

# Programme Evaluation for KIOS Foundation



Evaluation Report  
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## Abbreviations

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AI	Artificial Intelligence
EU	European Union
FCR	Findings-Conclusions-Recommendations
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
HRD	Human Rights Defender
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
KIOS	KIOS Foundation
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
RBM	Results-based Management
SOGI	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

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## Executive Summary

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The purpose of the programme evaluation for KIOS Foundation was to assess the results achieved and KIOS's role in strengthening the capacities of its grantees, and the functionality of KIOS's funding approach and practices. A key aspect of the evaluation was also to examine how, with the support of KIOS, grantees strengthen human rights movement and civil society in their respective countries.

The evaluation was carried out by Veera Pensala (team leader) and Kristiina Mikkola (responsible for quality assurance) from Consulting Agency ZULU in September-November 2024. The evaluation consisted of 10 evaluation questions which reflected the OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability). The methodology consisted of a desk review, online questionnaire to 25 grantees, 8 online interviews of grantees, 2 in-person workshops and 3 interviews of KIOS staff members and 3 interviews of other key informants.

### Key findings and conclusions

**Capacity-building of partners.** Grantees report notable progress in strengthening their capacities across key thematic areas that were a particular focus of development during the current programme period. Over half have experienced significant growth in advocacy, communications, networking, and leadership, while more than a third have made considerable advancements in organisational and financial management, the security of human rights defenders, risk management, and results-based management. These improvements are reflected in the grantees' enhanced ability to carry out human rights work effectively and impactfully, as well as in the strengthened sustainability of their organisations. All grantees consistently highlight the critical need for continued capacity-building to sustain and further advance their progress.

Grantees expressed high levels of satisfaction with the support provided by KIOS throughout the grant cycle and in different capacity-building modalities. Grantees particularly appreciate the excellent communication, timely financial disbursements, and responsive assistance from knowledgeable staff. The grant management and reporting guide is regarded as clear, comprehensive, and well-aligned with their needs, while the reporting templates, emphasising results-based management, were also widely praised and considered user-friendly. Monitoring trips have proven valuable, offering clarity in the implementation process and fostering productive discussions during in-person visits of KIOS staff. However, it was noted that these trips are not conducted for all projects every year. In addition, many grantees have not utilised KIOS funding to strengthen their own organisational capacities, and KIOS's policy guidelines have not been fully implemented within grantee organisations, largely due to time constraints. There is also a clear demand for more structured opportunities for networking, collaboration, and peer learning. Grantees have particularly highlighted the need for greater emphasis on systematic learning and enhanced connections among grantees.

Emerging human rights issues and risks are increasingly prevalent in KIOS programme countries, reflecting ongoing tensions between development, governance, and human rights. Grantees have identified several key risks, including growing threats to human rights defenders, the continued discrimination and marginalisation of vulnerable groups, gender-based violence, shrinking civic space, and challenges related to climate, energy, and unsustainable resource extraction. In this rapidly changing environment, new human rights challenges continuously arise. Many of these emerging challenges require ongoing capacity-building, where donors like KIOS can play a crucial role in supporting the development of new knowledge and skills necessary to confront these risks.

**Strengthening of the human rights movements and civil societies.** Evaluation identified eleven key dimensions through which grantees work to strengthen human rights movements and broader civil

society development in their respective countries. As a result of this work, evaluation identified 29 key positive changes in targeted groups and operating environments. These key results include strengthened capacities of duty-bearers, rights-holders, and civil society organisations, influenced policies, practices, and legal frameworks, increased cross-sector collaboration, empowered and mobilised communities, and greater public understanding of human rights issues. Grantees have also enhanced their own organisational capacities, further contributing to the sustainability of their work. The results reflect the depth of KIOS's human rights-based approach, which contributes to systemic change by fostering collaboration among various actor groups, enhancing capacities, and influencing legislation and enforcement. Through the holistic approach, KIOS's grantees significantly contribute to strengthening civil societies and advancing human rights movements in their targeted countries.

However, KIOS currently lacks a systematic conceptual framework in its reporting to explain how the programme strengthens civil society in the Global South through the work of its grantees. Developing a systematic framework for reporting could provide clearer insights into how grantees strengthen civil society and achieve significant positive multi-level impacts, and better demonstrate the relevance and effectiveness of KIOS's work.

**KIOS's expertise and grant-making mechanism.** Grantees appreciate KIOS's deep understanding of the human rights situation in their target countries, a sentiment echoed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. KIOS is highly valued by its grantees for offering support that goes beyond mere financial assistance. Two-thirds of grantees emphasise that KIOS's approach is distinct from other donors, as it includes close and intensive collaboration, personalised and responsive support, and a strong focus on organisational development. They highlight KIOS's empathetic, respectful, and trust-building approach, which fosters genuine partnerships. KIOS places a central emphasis on a human rights-based approach, encouraging grantees to align their initiatives with these principles.

The grant mechanism and processes are seen as highly functional, with clear guidance, transparent selection, good dialogue, and strong promotion of local ownership. Additionally, grantees value the user-friendly application templates and KIOS's responsiveness throughout the process. However, there are a few calls for improvements, particularly for longer-term funding phases, as current grants with a duration of one to three years lead to resource-consuming application cycles and uncertainty about the continuity of operations. A few grantees noted delays in application processing, which occasionally caused salary interruptions.

KIOS's portfolio building is guided by clear principles and KIOS's strategy that, alongside a new thematic division, has brought increased focus and cohesion to the grant portfolio. The expertise, experience, and networks of KIOS's long-term staff have been key strengths, enabling the identification of suitable partners. However, the portfolio's development has also occurred somewhat organically, which has led to a lack of transparency and limited shared understanding within KIOS. Additionally, changes in operational environments and constrained funding have posed challenges to the systematic development of the grant portfolio.

## Recommendations

**RECOMMENDATION 1.** Provide more structured learning and networking opportunities for grantees, along with capacity-building in both established and emerging thematic areas. Emphasise the importance of strengthening grantees' own capacity. Implement KIOS guidelines more consistently. Carry out yearly monitoring visits to all grantees.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.** Continue to support the grantees with a multifaceted, human rights-based approach, as this has proven effective in achieving substantial and systemic changes. Consider creating

a conceptual framework which can be systematically used in reporting how grantees strengthen civil society and the results they achieve through their work.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.** Continue the holistic approach and the diverse support for grantees, it is the added value in KIOS's grant-making. Consider extending the duration of the funding phases to provide longer-term support for long-term grantees, aligned with the MFA's 4-year programme cycle. This would offer greater security and organisational stability for grantees in the rapidly changing world. Focus on maintaining good responsiveness to grantees. Consider making small improvements to the application process based on grantees' suggestions in the report.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.** Develop and implement more formalised and transparent processes for building and managing the grant portfolio. This could include more frequent internal reviews, discussions, and especially proper documentation, ensuring that all staff have a shared understanding of the grant portfolio's direction and rationale.

## Key findings, conclusions and recommendations of programme evaluation for KIOS Foundation

Evaluation questions	Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Capacity-building of partners (efficiency, sustainability, relevance)			
<p>1. How do the grantees consider that KIOS's support has improved their organisational and technical capacity in different thematic areas?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 1.</b> According to the grantees' own assessment, their capacities have improved in all areas that were a particular focus of development during the current programme period. Over half reported significant growth in their capacity in advocacy, communications, networking, and leadership. More than a third reported significant growth in organisational and financial management, security of human rights defenders, risk management, and results-based management. These strengthened capacities are reflected in the grantees' work in how effectively and impactfully they are able to carry out human rights work, and in how capacity-building has strengthened the organisations' sustainability. Despite the good improvement in all thematic areas, all partners strongly emphasised the need for continuous capacity-building.</p>	<p><b>CONCLUSION 1.</b> The grantees have made significant progress in strengthening their capacities across key areas, which has enhanced their ability to effectively carry out human rights work and increased their sustainability. However, there is a clear need for ongoing capacity-building.</p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 1.</b> Provide more structured learning and networking opportunities for grantees, along with capacity-building in both established and emerging thematic areas. Emphasise the importance of strengthening grantees' own capacity. Implement KIOS guidelines more consistently. Carry out yearly monitoring visits to all grantees.</p>
<p>2. From the grantees' perspective, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the different capacity-building modalities and mechanisms used by KIOS?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 2.</b> The grantees assessed the support provided by KIOS's contact person as highly satisfactory, highlighting excellent communication, timely financial disbursements, and responsive assistance from knowledgeable staff. The grantees found the grant management and reporting guide to be clear, comprehensive, and well-aligned with their needs. Grantees also appreciated the reporting templates, which emphasise results-based management and are straightforward and user-friendly. However, according to KIOS staff, KIOS's policy guidelines have not been implemented among the grantees' organisations, primarily due to a lack of time. Grantees assessed KIOS monitoring trips as valuable, providing clarity in the implementation process and productive discussions during in-person visits. However, KIOS staff pointed out that trips are not made to all projects every year. As for strengthening grantees' own organisations' capacities, many said they have not used KIOS funding for that purpose.</p>	<p><b>CONCLUSION 2.</b> The majority of grantees are highly satisfied with KIOS's support throughout the grant cycle and in different capacity-building modalities. However, there is a gap in the implementation of KIOS's guidelines among grantees, and not all grantees receive regular monitoring visits. Additionally, many grantees have not used KIOS funding to strengthen their own organisational capacity. There is also a clear demand for more and structured learning and networking opportunities. These areas could be</p>	

<p>3. How has KIOS succeeded in supporting its grantees throughout the project cycle (planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting)? What are the strengths and weaknesses?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 3.</b> Two-thirds of grantees have been very satisfied with the support provided by KIOS at various stages of the grant cycle, while one-third has been moderately satisfied. Grantees have been most satisfied with the support provided during the planning, implementation and reporting phases, where KIOS's support has been strong. Most of the requests were related to networking and learning, where grantees expressed a need for more, and for more structured learning opportunities, networking and collaboration among grantees. Systematic development of learning and a stronger emphasis on peer learning were also highlighted by KIOS during the evaluation.</p>	<p>further developed to enhance the overall effectiveness of KIOS's support.</p>	
<p>4. Do the grantees see any new emerging human rights issues and risks in their operational environment?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 4.</b> Emerging human rights issues and risks are arising in KIOS programme countries. These issues reflect ongoing tensions between development, governance, and human rights. The risks identified by grantees consist of growing threats to human rights defenders, ongoing discrimination and marginalisation of vulnerable groups, gender-based violence, shrinking civic space, issues around climate, energy and unsustainable resource extraction.</p>	<p><b>CONCLUSION 3.</b> In a rapidly changing world, new human rights issues and risks continuously emerge, which grantees are well-positioned to identify and address within the limits of their resources. Many emerging issues require ongoing capacity-building — learning new knowledge and skills, where donors like KIOS can provide support.</p>	
<p>Strengthening of the human rights movements and civil societies (impact, effectiveness, sustainability)</p>			
<p>5. In which ways do the grants strengthen the human rights movement and civil society?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 5.</b> KIOS does not use any systematic conceptual framework in its reporting to explain or describe how the programme, through the work of grantees, strengthens civil society in the Global South. The evaluation divided grantees' work in eleven dimensions through which they strengthen not only human rights movement but largely civil societies in their respective countries: Own capacity-building, monitoring-documenting-reporting on the HR situation, advocacy, strategic litigation, capacity-building-networking-cooperation with duty-bearers/rights-holders/HRDs/CSOs, communications and awareness raising, and supporting initiatives that emerge from the communities.</p>	<p><b>CONCLUSION 4.</b> KIOS's grantees strengthen civil societies and the human rights movements through a multifaceted and comprehensive approach. The achieved results demonstrate that KIOS's support has enabled grantees to achieve substantial, multi-level effects across various areas of the human rights work. Achievements highlight KIOS's</p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 2.</b> Continue to support the grantees with a multifaceted, human rights-based approach, as this has proven effective in achieving substantial and systemic changes. Consider</p>

