partnership with UNA Uganda and SDGs Kenya Forum. The project is funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

During Phase I (2021–2024), the project aimed to strengthen the capacity of decision-makers to identify integrated solutions and advance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at both national and local levels. The target groups included parliamentarians, municipal leaders, key civil servants, civil society organizations, and journalists.

Phase II (2023–2026) focuses on strengthening the capacity and expertise of project partners in applying human rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to sustainable development, including the use of gender-responsive data and citizen-generated data.

Overall, the project seeks to enhance the effective and inclusive local implementation of the SDGs. It also empowers civil society organizations and youth to meaningfully influence SDG implementation, monitoring, and reporting, ensuring that national progress better reflects community priorities and leaves no one behind.

The expected results include strengthened SDG implementation in Tanzania through more active engagement of civil society, including youth. In addition, regional networking is enhanced, and inclusive, civil society-led processes are utilized to voice the priorities of marginalized groups to duty-bearers in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. In particular, the human rights-based approach is further integrated into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The project has not been externally evaluated before.

2. Scope, purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation covers Phases I and II of the project “Accelerate SDGs in East Africa.” In addition, the assignment includes the preparation of the Terms of Reference (ToR) in cooperation with the UN Association of Finland and the project partners.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the project and to provide recommendations for the future work. The objectives of the evaluation are:

- To assess the changes brought about by the project
- To identify the key components on which future work can be built
- To assess the sustainability of the project in terms of what will remain after the project ends

The findings are primarily intended for use by the UN Association of Finland and its project implementing partners. However, they will also be shared with key stakeholders (Ministry for Foreign Affairs and other relevant stakeholders).

3. Issues to be addressed and evaluation questions

The evaluation is asked to address, but not necessarily to limit to the following evaluation questions:

IMPACT

1. *What significant and lasting changes has the project contributed to?**
2. *How has project contributed to the engagement and participation of civil society in VNRs/UPR mid-term assessment process?*
3. *How effectively has the project reached the most vulnerable groups, particularly young people, and promoted their participation in the project?*

EFFECTIVENESS

5. *What results has the project produced?*
6. *How has the project strengthened the capacities, practices, or engagement of project partners and their organizations?*
7. *How has the project enhanced regional collaboration amongst the project partners? What are the best practices for future regional cooperation?*
8. *How has the project influenced project partners' position in the national and international networks?*

RELEVANCE

8. *Has the project been relevant to national SDG priorities in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania? How have they been relevant?*

SUSTAINABILITY

9. *How sustainable are the results achieved in the project? What measures would be needed to improve sustainability?*
10. *What are the best practices of the project on which future work can be built?*

* Changes e.g. in the legislation, representation of the civil society in the national structures or similar developments

4. Methodology

The evaluation team is expected to use its professional skills and experience in defining the most relevant approach and methodology for the evaluation. The detailed methodology will be developed during the inception phase of the evaluation, including, among others:

- Desk review and analysis of relevant documents
- Workshops
- Interviews and focus group discussions with key informants and other relevant stakeholders

5. The evaluation process and time schedule

The UN Association of Finland has selected the evaluators Veera Pensala and Kristiina Mikkola to carry out the evaluation based on their offer.

Timeline for key evaluation meetings and deliverables:

Activities	Date
Contracting of evaluators	December 2025
Kick-of meeting	18 th December, 2025
Workshops for designing the ToR	11 th February and 2 nd March, 2026
Inception report	13 th March, 2026
Inception report meeting	19 th March, 2026
In-person validation workshop	4 th May, 2026
Draft Report	15 th May, 2026
Final Report	29 th May, 2026
Presentation of the report	2 nd June, 2026

6. Reporting

The evaluators are asked to deliver the following reports in English language and submit them in electronic format to Jenni Kauppila, jenni.kauppila@ykliitto.fi:

1. Inception report: On the basis of the desk study, the evaluators shall present an inception report. The inception report should include the evaluation matrix with focused evaluation questions, a description of the methodology, and a detailed and updated work plan.
2. Draft final report for comments
3. Final report: A maximum of 30 pages long report (excluding summary of max. 3 pages long and annexes)

7. Budget

The maximum budget for evaluation is 22 000 euros (including VAT 25,5 %). The price includes all costs related to the assignment.

8. Mandate

The evaluation team is entitled and expected to discuss matters relevant to this evaluation with pertinent persons and organizations. However, it is not authorized to make any commitments on behalf of the UN Association of Finland.

2. List of Documents Reviewed

UNAFI Project Phase I & II

UM Valtionavustuspäätös 1.7.2020

UM Valtionavustuspäätös 2023, Vaihe II

UNAFI. 2020. Application for Discretionary Government Transfer Project – CSO project. Accelerating SDG Implementation in East Africa

UNAFI. 2021. Updated Results Framework 22 June 2021

UNAFI. 2022. Annual Development Cooperation Report and a Report on the Use of Discretionary Government Support 2021, Phase I

UNAFI. 2022. Application for Discretionary Government Transfer Project – CSO project. Accelerate SDGs in East Africa, Phase II

UNAFI. 2022. Updated Results Framework 2023–2026.