<p>6. How do the grantees assess what have been the changes in the targeted groups and their operating environment?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 6.</b> The grantees reported many positive changes in the targeted groups and operating environment. The results that grantees have achieved with the support of KIOS funding can be divided into changes in capacities of duty-bearers, rights-holders and civil society organisations, influenced policies, practices, and legal networks, increased cross-sector collaboration, empowered and mobilised communities, increased understanding among wide public, and finally; strengthened organisational capacity among the grantees themselves.</p>	<p>human rights-based approach, which aims at realisation of human rights through transformative, systemic changes among different actor groups, in their interrelations and collaboration, as well as in legislation and law enforcement. The use of a systematic conceptual framework to describe how grantees strengthen civil society and achieve results could provide a clear structure for reporting and demonstrate better the relevance and effectiveness of KIOS's work.</p>	<p>creating a conceptual framework through which it can be systematically and clearly reported how grantees strengthen civil society and the results they achieve through their work.</p>
<p>KIOS's expertise and grant-making mechanism (efficiency, relevance)</p>			
<p>7. In the grantees' experience, does KIOS's capacity-building operate in a similar way to other donors, or how does it differ?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 7.</b> Two-thirds of KIOS's grantees feel that KIOS's support and capacity-building is different from other donors: KIOS's support is not just financial but is based on close and intensive collaboration, includes responsive and personalised support and focuses on organisational development. KIOS places a strong emphasis on a human rights-based approach, encouraging grantees to align their initiatives with principles of human rights. Unlike other donors who may focus more on short-term outcomes, KIOS's commitment to human rights allows grantees to develop actions that foster long-term impact.</p>	<p><b>CONCLUSION 5.</b> Grantees see KIOS as a highly engaged and encouraging donor whose support extends beyond financial assistance, taking a holistic approach that focuses on long-term organisational sustainability and aiming at achieving long-term impact. KIOS actively strives to learn about and understand the human rights situations in the target countries, using a comprehensive approach that centers on close collaboration with its grantees. As a result, KIOS has a deep understanding of the operating environments and human rights situations, which is essential for relevant and effective work in</p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 3.</b> Continue the holistic approach and the diverse support for grantees, it is the added value in KIOS's grant-making. Consider extending the duration of the funding phases to provide longer-term support for long-term grantees, aligned with the MFA's 4-year programme cycle. This would offer greater security and</p>
<p>8. What is the grantees' experience of how KIOS strives to understand the human rights context, the operational environment and its challenges in its target countries?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 8.</b> Grantees consider that KIOS has a strong understanding and expertise of the human rights situation in the target countries and the challenges of the operating environment. This view was also shared by officials from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Grantees especially appreciate KIOS's approach, which is based on empathy, respect, trust and aims at building of genuine partnerships.</p>	<p>for relevant and effective work in</p>	<p>greater security and</p>

<p>9. How do KIOS's grantees assess the functionality of the grant-making mechanism?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 9.</b> Grantees assess the grant mechanism and its processes as highly functional, highlighting particularly clear guidance, good dialogue, transparency of selection process and KIOS's respect for and promotion of local ownership. Many were also satisfied with KIOS's responsiveness and the user-friendliness of application templates. However, many grantees wish for longer-term funding for their work. Although KIOS aims for long-term partnerships, the granted funding is for 1-3 years at a time. Also, a few grantees mentioned delays in application processing, which had for example resulted in interruptions to salary payments. Grantees had many separate, small suggestions for improving the grant mechanism and various stages of the application process.</p>	<p>supporting grantees. However, human rights work takes time, and changes do not happen quickly. While KIOS's funding mechanism is well-regarded for its functionality, and many partnerships are long-term, individual grants are from two to three years. Continuous applications consume resources and create uncertainty about the continuity of operations. Longer-term funding phases would provide security and stability for organisations.</p>	<p>organisational stability for grantees in the rapidly changing world. Focus on maintaining good responsiveness to grantees. Consider making small improvements to the application process based on grantees' suggestions in the report.</p>
<p>10. What are the strengths and weaknesses in KIOS's grant portfolio development?</p>	<p><b>FINDING 10.</b> KIOS's programme outlines clear principles on how the grant portfolio is built, and during the current programme period, the strategy and new thematic division have guided the work, bringing more focus and cohesion to the portfolio. The strengths of KIOS's portfolio also include the strong expertise, experience, and networks of long-term staff, which have helped in identifying suitable partners. On the other hand, this has also led to the portfolio developing partly organically, meaning its construction has not been entirely transparent or widely shared in KIOS. Additionally, changes in the operational environments and limited funding have further complicated the effective portfolio development work.</p>	<p><b>CONCLUSION 6.</b> The implementation of a strategy and thematic division has brought greater focus and clarity to KIOS's grant portfolio, which is a positive development for aligning projects directly with KIOS's goals. Long-term staff members with significant expertise and networks are valuable assets, enhancing KIOS's ability to select appropriate grantees. While beneficial in some respects, the portfolio has partly grown in a somewhat organic manner, which has resulted in a lack of transparency and limited collective understanding within KIOS.</p>	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 4.</b> Develop and implement more formalised and transparent processes for building and managing the grant portfolio. This could include more frequent internal reviews, discussions, and especially proper documentation, ensuring that all staff have a shared understanding of the grant portfolio's direction and rationale.</p>

# 1. Objectives and methodology of the evaluation

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## 1.1 Objectives and scope of the evaluation

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The KIOS Foundation, established in 1998 by 11 Finnish NGOs, is primarily funded by Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The foundation focuses on advancing human rights, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable groups, by supporting human rights defenders (HRDs) in developing countries. KIOS works in partnership with local civil society and human rights organisations, emphasising that human rights cannot be imposed externally. The foundation provides comprehensive support tailored to the needs of HRDs in the Global South, focusing on sustainable and safe human rights work. KIOS directs its support to focus countries in East Africa and South Asia, including Kenya, Uganda, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In accordance with the Terms of reference (ToR), the purpose of this assignment is to conduct an evaluation of the on-going KIOS Programme 2022–2025. The evaluation provides an external and independent assessment of the results achieved in strengthening the capacities of the grantees of KIOS Foundation, KIOS's role in strengthening its grantees' organisational and technical capacities and the functionality of KIOS's funding approach and practices. A key aspect of the evaluation is also to examine how, with the support of KIOS, grantees strengthen human rights movement and civil society in their respective countries. The evaluation gives recommendations, aiming at improving ongoing development cooperation and guiding the planning of the new programme period for 2026-2029.

The main objectives of the evaluation are:

1. To increase understanding of the best ways to support the strengthening of the human rights movement and civil society through KIOS's grantees;
2. To increase understanding of how KIOS has managed to build the organisational and technical capacities of its grantees;
3. To give recommendations to the development of KIOS's grantee capacity-building and partnership management work;
4. To give recommendations to the development of KIOS's tools & practices in grant-making.

In addition to meeting accountability requirements and corresponding to traditional OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (particularly relevance, coherence, impact and sustainability), the evaluation builds on KIOS staff's and grantees' learning and ownership. The evaluation aims to emphasise the fullest possible participation and engagement of the involved parties during the evaluation process. Close collaboration during the evaluation will also produce more relevant and useful recommendations for the future work.

## 1.2 Methodology

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The evaluation was carried out by Veera Pensala (team leader) and Kristiina Mikkola in September-November 2024. Kristiina Mikkola had a special role in quality assurance in the evaluation. Quality assurance focused in particular on refining the methodology and quality assurance of reports; on relevant findings, conclusion and recommendations.

The evaluation examined the Programme from the perspective of the evaluation questions defined in the Terms of Reference, reflecting the evaluation criteria of OECD-DAC (relevance, effectiveness,

efficiency, impact, sustainability and coherence). 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 and online questionnaire with in-person workshops and online 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 programme documents was carried out from the perspective of the evaluation questions. The materials reviewed are listed in the Annex 2.

b) **Online questionnaire to KIOS's grantees** (25 grantees, response rate 78 %). A key data collection method in the evaluation was an online questionnaire, which was sent to all current KIOS grantees as well as those whose grant has ended during this programme period 2022–2025 (32 grantees). The questionnaire was conducted using the Webropol program and focused on how KIOS has managed to build the organisational and technical capacities of its grantees.

c) **Online interviews** (8 grantees). In addition to the online questionnaire, online interviews with eight grantees from all main partner countries (two from each) were conducted. The semi-structured interviews focused on how the grantees strengthen the human rights movement and civil society through their grants. Organisations and persons interviewed are listed in the Annex 3.

d) **In-persons workshops and interviews for KIOS staff** (12 persons). Evaluation organised two workshops for KIOS staff for the purposes of ownership and shared learning. The first workshop focused on the evaluation methodology and the latter on evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. In addition to workshops, the evaluation interviewed five members of current KIOS staff and two former KIOS employees. Organisations interviewed are listed in the Annex 3.

e) **Other key informant interviews** (3 persons). Qualitative information through semi-structured key personnel interviews was carried out with the MFA desk officer from the Unit for Civil Society (KEO-30) and through emails from the Unit for Human Rights Policy (POL-40) and the Finnish embassy in Kenya.

## 2. KIOS Programme

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### 2.1 KIOS Foundation

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The KIOS Foundation, founded in 1998 by 11 Finnish NGOs in collaboration with Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, promotes human rights and social justice globally. Since its inception, KIOS has been committed to advancing universal human rights as outlined in UN treaties and instruments, with a strong focus on marginalised groups. Since 2011, the foundation has prioritised supporting human rights initiatives in East Africa and South Asia.

KIOS operates through four strategic pillars:

1. **Grant-making:** KIOS provides funding to local human rights defenders and organisations, empowering them to design and implement actions that suit their unique contexts. The foundation values diversity, supporting both established and emerging actors, and takes calculated risks to enable innovative approaches.

2. **Capacity-building and networking:** KIOS helps strengthen the capacity of grantees and fostering networks that enhance their sustainability and effectiveness. This includes ensuring that organisations operate safely and are equipped to handle risks.
3. **Advocacy and partnerships:** As a funder, KIOS leverages its influence to advocate for human rights defenders, often in collaboration with grantees and strategic allies, amplifying their voices and impact.
4. **Knowledge building:** KIOS learns from its grantees and stays attuned to the shifting realities of human rights work. This ensures that its strategies remain relevant and responsive to evolving challenges.

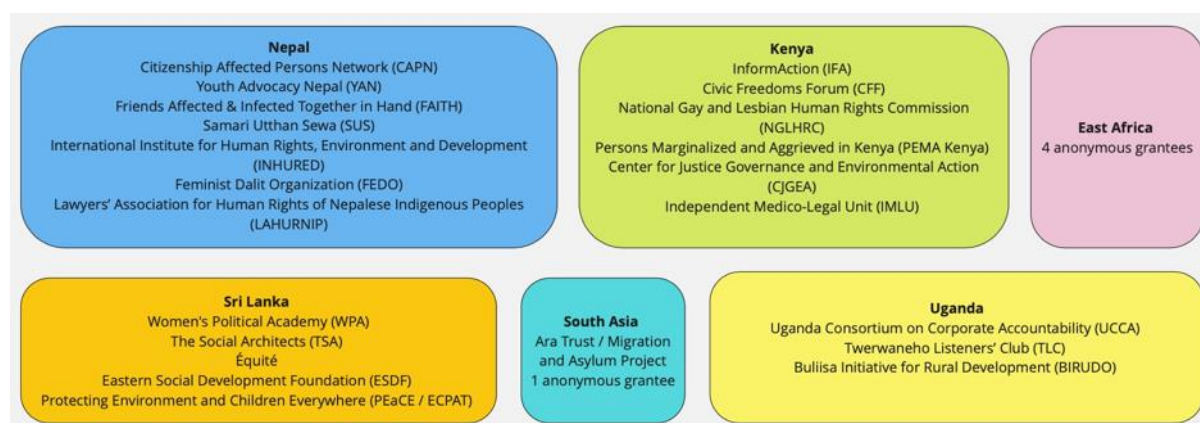
Through grant-making, KIOS acts as an enabler, empowering grantees to advance human rights locally, nationally, and internationally. Grantees strengthen rights-holders – especially marginalised groups – by building their knowledge and skills to claim their rights. They also raise awareness about human rights, document and report human rights violations, ensuring justice and accountability, even in high-risk environments. In addition, grantees engage duty-bearers, raising awareness of their responsibilities and advocating for legal reforms and practical implementation of human rights standards. In some cases, they collaborate with rights-holders on strategic litigation to achieve structural changes and enforce state obligations across economic, social, civil, and political rights.

The KIOS Foundation places a strong emphasis on bolstering civil society, particularly by creating a supportive environment for human rights defenders and their organisations in developing countries. KIOS believes that a vibrant, independent, and capable civil society dedicated to protecting human rights is essential for achieving these rights and for maintaining democracies grounded in the rule of law. At the same time, the fulfilment of human rights reinforces the strength and effectiveness of civil society.

During this programme period, KIOS has directed its funding, communications, and advocacy primarily to East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi) and South Asia (Nepal, Sri Lanka, regional and exile organisations). These regions were chosen due to KIOS’s longstanding presence, expertise in human rights issues, and established trust with local actors. Guided by its 2021-2024 strategy and regional policies, KIOS has emphasised three main thematic areas: democracy and rule of law, non-discrimination and gender equality, and business and human rights. Cross-cutting themes – non-discrimination and gender equality, the safety of human rights defenders, and environmental and climate issues – have been taken into consideration in all KIOS work.

Currently KIOS has 27 grantees (autumn 2024). Partnership has ended with 7 grantees during the ongoing programme period. The grantees are:

Figure 1. KIOS’s grantees



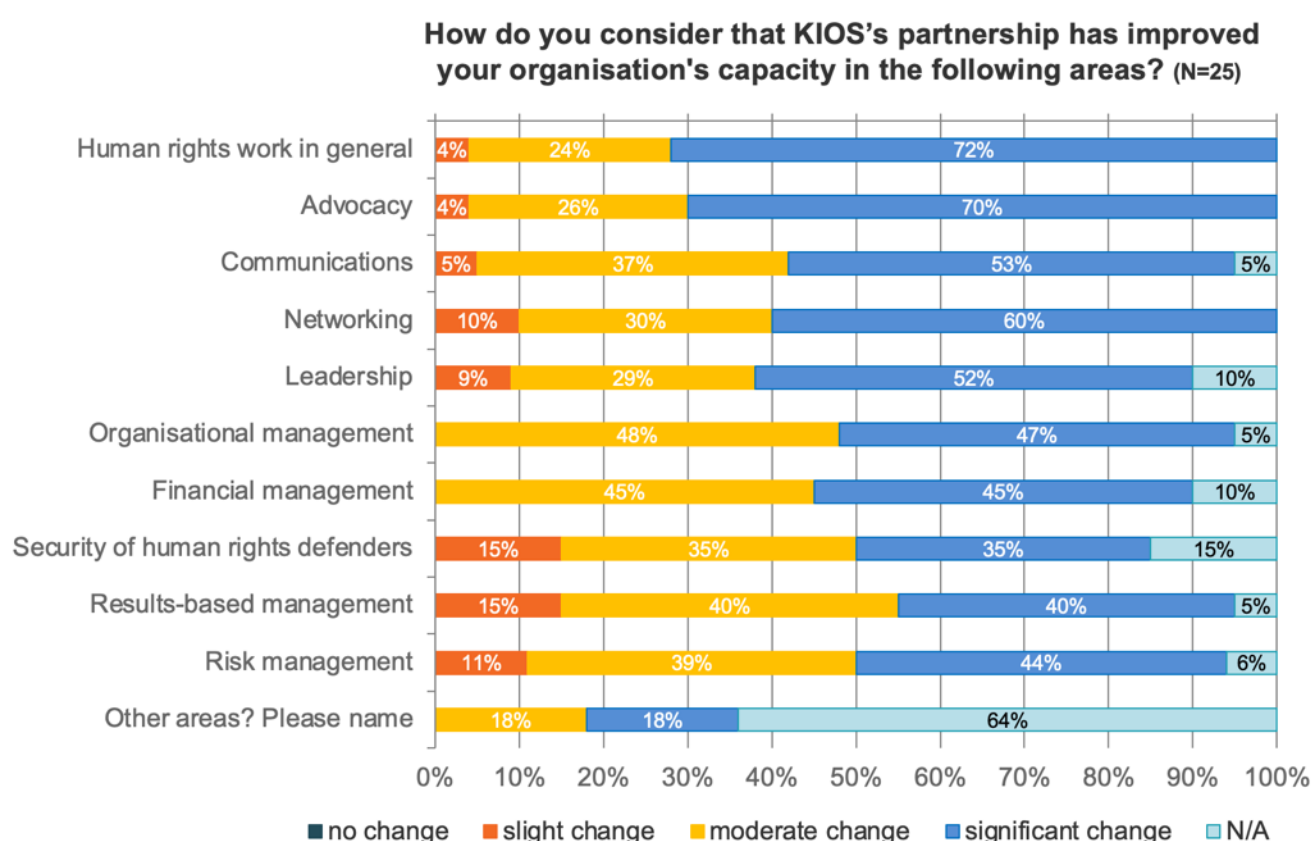
### 3. Findings of the evaluation

#### How do the grantees consider that KIOS’s support has improved their organisational and technical capacity in different thematic areas?

The online questionnaire asked grantees to assess how much their capacity has been strengthened in human rights work overall and under various themes due to the support provided by KIOS (see table 1 below). The grantees were asked to respond only to those themes that have been relevant to them during the current programme period. They were also instructed to consider changes influenced by support from other potential donors, as long as KIOS's support was still contributing to the change.

#### 3.1 Capacity development in thematic areas

Table 1. Grantees’ capacity development in diverse thematic areas



Nearly three out of four respondents (72%) reported significant improvements in their overall human rights work thanks to KIOS’s support. This change can be well understood by considering that obtaining, managing and implementing the grant itself strengthens the organisation’s capacity to carry out its human rights work.

Regarding the specific themes, over two-thirds of respondents (70%) reported a significant strengthening of their advocacy capacity. In other thematic areas of communications, networking, leadership, organisational and financial management, about half of the respondents (45-60%) assessed their capacity as significantly increased, with just under half rating it as moderately increased. No grantee reported no change in any of the areas.

For security of human rights defenders and results-based management, 15% of respondents in both areas assessed their capacity as only slightly increased. This is noteworthy, as both have been areas of focus during the programme period. On the other hand, security challenges are on the rise in all programme countries, and responding to them is challenging and also depends heavily on external factors. What comes to results-based management, there is much to learn in it, and it takes time and persistent effort to become proficient in it. In these two thematic areas, however, almost half of respondents (40-44%) assessed that their capacity had increased significantly, which is, of course, a good achievement.

In the questionnaire, grantees were also asked to describe how the enhanced capacities are reflected in the organisation and in its activities. Below is a theme-by-theme breakdown of the grantees' answers.

**Advocacy.** Strengthened advocacy capacity has empowered grantees to defend their communities' rights more effectively, elevate issues on national and international stages, and foster collaboration with stakeholders. Increased capacity has also allowed grantees to access international human rights mechanisms and create coalitions for collective advocacy. Additionally, organisations have refined their advocacy through sustained data collection, reliable reporting, and partnerships that bolster their credibility. By linking grassroots efforts with international platforms, grantees have been instrumental in supporting affected communities and seeking remedy at multiple levels.

**Communications.** Grantees have developed their communication capacity over time which has led to improved outreach and more effective engagement with stakeholders, donors, and communities. Grantees' communication strategies have diversified, utilising platforms like social media, newsletters, and research articles to raise awareness and advocate for human rights.

**Networking.** Grantees' strengthened advocacy capacity is reflected in their ability to effectively engage with stakeholders at local, national, and international levels. Through KIOS support, grantees have expanded their networks, allowing for better collaboration with key partners such as governments, NGOs, and international human rights bodies. These partnerships have enabled more strategic advocacy campaigns and have amplified their influence, particularly in areas like gender justice, human rights, and climate change. For example, grantees have participated in international forums, established relationships with influential policy-makers, and engaged in advocacy coalitions. Additionally, these networks have facilitated knowledge-sharing, policy dialogue, and resource mobilisation, enhancing their organisational effectiveness. The ability to mobilise diverse stakeholders, hold policy dialogues, and coordinate collective action is now a key strength, positioning these organisations as trusted advocates in the human rights sector. Overall, the growth in networking capacity has significantly boosted their advocacy work and ability to drive social change.

**Leadership.** The enhanced leadership capacity of grantees is evident in their increased ability to guide and inspire action within their organisations and communities. Support from KIOS has enabled the development of leadership programs, recruitment of skilled staff, and enhanced mentorship, which has fostered effective leadership at all levels. For example, grantees have strengthened internal governance, built leadership among marginalised groups, and created platforms for youth and women to take on key roles. These initiatives have empowered individuals to lead advocacy efforts, manage community-driven projects, and engage with local authorities.

**Organisational management.** Grantees' strengthened organisational management capacity is reflected in the improved systems, structures, and leadership that grantees have implemented. KIOS's support has led to the development of strategic plans, communications strategies, and improved financial management practices, which have enhanced accountability and transparency. Through better recruitment, training, and monitoring, grantees have optimised resources and tracked outcomes more effectively. Despite challenges like fundraising, these advancements have strengthened governance,

decision-making, and operational sustainability, allowing organisations to manage their projects more efficiently.

**Financial management.** KIOS's support has enhanced grantees' financial reporting, accountability, and compliance with internationally recognised standards. KIOS's grants have also helped organisations implement digital financial management systems and develop policies and practices, ensuring better financial integrity, transparency, and ultimately fostering more efficient use of resources and improved financial sustainability.

**Security of human rights defenders.** The strengthened capacity in the safety of human rights defenders (HRDs) is reflected in the increasing efforts to address their protection needs. Many grantees have developed safety policies, provided psycho-social support, and implemented capacity-building initiatives focused on risk management, advocacy, and digital security. In response to risks, some HRDs have been relocated to safer areas, and others have received training on security protocols.

**Results-based management.** As a result of improved capacity in results-based management (RBM), grantees have improved their planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes. Training provided by KIOS has enhanced the use of tools such as logframes and theories of change, outcome-oriented planning, and regular data collection. These advancements have fostered more effective project implementation, and achievement of set outcomes.