UNAFI. 2023. Annual Development Cooperation Report and a Report on the Use of Discretionary Government Support 2022, Phase I

UNAFI. 2024. Annual Development Cooperation Report and a Report on the Use of Discretionary Government Support 2023, Phase I

UNAFI. 2025. Annual Development Cooperation Report and a Report on the Use of Discretionary Government Support 2024, Phase I

UNAFI. 2024. Annual Development Cooperation Report and a Report on the Use of Discretionary Government Support 2023, Phase II

UNAFI. 2025. Annual Development Cooperation Report and a Report on the Use of Discretionary Government Support 2024, Phase II

Partner reports Phases I-II

Finland-UN-Habitat Strategic Partnership for the SDGs. Narrative report from January-December 2025

SDGs Kenya Forum. 2023. Annual Report of Accelerating the Implementation of SDGs in East Africa Project. Year 2022

SDGs Kenya Forum. 2024. Bi-annual Report of Accelerating the Implementation of SDGs in East Africa Project, Year 2024 (Jan-Jul)

UNA Tanzania. 2022. Narrative Activity Report 2021

UNA Tanzania. 2024. Narrative Activity Report. Accelerating SDGs Implementation in East Africa Phase I & II. January-December 2023

UNA Tanzania. 2025. Presentation at the Finnish Embassy, Dar es Salaam, December 2025

UNA Uganda. 2022. 1st Phase 3 Months Project Report. Report period: October to December 2021

UNA Uganda. 2022. Report August to October 2022

Activity reports of e.g. Model UNs, community youth dialogues, hackathons, international conferences, side events and workshops organized by UNAFI and partners

Context analysis and CSO shadow reports

SDGs Kenya Forum. 2024. 2024 Kenya CSO's Voluntary National Review Report, July 2024.

TSDP. 2023. Tanzania Civil Society Report on the Sustainable Development Goals. Contribution to the Voluntary National Review 2023.

UNA Tanzania. 2021. Institutional and Policy Framework for SDGs: Context Assessment in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Study Report. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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3. List of Persons Interviewed

Name	Position and Organisation
TANZANIA	
Goodluck Willy	Project Coordinator, UN Association of Tanzania
Prisca Kowa	Senior Officer, Strategic partnerships and compliance, Policy Forum, Tanzania
Amin Abdallah	Coordinator, Mwanza City Council
KENYA	
Florece Syevuo	Executive Director, SDGs Kenya Forum
Bridget Rubuge	SDGa Lead, SDGs Kenya Forum
Stella Aswani	Communications Officer, SDGs Kenya Forum
Nicholas Odaga	Grants Lead, SDGs Kenya Forum
Victoria Musimbi	Freelance Journalist, Africa Solutions Media Hub
Elizabeth Apondi	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Communications Officer, Polycom Girls
Jane Atuta	Economist, SDGs Unit, The State Department for Economic Planning under the National Treasury
Jewel Omina	Hackathon Winner 2024
UGANDA	
Linda Asaba	Project Coordinator, The UN Association of Uganda
Richard Baguma	Executive Director, The UN Association of Uganda
Pius Suuna	Finance and Admin, The UN Association of Uganda
Andrew Kalema	Social Media and Chapter Mobilizer, The UN Association of Uganda
Asa Lugada	IT Officer, The UN Association of Uganda
Isaac Nasasira	UN Youth Delegate
Charity Kalebbo	Executive Director, Electoral Laws and Governance Institute
Allan Ananura	Consultant, Business Development & Investment, iVenture Africa
FINLAND	
Jenni Kauppila	Advocacy Work Officer, The UN Association of Finland
Helena Laukko	Executive Director, The UN Association of Finland
Sanna Mari Huikuri	Development Manager, City of Tampere
Eveliina Kiema-Majanen	Senior Adviser, Strategy Unit, The Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities

4. Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Criterion	Evaluation questions	Data sources	Data collection methods
IMPACT	1. What significant and lasting changes has the project contributed to?*	- Four project partners - Key stakeholders	Outcome harvesting
	2. How has project contributed to the engagement and participation of civil society in VNRs/UPR mid-term assessment process?	- Four project partners - Key stakeholders - Documents	- Focus groups - Interviews - Document analysis
	3. How effectively has the project reached the most vulnerable groups, particularly young people, and promoted their participation in the project?	- Four project partners - Key stakeholders - Documents	- Focus groups - Interviews - Document analysis
EFFECTIVENESS	4. What results has the project produced?	- Four project partners - Key stakeholders	Outcome harvesting
	5. How has the project strengthened the capacities, practices, or engagement of project partners and their organizations?	Four project partners	Focus groups
	6. How has the project enhanced regional collaboration amongst the project partners? What are the best practices for future regional cooperation?	Four project partners	Focus groups
	7. How has the project influenced project partners' position in the national and international networks?	- Four project partners - Key stakeholders	- Focus groups - Interviews
RELEVANCE	8. Has the project been relevant to national SDG priorities in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania? How have they been relevant?	Documents	Document analysis
SUSTAINABILITY	9. How sustainable are the results achieved in the project? What measures would be needed to improve sustainability?	Four project partners	Focus groups
	10. What are the best practices of the project on which future work can be built?	Four project partners	Focus groups
* Changes e.g. in the legislation, representation of the civil society in the national structures or similar developments			