**Risk management.** At the organisational level, grantees have developed the ability to assess situations and effectively manage associated risks. Risk assessments are conducted systematically, ranking inherent risks based on their likelihood and potential impact on intended projects. This structured approach ensures that grantees prioritise and address the most significant risks, enabling better decision-making and project implementation.

### 3.2 Capacity-building needs

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Grantees were asked in which areas they still need capacity-building. Both larger, seasoned organisations and smaller, newer grantees alike responded to the question by mentioning several needs. All highlighted the importance of ongoing capacity-building, especially in today's rapidly changing world. The list below presents the needs organised into categories, with specific requests for each category detailed underneath:

Figure 2. Grantees' capacity-building needs in diverse thematic areas



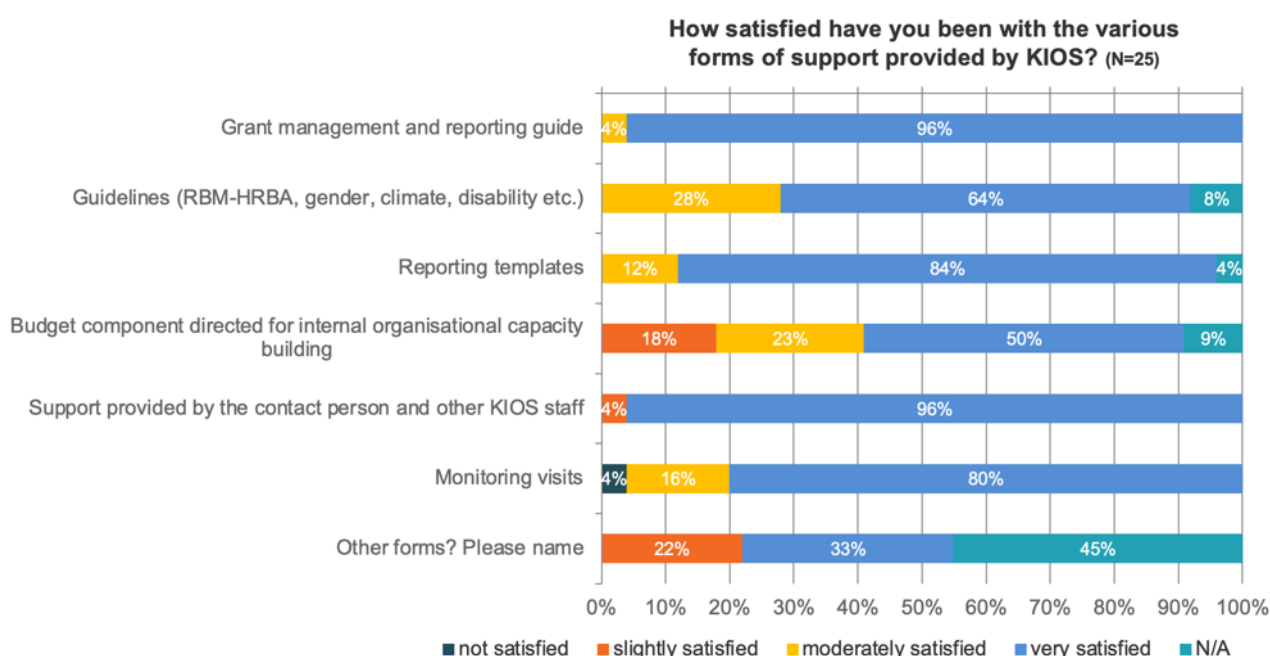
Other thematic areas mentioned once by grantees: Mental health and psychosocial support, climate change, human rights, international human rights mechanisms, transitional justice, legal aid, community outreach and engagement strategies, social movement building and collective action, transgender persons inclusive programming.

## From the grantees’ perspective, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the different capacity-building modalities and mechanisms used by KIOS?

The evaluation asked grantees how satisfied they had been with the different modalities and mechanisms in which KIOS provides support to them (see table 2 below). These support methods include written materials, such as the grant management and reporting guide, various KIOS guidelines and reporting templates. Additionally, support methods include the possibility to include grantees’ own organisational capacity-building in the budget, support provided by KIOS’s staff, and project monitoring visits. Other support methods highlighted by the grantees included capacity-building through external consultant and interaction with local partners and other grantees. Core funding was not listed as an option in the questionnaire, but according to KIOS staff, at least half of the grantees receive core funding. The importance and significance of core funding is highlighted under the section 3.9.

### 3.3 Satisfaction with various forms of support

Table 2. Satisfaction with various forms of support



The grantees were most satisfied with the support provided by KIOS's contact person and other staff, the grant management and reporting guide, the reporting templates, and the project monitoring visits. In these areas, at least four out of five respondents were very satisfied. Below is a more detailed breakdown of each form of support and the respondents' evaluations of them.

**Grant management and reporting guide (96 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** The grantees found the guide to be clear, comprehensive, and well-aligned with their needs. Its clarity helped streamline grant management processes and ensured compliance with KIOS's expectations. Additionally, the straightforward and accessible language of KIOS’s guidelines made it easier for the grantees to understand expectations and meet reporting and financial requirements.

**Guidelines such as RBM-HRBA, gender, climate, disability, etc. (64 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** Although the grantees assessed the guidelines very positively, many responses suggest that the respondents did not seem to understand what KIOS's guidelines are. According to KIOS staff, these policies have not been fully implemented among the grantees, primarily due to a lack of time. A few

grantees also indicated that the policies did not apply to them (N/A), which may similarly indicate that these policies have not reached all grantees. However, a few noted that the guidelines helped them incorporate new perspectives, such as gender and human rights-based approaches, into their work.

**Reporting templates (84 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** Grantees appreciated the reporting templates, which emphasised results-based management and were straightforward, user-friendly, and effective in streamlining reporting processes. These tools made it easier to meet deadlines, maintain transparency, and clearly report on progress, minimising the burden of administrative work. While some forms were occasionally lengthy, their clarity helped focus attention on impactful reporting rather than unnecessary details. According to KIOS staff, efforts have been made at KIOS to ensure that the templates are as functional and straightforward as possible. This work is well reflected in the responses from grantees.

**Budget directed for internal organisational capacity-building (50 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** Those who had strengthened their capacity with budget component expressed satisfaction with this opportunity, as it enhanced the organisations' overall performance and sustainability. Grantees used the budget to develop areas such as financial management, leadership, mentorship programs, social media and data security techniques, project management, monitoring and evaluation including results-based management, advocacy capacity, and networking. A quarter of respondents indicated that they had not increased internal capacity within their organisation with KIOS funding which might explain the lower rating (slight or moderate satisfaction with this form of support). Some had not planned to include capacity-building in their budget, others lacked sufficient funds, and some had received support through an external consultant funded by KIOS.

**Support provided by the contact person and other KIOS staff (96 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** The grantees assessed contact person support as highly satisfactory, highlighting excellent communication, timely financial disbursements, and responsive assistance from knowledgeable staff. Grantees appreciated the clear, open communication channels and regular mentorship, which fostered trust and empathy, particularly as KIOS staff showed understanding of their organisational constraints. This empathy enables KIOS to provide support that feels tailored and personally invested in each grantee's mission. Dedicated support staff were always available to explain unclear aspects, and feedback on reports was constructive and valuable, helping improve documentation quality and transparency. Overall, this supportive, flexible, and empowering approach from KIOS was highly appreciated by the grantees.

**Monitoring visits (80 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** Grantees assessed KIOS monitoring trips as valuable, highlighting that monitoring and periodic visits provided clarity in the implementation process and facilitated productive discussions during in-person visits. However, one grantee noted moderate satisfaction, expressing a desire for more time dedicated to visiting grassroots projects. They suggested that increased opportunities for deeper collaboration during these visits could further enhance project outcomes. Although the grantees were very satisfied with the monitoring trips, KIOS staff pointed out that trips are not made to all grantees every year.

### 3.4 Forms in which grantees would like to receive capacity-building

The questionnaire asked grantees about the ways in which they would like to receive capacity-building in the future. Grantees responded that they hoped for more trainings, peer learning with other KIOS grantees, international networking opportunities and sustained capacity-building programmes such as mentorship and fellowship.

**Trainings and workshops.** Grantees highlighted the benefit of in-person capacity development trainings, tailored training workshops and 1-2 days trainings.

**Advocacy and networking opportunities.** Grantees expressed a desire to attend international advocacy forums and opportunities for engaging with global civil society.

**Peer learning** was another area of interest, with grantees seeking more opportunities to exchange knowledge with other KIOS grantees and engage in peer-to-peer exchanges to share best practices.

**Mentorship and hands-on support.** Grantees valued hands-on mentorship programs, especially ongoing one-on-one mentoring in fields like human rights advocacy and organisational management.

**Fellowships.** Grantees expressed their interest in receiving support through fellowships and sustained capacity-building initiatives that would offer longer-term benefits.

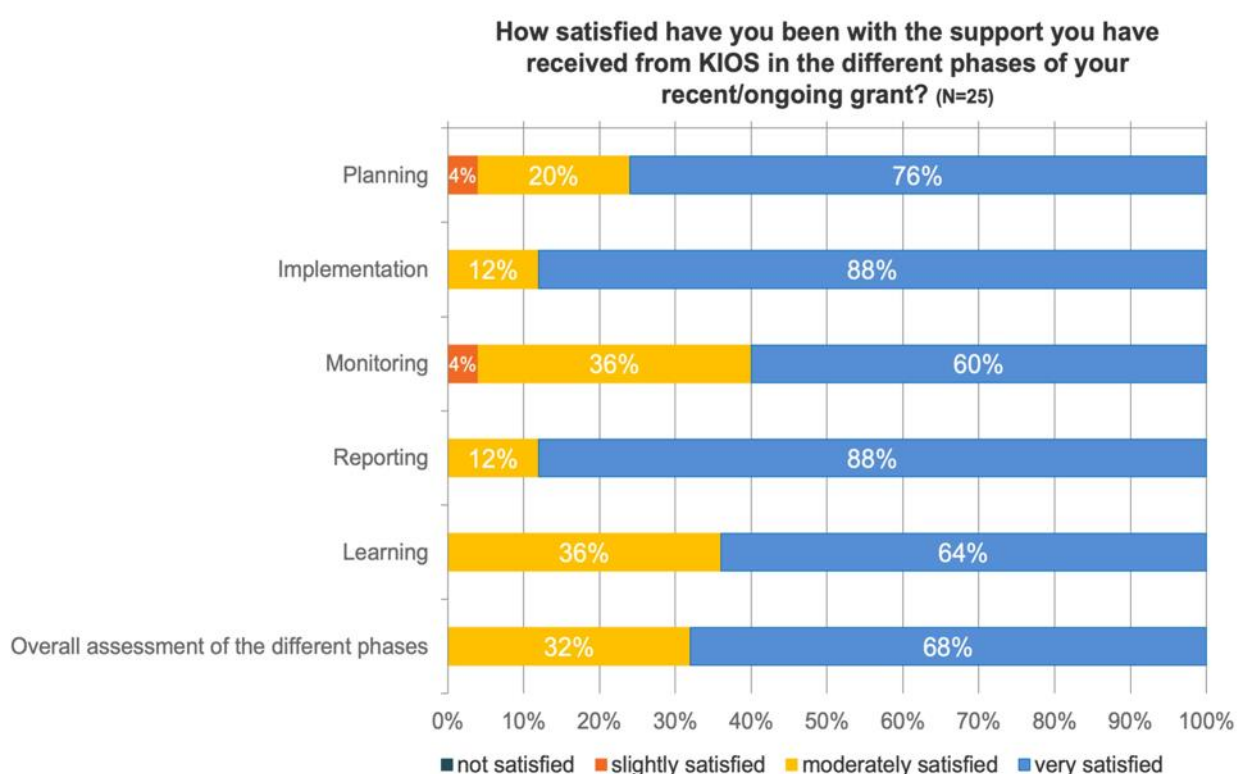
**Introductions to potential funders** were seen as important steps for diversifying resources and building partnerships.

### How has KIOS succeeded in supporting its grantees throughout the grant cycle (planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting)? What are the strengths and weaknesses?

Respondents to the online questionnaire were asked to assess how satisfied they had been with the different phases of the grant cycle, as well as to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each phase (see table 3 below).

#### 3.5 Satisfaction with the support received throughout the grant cycle

Table 3. Satisfaction with the support received during grant phases



Two-thirds of respondents have been very satisfied with the support provided by KIOS at various stages of the grant cycle, while one-third was moderately satisfied. Grantees have been most satisfied with the support provided during the implementation and reporting phases, with nearly 90% very satisfied. Three out of four were also very satisfied with the support provided by KIOS during the planning phase. Over half were very satisfied with the support for monitoring and learning. None of the grantees were dissatisfied with support at any stage of the funding cycle, although one respondent was somewhat dissatisfied with the support provided during planning and monitoring.

**1. Planning (76 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** Grantees expressed high satisfaction with KIOS's support during the planning phase. Respondents appreciated KIOS's clear guidance and strategic advice, which helped them refine objectives and align their grants with long-term goals. For instance, one grantee shared that KIOS's assistance allowed them to address gaps in project design, ultimately strengthening their planning approach and ensuring that their objectives were both realistic and impactful. Another grantee mentioned that the consultative nature of KIOS's planning support enabled them to address the specific needs of their target communities effectively. To enhance the planning phase, some of the grantees suggested that KIOS facilitate introductions to potential partners, share successful past proposals and lessons learned and conduct capacity assessments for grantees to identify specific organisational needs.

**2. Implementation (88 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** Grantees expressed high satisfaction (88 % of the respondents) with the implementation support provided by KIOS, particularly highlighting KIOS's flexibility and responsiveness. KIOS was described as supportive in addressing evolving needs, approving budget adjustments, and adapting plans to unforeseen challenges, such as political complexities or emergencies like COVID-19. This flexibility has been essential for effective programme delivery for grantees. Grantees also appreciated the promptness of KIOS in fund disbursement. To improve the implementation phase, grantees emphasised the need for continuous capacity-building focused on substance knowledge, organisational development and on topics relevant to grant management. Grantees also expressed the need for building alliances with national and international agencies, connecting to like-minded groups, both regionally and globally, and experience sharing and networking opportunities among grantees.

**3. Monitoring (60 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** KIOS's involvement in monitoring was praised for being hands-on, with frequent check-ins and field visits. Grantees found this level of engagement helpful for tracking progress and making necessary adjustments. One respondent shared that KIOS's monitoring visits and in-person sessions were valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange. To improve monitoring, some grantees recommended more frequent engagement and site visits to strengthen the partnership and assess progress. They also highlighted for the need for technical assistance and expertise in data management, integration of comprehensive monitoring systems and support in assessments and evaluations.

**4. Reporting (88 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** KIOS's support in reporting was widely commended for its clarity and timeliness. Grantees found KIOS's reporting expectations to be well-defined, and the feedback received was constructive, helping them improve the quality of their reports. Some respondents appreciated the quick responses to their reports, enabling them to proceed with their activities without interruptions. For the grant closure phase, one grantee suggested improvements in providing feedback on grant performance to help grantees understand their strengths and areas for improvement, offering guidance on future funding opportunities to support continued growth and sustainability, and encouraging documentation of lessons learned, allowing grantees to capture valuable insights and refine their approaches for future projects.

**5. Learning (64 % of the respondents were very satisfied).** Grantees valued KIOS's emphasis on learning and capacity-building opportunities. Through knowledge-sharing sessions and workshops, grantees were able to learn from KIOS's and other grantees' experiences. One grantee shared that the learning

sessions with KIOS were tailored to their needs and allowed them to adopt best practices, leading to meaningful organisational growth. Another respondent mentioned that KIOS's technical guidance helped staff develop their skills, contributing to improved service delivery and programme impact. However, many respondents expressed a need for more, and for more structured learning opportunities, such as workshops, webinars, peer networking events and peer exchanges. Structured platforms and facilitated sessions for reflecting on lessons learned from ongoing grants would allow grantees to learn from each other's successes and challenges.

## Do the grantees see any new emerging human rights issues and risks in their operational environment?

### 3.6 Emerging human rights issues and risks

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The evaluation asked about new emerging human rights issues and risks in the grantee interviews. These risks are due to a combination of rapid economic changes, political instability, and growing global attention to human rights. In many cases, governments are struggling to balance development priorities (such as economic growth, resource extraction, and energy transition) with the protection of human rights. The increasing use of digital technologies has both amplified activism and provided new tools for governments to monitor and suppress dissent, exacerbating privacy and security risks. Additionally, entrenched societal norms around gender, caste, and sexuality continue to fuel discrimination, even in the face of legal protections. These emerging risks reflect ongoing tensions between development, governance, and human rights in the context of rapidly changing global and local landscapes. Below is a country-specific list of the human rights issues and concerns reported by the grantees.

**In Kenya**, several pressing human rights issues are linked to energy, mining, technology, women's rights, and civil society challenges:

- **Energy and climate change:** Large-scale energy and infrastructure projects often lack adequate community involvement, raising concerns over sustainable development and fair energy policies. Many African countries like Ghana and Ethiopia are shifting towards energy independence, highlighting also in Kenya the need to incorporate local priorities into development plans while ensuring community rights.
- **Mining:** Expanding mining activities have led to land rights disputes, environmental impacts, and compensation issues. There's a need for policies that protect community rights and include locals in decision-making about mining operations.
- **Technology and human rights:** Technology, including AI (Artificial Intelligence), presents new opportunities and challenges for human rights in Africa. There is a growing movement to use technology for environmental protection and rights advocacy.
- **Women's rights and security:** Women human rights defenders face more surveillance and safety risks than men. Femicide is also a critical issue, with many women losing their lives in violent and politically motivated attacks.
- **Civic space and funding cuts for state human rights agencies:** New laws, like the Public Benefits Organisations Act, impose strict compliance demands on civil society, threatening their operations. Additionally, budget cuts to key state human rights agencies impair their ability to support victims, which hinders access to justice and protection.

**In Uganda**, emerging concerns highlight key human rights challenges arising from resource extraction, industrial growth, land rights, labor protections, and digital privacy:

- **Resource extraction and environmental activism conflicts:** The extraction of rare earth minerals and fossil fuels is sparking conflict in East Africa, for example on projects like the East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline in Uganda. Human rights defenders face increasing threats and arrests, as climate activists and fossil fuel developers clash. The situation raises concerns over the safety of activists as environmental impacts become more visible.
- **Land rights in transitional mineral mining:** Mining activities, especially for transitional minerals, are expanding across East Africa. This growth frequently involves land acquisitions, which creates critical land rights issues for local communities affected by these projects.
- **Workers' rights in new industrial developments:** Chinese investments in industrial parks, particularly in agriculture, are raising new concerns about workers' rights. These developments impact the value supply chain and have broader implications for environmental sustainability, property rights, and privacy protections for local communities.
- **Digital surveillance and activist monitoring:** In Kenya and Tanzania, government surveillance on social media and internet platforms is increasingly used to monitor activists. This trend could expand across East Africa also to Uganda, endangering data privacy and online security for those involved in activism and human rights work.

In **Nepal**, emerging human rights issues include shrinking civic space, ongoing discrimination and marginalisation of vulnerable groups, threats to human rights defenders, and systemic inequality, poverty, and resource disparities:

- **Shrinking civic space:** The government in Nepal has introduced restrictive laws that hinder civil society organisations' operations, especially in areas like registration, renewal, and international funding. This trend threatens democratic health and human rights protections.
- **Impact of social media on human rights:** Social media poses human rights risks, particularly for young people vulnerable to online harassment. Additionally, misinformation on these platforms undermines social harmony and dignity, raising new human rights concerns.
- **Limited effectiveness of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):** With only 10% of its recommendations acted upon, the NHRC's effectiveness is compromised, limiting its role in addressing human rights violations.
- **Safety of human rights defenders:** Human rights defenders in Nepal face significant threats, harassment, and violence, with insufficient protections hindering their vital advocacy efforts.
- **Gender-based violence and caste-based discrimination:** Despite legal protections, gender-based violence and caste discrimination persist, harming individuals' dignity and perpetuating social inequality.
- **Discrimination against marginalised groups:** Marginalised groups, such as Dalits, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, Madhesis, and indigenous communities, continue to face discrimination that limits their societal participation and access to rights.
- **Lack of meaningful representation:** Despite gains in parliamentary representation, women and Dalits lack representation at higher bureaucratic levels, reducing their influence in key decision-making processes.
- **Digital access and the digital divide:** Limited digital access among marginalised groups exacerbates inequality, restricting access to opportunities, information, and essential resources.
- **Systemic inequality, poverty, and resource disparities:** Nepal struggles with systemic inequality, poverty, and imbalanced resource distribution, depriving certain groups of opportunities and perpetuating social disparities.

In **Sri Lanka**, the grantees highlighted emerging risks related to the country's economic, political, and social crises:

- **Political instability and election-related risks:** Ongoing political, social and economic instability impacts human rights defenders, LGBTQ individuals, and marginalised communities, heightening security risks. With a new president in office and parliamentary elections

scheduled for November 14, the political landscape is in flux<sup>1</sup>. The upcoming election increases risks for vulnerable groups due to intensified political scrutiny.

- **Rising hostility toward LGBTQ individuals and lack of legal protection:** Political and religious leaders have escalated anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, creating an unsafe environment. Despite promises of reforms, legal protections for LGBTQ rights remain limited and slow-moving.
- **Economic crisis:** Severe economic hardship impacts citizens' access to basic needs, risking economic rights. Rising unemployment worsens poverty, challenging livelihoods and human rights. The economic crisis has also led to widespread housing instability and homelessness.
- **Mental health crisis:** Political and economic pressures are driving a mental health crisis. Increased stress and uncertainty impact individuals' mental well-being, making support a crucial need in addressing the broader human rights situation.
- **Human trafficking and drug issues:** Economic hardship fuels human trafficking, while drug trafficking remains prevalent, with both contributing to rising crime rates and social instability. Chemsex within the GBT community is a growing health risk, necessitating targeted support.
- **Migration:** Economic and political instability drives migration, straining resources and requiring migrant protections.
- **Online security threats:** Increased government digital surveillance and social media monitoring threaten activists' privacy and freedom of expression, raising concerns about data safety and online security for human rights defenders and activists.

## In which ways do the grants strengthen the human rights movement and civil society?

The aim of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' programme support is that Finnish CSOs strengthen active and diverse civil societies in developing countries and their operating conditions over the long term<sup>2</sup>. This section explains how KIOS aligns with this objective by describing how its grantees strengthen civil society with the support of KIOS. The results of the grantees' work, i.e. concrete changes achieved, are described in the next section of this report.

The support provided by KIOS to its grantees, which is based on identifying and funding human rights - focused CSOs in the Global South, enhancing their capacity, supporting their national and international networking, and engaging in advocacy on their behalf and alongside them, is shown in figure 3 below. However, this section does not further discuss the KIOS's role, as it is covered elsewhere in the report. The figure, however, helps clarify the scope within which KIOS can influence the work of its grantees in strengthening civil societies in their respective countries.

### 3.7 Dimensions of work in which grantees strengthen civil societies in the Global South

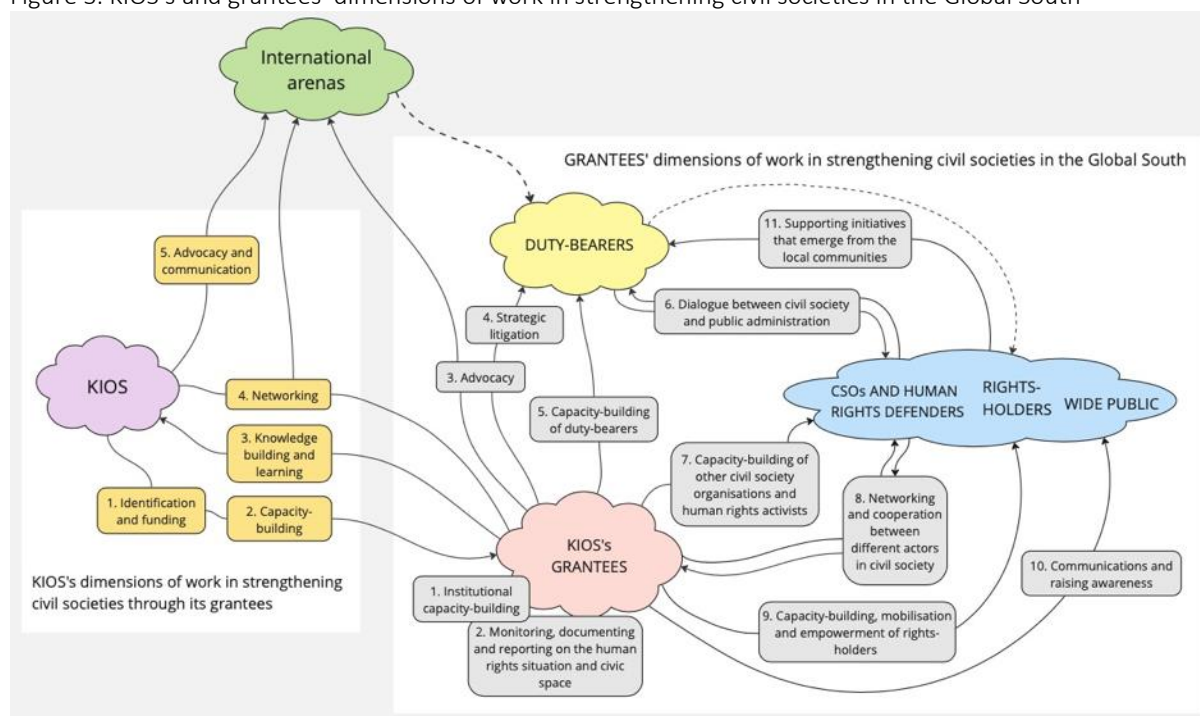
The evaluation asked grantees in interviews to broadly describe how they carry out their work. The work of the grantees revealed 11 different dimensions or components through which the grantees strengthen both the human rights movement and civil society in their respective countries (see figure 3 below).

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<sup>1</sup> The interview was conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2024

<sup>2</sup> Instrument description for programme-based support, MFA, September 2024

Figure 3. KIOS's and grantees' dimensions of work in strengthening civil societies in the Global South



(1) Perhaps the most typical dimension of work strengthening civil societies among programme support recipients, and also central to KIOS grantees, is own organisation's capacity-building. KIOS grantees engage in capacity-building as part of the grant they receive, while the work itself and KIOS's ongoing support during the grant period also enhance their organisational and technical capacities. This capacity strengthening is discussed extensively in other sections of this report.

(2) A second key aspect of grantees' work is monitoring, documenting, and reporting on human rights and civil society. These efforts support evidence-based advocacy influencing policies that uphold human rights. Systematic reporting fosters transparency and accountability by exposing human rights abuses and pressuring governments or perpetrators to take action. It also informs communities about their rights, empowering them to demand change. Additionally, well-documented reports enhance grantees' credibility, positioning them as reliable and influential advocates.

(3) A central element of KIOS's work across all grantees is strong advocacy. KIOS grantees engage in diverse advocacy efforts at local, national, regional, and international levels. This work enhances accountability by highlighting obligations under national and international human rights frameworks, holding duty-bearers responsible for upholding rights. It also promotes the rule of law by advocating for legal and institutional reforms. Effective advocacy often leads to structural changes that benefit civil society in the long term. It is important for grantees that the needs and rights of marginalised groups are included in policy and decision-making.

4) Strategic litigation plays a transformative role in KIOS's grantees work in advancing human rights and strengthening civil society. By holding duty-bearers accountable, litigation aligns legal frameworks with human rights obligations. It often aims at leading to landmark rulings that clarify legal standards, reinforcing protections and influencing how laws are applied. High-profile cases draw public attention, fostering dialogue, creating societal pressure for change, and increasing support for rights-based initiatives. It also raises awareness in affected communities about their rights and legal tools for protection.

(5) KIOS's grantees strengthen the capacity of duty-bearers to understand and fulfil their human rights obligations. Capacities of authorities, decision-makers, and politicians are not built only through

trainings, but in all forms of cooperation such as in meetings, dialogue and advocacy activities. This work improves governance, accountability, and service delivery while fostering trust between authorities and civil society. By equipping duty-bearers with knowledge and skills, grantees help create an enabling environment where civil society can thrive and citizens' rights are better protected.

(6) Many of KIOS's grantees support and promote dialogue between civil society and public administration. This collaboration builds trust, improves mutual understanding, and ensures that people's needs and rights are considered in decision-making. By creating platforms for constructive engagement, grantees help bridge gaps, enhance accountability, and promote inclusive governance. This also empowers civil society actors to play a more active role in shaping policies and addressing societal challenges.

(7) Particularly in strengthening the human rights movements, but also as a dimension of empowering civil societies, grantees build the capacities of other civil society and human rights organisations. This work enhances their skills, knowledge, and resources, enabling them to operate more effectively.

(8) KIOS's grantees strengthen the human rights movements and civil societies by facilitating networking and collaboration between diverse civil society actors. This helps build coalitions, improves coordination, and promotes shared strategies, enhancing the overall impact of advocacy efforts. This approach enables the movement to address complex challenges more comprehensively, fostering greater resilience and long-term change in society.

(9) One of the key elements of human rights-based approach is strengthening the capacity of rights-holders. KIOS's grantees raise awareness of rights, mobilise, and empower rights-holders to assert and defend their rights. Through legal aid, support, and for example trainings, the grantees equip communities to seek justice. This empowerment fosters greater participation in decision-making, increases accountability, and enables whole communities to challenge human rights violations, ultimately contributing to more resilient and active civil societies.

(10) KIOS's grantees use communication and awareness-raising to foster understanding, change public attitudes on diverse themes, and inform the public about human rights issues. Grantees produce materials, use social media and radio, and advocate through campaigns. By highlighting injustices, grantees mobilise public opinion and create pressure for change. This fosters broader societal engagement, encourages accountability, and empowers communities to demand their rights, ultimately contributing to a more informed, active, and resilient civil society.

(11) Grantees also support initiatives that emerge from local communities. By providing resources, guidance, and advocacy, grantees help amplify the voices of grassroots movements and empower communities to address their own issues. This support fosters a sense of ownership, enhances local leadership, ultimately promoting sustainable change and a more active, resilient civil society.

KIOS does not use any systematic conceptual framework (such as categories described above) in its reporting to describe how the programme, through the work of grantees, strengthens civil society in the Global South. However, the use of such a framework could provide a clear structure for reporting and demonstrate the relevance of the KIOS Programme to strengthening civil society and how the results achieved (described in the next section) are clearly compatible with the MFA's objective of strengthening civil society.

## How do the grantees assess what have been the changes in the targeted groups and their operating environment?

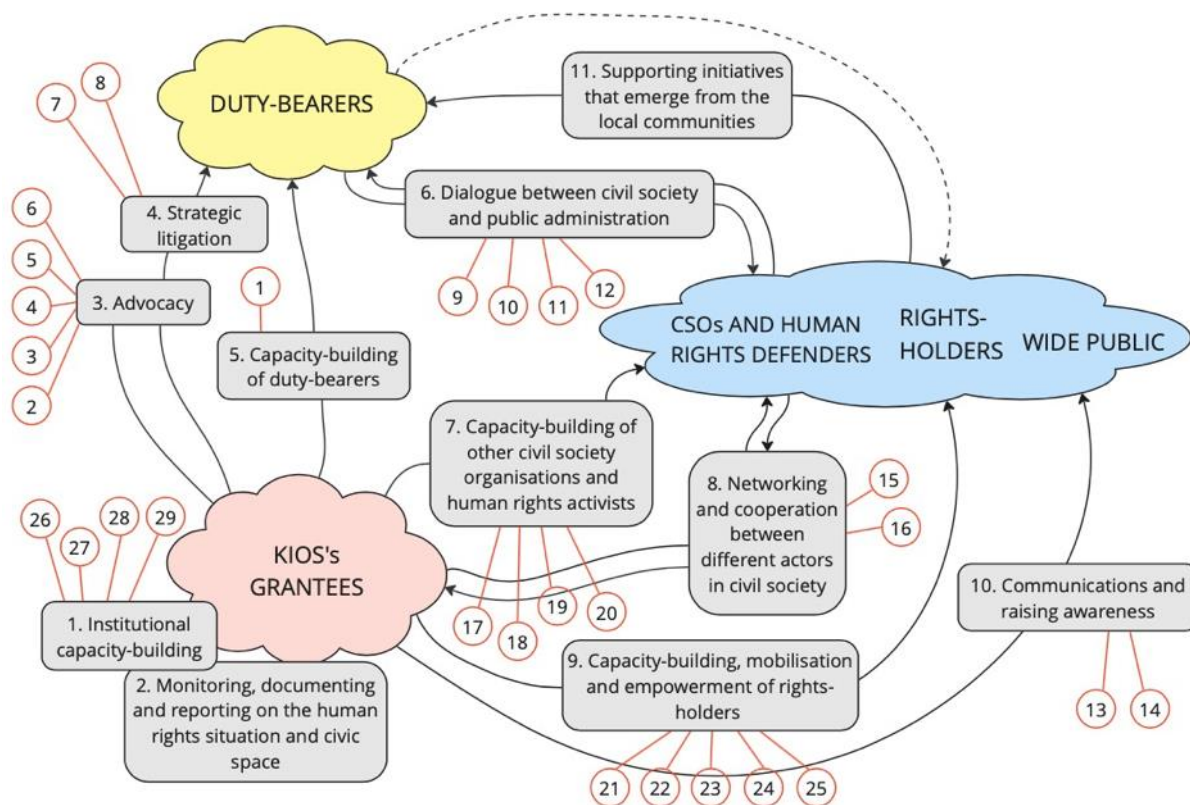
### 3.8 Achieved results

The evaluation asked eight grantees (30 % of all the current grantees) to describe what they considered to be their three biggest achievements made possible by KIOS's support in the current programme period. The reported changes highlight KIOS's human rights-based approach, which aims for transformative, systemic changes among different actor groups, in their interrelations and collaboration, as well as in legislation and law enforcement.

All the achievements feed to the outcome and impact levels when assessed against the programme's results framework. They reflect capacity growth for both rights-holders and duty-bearers, but at the same time go far beyond this: both groups are advancing the realisation of human rights by actively claiming their rights (rights-holders) and, on the other hand, fulfilling their obligations (duty-bearers). The changes also reflect increased collaboration among civil society actors, as well as cooperation between different groups of actors, shifts in public awareness, and, finally, changes in policies, practices, and legal frameworks. The changes are divided into six different categories below. The figure below shows which component of strengthening civil society each change belongs to. The figure shows also that the changes are broadly distributed across different components and are well aligned with the work grantees carry out.

Figure 4. Achieved changes organised under dimensions of work of strengthening civil society

#### Achieved changes organised under dimensions of work in strengthening civil society



**Influenced policies, practices and legal frameworks.** These changes represent efforts to shape, influence, or directly impact policy decisions, legal frameworks, and judicial practices at national or local levels to ensure greater protections and rights for marginalised communities.

1. Created and distributed Sri Lanka's first comprehensive guide on Sexual Orientation and Gender (SOGI) rights, with materials widely used by health workers and incorporated into police training programs. *(Sri Lanka)*
2. Influencing policy and practice at the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) to require public involvement in environmental decisions. *(Kenya)*
3. Conducted pioneering research on air pollution's impact on women and marginalised communities in the Kathmandu Valley, influencing the National Human Rights Commission's recommendations. *(Nepal)*
4. Strengthening judicial recognition of environmental rights, establishing the state's obligation to protect procedural environmental rights. *(Kenya)*
5. Advances in transitional justice - Efforts toward establishing a truth commission and an office for missing persons have laid the groundwork for future accountability. *(Sri Lanka)*
6. Achieving close to 98% success in interventions supporting communities in accessing remedies. *(Uganda)*
7. Achieving accountability at the individual level in Kenya through the "Baby Pendo" case, setting a precedent for police responsibility. *(Kenya)*
8. Prosecution of torture cases in Kenya as torture rather than assault, marking a shift toward specific accountability for abuse. *(Kenya)*

**Enhanced cross-sector collaboration with duty-bearers.** These changes reflect efforts to establish or strengthen networks and partnerships across different sectors, fostering collaboration to achieve greater advocacy impact and support.

9. Building trust and collaboration with District Secretariat offices in Sri Lanka, bridging gaps with government stakeholders. *(Sri Lanka)*
10. Forming a tripartite collaboration involving civil society and state agencies like the National Police Service in Kenya. *(Kenya)*
11. Partnering with the National Human Rights Commission and Ministry of Forests in Nepal to advance human rights initiatives. *(Nepal)*
12. Building stronger regional networks and fostering cross-sector collaboration between government, NGOs, and civil society for coordinated advocacy and unified impact. *(Uganda)*

**Raised awareness among the wider public.** This category involves achievements in creating awareness and advocating for societal issues, often through campaigns, media, or educational resources to foster understanding and change public attitudes.

13. Raised awareness on the connection between human rights and climate justice in Nepal through dialogues and media. *(Nepal)*
14. Challenged perceptions of climate science in Nepal, highlighting climate change as a social, political, and cultural issue, beyond technical or environmental boundaries. *(Nepal)*

**Enhanced collaboration and capacity development of civil society organisations, other stakeholders and human rights activists.** This category highlights efforts to improve the collaboration, skills, knowledge, and resilience of different stakeholders and human rights activists.

15. Creating a unified civil society response to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) report, bringing attention to human rights compliance issues. *(Sri Lanka)*
16. Built a robust network with national and international organisations, elevating HRDs' voice in advocacy from local to global levels and supporting accountability initiatives. *(Uganda)*
17. Creating a pool of trained LGBTQI+ community leaders in Sri Lanka to carry the movement forward. *(Sri Lanka)*
18. Equipping human rights defenders in Nepal with reporting and litigation skills, forming rapid response teams. *(Nepal)*

19. Building a network of 350-400 peer resource persons within institutions to advocate for SOGI rights. *(Sri Lanka)*
20. Provided consultation and support to national organisations, enhancing their capacity to support partners and promote corporate accountability. *(Uganda)*

**Community empowerment and mobilisation.** These changes aim to empower communities, supporting them to take collective action and enabling them to advocate for their rights and engage with policy processes effectively.

21. Empowered communities in Kenya to understand and exercise their rights, currently in resisting a proposed nuclear plant project. *(Kenya)*
22. Youth engagement in human rights advocacy - Young people in Nepal are now participating in local decision-making, challenging the notion that human rights advocacy is solely an adult responsibility. *(Nepal)*
23. Built community capacity in Uganda to independently manage grievance redress mechanisms. *(Uganda)*
24. Shifted public attitudes in Kenya, enabling community members to approach and engage with the National Police Service for addressing their concerns. *(Kenya)*
25. Increased civil society response to advocate for tea plantation community rights, with community members now actively demanding their rights. *(Sri Lanka)*

**Strengthened organisational capacity.** These changes reflect significant organisational strengthening among KIOS's grantees.

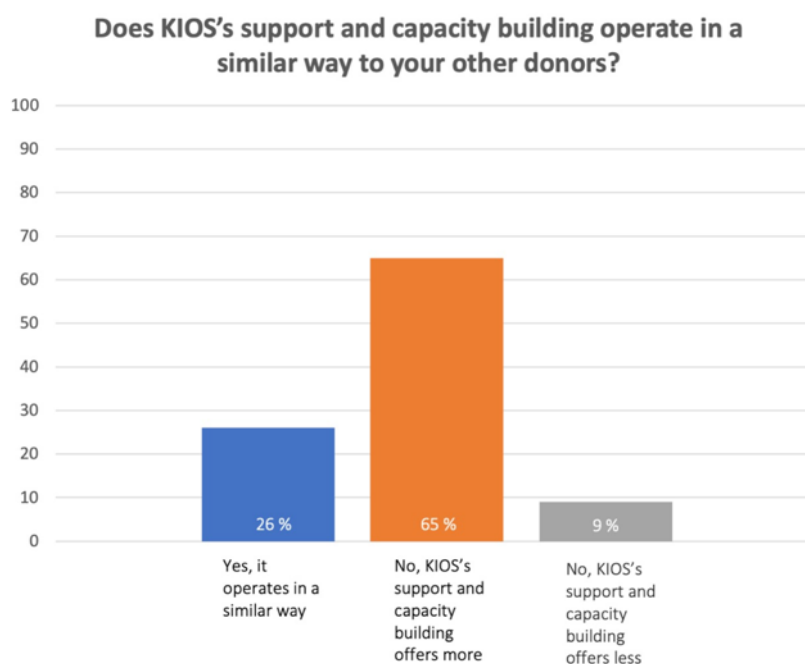
26. Strengthened strategic leadership, enhancing long-term project planning and the capacity to navigate complex challenges. *(Uganda)*
27. Increased organisational resilience through improved financial management and consistent planning, creating a more stable and self-sustaining organisation. *(Uganda)*
28. Established a helpline, providing community members with structured legal aid and guidance, connecting them directly to resources and assistance. *(Sri Lanka)*
29. Expanded outreach in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka by hiring Tamil staff members and building community trust, leading to increased demand and requests for a permanent office in Jaffna. *(Sri Lanka)*

**In the grantees' experience, does KIOS's capacity-building operate in a similar way to other donors, or how does it differ?**

Grantees were asked in the online questionnaire whether KIOS's support and capacity-building differ from other donors (see table 4 below).

### 3.9 The distinction of the support provided by KIOS from other donors

Table 4. The distinction of the support provided by KIOS from other donors



A quarter of respondents (26 %) said that the support and capacity-building function in a similar way. Two-thirds of respondents (65 %) reported that KIOS's support and capacity-building clearly differ from other donors, as it offers more. Two respondents (9 %) felt that other donors provide more. They mentioned that other donors offer both annual and regular virtual workshops and training sessions for them unlike KIOS, and conduct regular learning sharing sessions between different partners. Below is a more detailed explanation of KIOS's approach, which grantees feel differs from that of other donors.

**Core funding.** KIOS stands out from other donors by providing core funding that organisations can allocate at their discretion. This support is valuable, especially for grantees facing diverse capacity gaps, as it enables them to address specific organisational needs and priorities.

*"KIOS is open to providing core funding that we can use towards initiatives we deem fit. This is incredibly useful, and I encourage other partners to adopt this approach."*

**Emphasis on human rights-based approach.** KIOS places a strong emphasis on a human rights-based approach, encouraging grantees to align their initiatives with principles of human rights. Unlike other donors who may focus more on short-term outcomes, KIOS's commitment to human rights allows grantees to develop programmes that foster long-term impact.

*"KIOS's support allows us to focus on community human rights needs rather than predefined outcomes. This approach helps us develop initiatives based on actual community responses."*

**Collaborative and flexible approach.** KIOS offers a collaborative and flexible support structure, allowing grantees to tailor capacity-building activities to their unique needs instead of adhering to a one-size-fits-all model. KIOS's flexibility also helps grantees adapt their grants to changing conditions on the ground, particularly in sensitive environments.

*"KIOS has shown great flexibility during the implementation phase, allowing us to adjust our projects to meet evolving needs. This is essential for us, as other donors often maintain rigid structures that don't account for our dynamic context."*

**Holistic approach.** KIOS's support extends beyond financial assistance, taking a holistic approach to capacity-building which focuses on long-term organisational sustainability. This comprehensive support includes not only individual projects but also the broader needs of the organisation, strengthening all aspects of running a human rights organisation.

*"Unlike most donors who focus solely on project-based funding, KIOS supports our entire organisation. This includes capacity-building opportunities that ensure all aspects of our organisation are strengthened."*

**Long-term partnership.** Two-thirds of the organisations that responded to the questionnaire have been partners with KIOS for at least 6 years and of these, almost one-third for at least 10 years. KIOS aims at longer-term partnerships than many other donors, providing a stable foundation for grantees' growth and more opportunities for organisational capacity-building. This continuity enables grantees to leverage internal resources more effectively and build on the foundation established by KIOS's support.

*"Our current grant with KIOS spans two years, which has allowed us to continue programs initiated by KIOS and later implemented through other funding sources. This long-term support has been crucial for our growth."*

**Responsive and personalised support.** KIOS's commitment to responsive, engaged, and personalised support differentiates it from other donors who may take a standardised approach. KIOS's staff actively engage with grantees, providing ongoing feedback and support throughout the grant cycle and offering assistance tailored to each organisation's specific context and needs.

*"KIOS staff are always engaged and available for guidance, providing tailored support based on our unique needs and context. This level of personalised support is something we rarely experience with other donors."*

**Knowledge sharing among grantees.** KIOS has encouraged knowledge sharing and collaboration among its grantees, fostering a learning environment that allows them to learn from each other's successes and challenges. This peer-to-peer learning is less common with other donors who may focus solely on individual organisational performance without facilitating these opportunities.

*"KIOS promotes knowledge sharing through collaborative environments where grantees can exchange insights. This has been instrumental in helping us understand and adopt best practices from other organisations."*

## What is the grantees' experience of how KIOS strives to understand the human rights context, the operational environment and its challenges in its target countries?

### 3.10 KIOS's knowledge of human rights contexts

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The evaluation explored how KIOS engages in dialogue with grantees and seeks to understand the human rights situation and operational challenges in their countries. Apart from understanding the operational environment, grantees consistently highlighted the relational qualities of KIOS's support—such as empathy and engagement that foster trust and a strong sense of genuine partnership.

**In-depth understanding of local human rights contexts.** KIOS is described as having an intimate knowledge of human rights issues in each country. They consult grantees, conduct field visits, and engage with local communities to gain firsthand insight into the on-the-ground realities. One organisation describes KIOS's approach as a *“thirst for comprehensive understanding of the country's overall democratic development, civic space, and situation of human rights defenders.”*

**Continuous dialogue and engagement.** Grantees consistently describe KIOS as constructive and supportive in their communication style, fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect. KIOS places significant emphasis on maintaining open and continuous dialogue with grantees, facilitating regular discussions and consultations. This communication is described as *“cordial, friendly and supportive”* and enables both KIOS and its grantees to stay updated on the latest developments. Many grantees highlight the value of this interaction, such as one organisation noting, *“The KIOS team is always open to discussing our situation and actively seeks to understand the current challenges we face.”*

**Adaptability to changing operational environments.** Recognising the dynamic nature of operational environments, KIOS shows flexibility in its support by adapting its funding mechanisms to address emerging needs. This flexibility is crucial in regions facing political instability and security risks. As one grantee states, *“KIOS has a clear awareness of the operational difficulties... This has enabled KIOS to be more flexible and adaptive, allowing us to navigate these challenges more effectively.”*

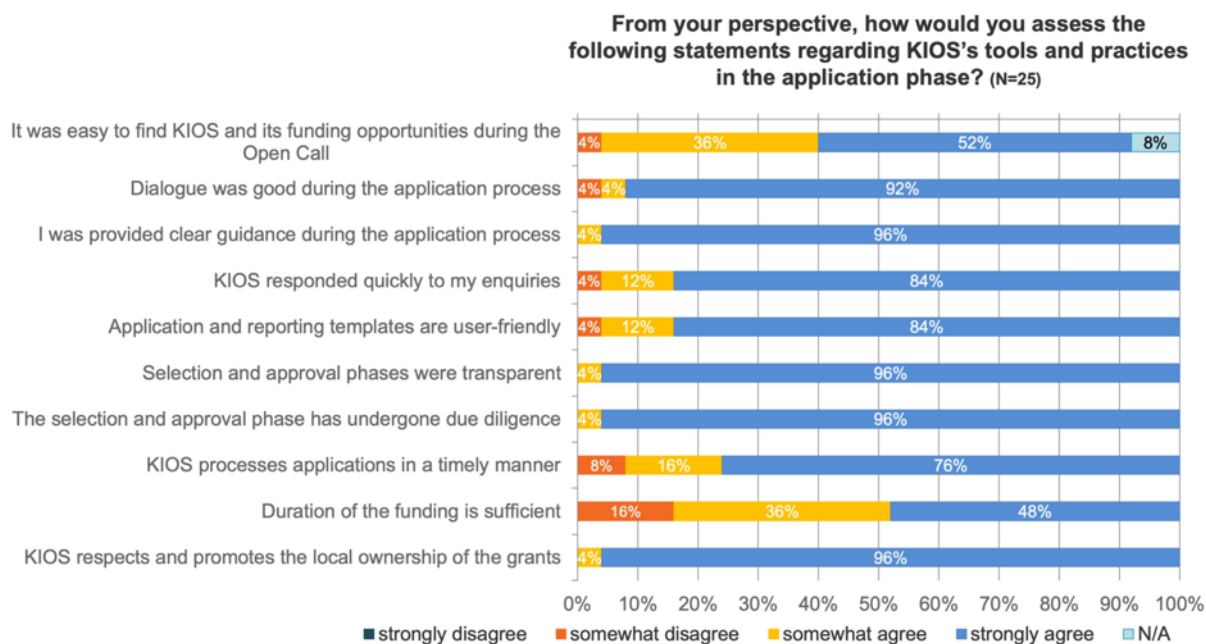
**Respect and cultural sensitivity.** Grantees felt that KIOS respects their local contexts and cultural nuances, which makes the support feel more relevant and appropriate. This respect for the grantee's autonomy and expertise in their own community allows them to operate with dignity and self-determination, rather than feeling micro-managed.

## How do KIOS's grantees assess the functionality of the grant-making mechanism?

The evaluation examined how satisfied the grantees are with KIOS's application process and grant mechanism. Although this question was not explicitly included in the original evaluation questions outlined in the ToR, one of the objectives of the evaluation was to explore how KIOS could improve its tools and practices in grant-making, and it was added in the online questionnaire.

### 3.11 Functionality of the application process and grant mechanism

Table 5. Functionality of the application process and grant mechanism



Grantees evaluated the application process overall as highly functional and effective. Over 90% of respondents were very satisfied with the dialogue, clear guidance, and transparency during the selection and approval phases, as well as the due diligence process, respect for and promotion of local ownership. Additionally, more than 80% were very satisfied with KIOS's responsiveness and found the application and reporting templates user-friendly.

About half of the respondents indicated that KIOS was only somewhat easy to find during open call<sup>3</sup>. However, the questionnaire does not provide insights into why this was the case.

Regarding the adequacy of funding duration, several grantees commented that funding periods should be longer, as human rights work requires time, and achieving meaningful change is not a quick process. While KIOS aims for long-term partnerships, the need for repeated applications for two to three year grants consume organisational resources and creates uncertainty about the future.

A few respondents also noted that KIOS did not process applications in a timely manner, although the majority were very satisfied with this aspect as well. A few respondents mentioned that delays during the renewal phase have resulted in interruptions to salary payments. Staff turnover at KIOS over the past few years has possibly contributed to delays in communication with grantees.

In open-ended responses, grantees also expressed their expectations regarding improvements for the grant mechanism. Each of these proposals represent views of one to three grantees:

- **Accessible online portal:** Ensure the application portal is user-friendly and compatible with various devices and browsers.
- **Flexible language requirements:** Accept applications in multiple languages to make the process more inclusive, particularly for local organisations.
- **Simplified application forms:** Streamline forms to make them more accessible for smaller NGOs. Provide reusable templates for budgets, narratives, and other documentation.

<sup>3</sup> KIOS organises one open call for new grantees per programme period.

- **Informational support:** Host webinars or Q&A sessions during the application phase to help applicants understand the process and clarify doubts.
- **Clear grant strategy overview:** Provide a detailed overview of the KIOS grant programme strategy to help grantees align their applications with programme goals.
- **Extended deadlines:** Lengthen application timelines to allow more time for proposal preparation.
- **Feedback mechanism:** Include diverse stakeholders in the application review committee.
- **Increased budget flexibility:** Allocate funds for monitoring (10-20% of the total budget) and unforeseen costs (10%) to address challenges arising during project implementation.
- **No-cost extensions:** Allow extensions to adapt to changing contexts.
- **Inclusive reporting:** Expand categories in reporting beyond "Men," "Women," and "Other" to explicitly include LGBTIQ+ individuals for better data collection and representation.
- **Process clarity:** Clearly outline processes and expectations from the outset, including transparent explanations for funding decisions.

## (10) What are the strengths and weaknesses in the building of KIOS's grant portfolio?

### 3.12 KIOS's grant portfolio

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KIOS has defined in its 2022-2025 programme the general principles for how it builds its grant portfolios in South Asia and Eastern Africa. Key criteria outlined in the programme include:

1. KIOS channels funding particularly to its three thematic focus areas: democracy and rule of law, non-discrimination and gender equality, and business and human rights. Cross-cutting themes—non-discrimination and gender equality, the safety of human rights defenders, and environmental and climate issues—are also considered when selecting grantees. However, KIOS also reserves some pool funding for new and emerging issues on the ground. Focusing on specific themes enables better local networking, synergy, and capacity-building for grantees.
2. In addition to selecting more established human rights actors, KIOS supports emerging and grassroots human rights groups and movements essential for building a sustainable human rights movement. In this type of mixed portfolio approach, mutual collaboration between organisations and learning between large and small grantees are emphasised. However, partnerships with smaller, emergent organisations may incur a higher level of risk which may be more time consuming for KIOS to manage.
3. KIOS is committed to providing long-term funding for selected grantees and to making multi-annual general grant decisions whenever possible, building the capacity of grantees to plan their work holistically over the long term.
4. KIOS identifies grantees having the mandate to work at regional level and in capacity-building initiatives such as organisations or networks focusing on the safety and security of human rights defenders. This enables KIOS to keep some smaller grantees and human rights defenders working in extremely challenging contexts or with highly sensitive issues in the portfolio.

In addition to these criteria, the way KIOS selects new grantees also influences portfolio building. During each programme period, KIOS organises an open call for grants, with the most recent being the open call held in Nepal during this programme period. Open calls are important to increase the accessibility of grant-making and to find new human rights actors, especially in new thematic or country areas for the KIOS Foundation. At other times, there is an ongoing call, meaning KIOS continuously identifies new

grantees through its networks. This supports the building of portfolios from other strategic perspectives.

In practice, the available funding also affects portfolio building. According to KIOS staff, the scarcity of funding has limited the strategic development of portfolios in certain countries, for example in Sri Lanka. One practical issue in selecting grantees has been whether it is possible to travel for monitoring visits. If a potential grantee is located very far away, for example, in rural areas, the limited resources for monitoring trips may not allow travel to those locations.

KIOS has built its current grant portfolio around three thematic areas, bringing clarity and focus to the portfolio. KIOS supports new and emerging, large and small organisations, and has also continued to support its long-term grantees. According to interviews with KIOS's staff, especially in Eastern Africa sufficient financial resources for building the portfolio have enabled the creation of a clear portfolio, with a strong thematic focus, allowing KIOS to profile itself, differentiate, and gain visibility in this sector. In Nepal, the open call has guided the portfolio-building process positively: the goal was to include smaller actors representing marginalised groups and their rights, and this has been successful according to KIOS staff. The comments from the representatives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs also support the view that KIOS has built its portfolio systematically and professionally.

The interviews conducted during the evaluation also highlighted that although portfolio development is based on certain criteria, the selection of grantees has largely relied on the expertise, experience, and networks of long-term staff members. Some interviewees described the portfolios as having been built partly in an organic manner. The selection criteria have not been systematically documented, which has been perceived as lacking transparency among KIOS staff and has led to a lack of shared understanding about how the portfolio has been built and how all grantees have been selected for it.

## 3. Conclusions and recommendations

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### 3.1 Conclusions

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**CONCLUSION 1.** The grantees have made significant progress in strengthening their capacities across key areas, which has enhanced their ability to effectively carry out human rights work and increased their sustainability. However, there is a clear need for ongoing capacity-building.

**CONCLUSION 2.** The majority of grantees are highly satisfied with KIOS's support throughout the grant cycle and in different capacity-building modalities. However, there is a gap in the implementation of KIOS's guidelines among grantees, and not all grantees receive regular monitoring visits. Additionally, many grantees have not used KIOS funding to strengthen their own organisational capacity. There is also a clear demand for more and structured learning and networking opportunities. These areas could be further developed to enhance the overall effectiveness of KIOS's support.

**CONCLUSION 3.** In a rapidly changing world, new human rights issues and risks continuously emerge, which grantees are well-positioned to identify and address within the limits of their resources. Many emerging issues require ongoing capacity-building — learning new knowledge and skills, where donors like KIOS can provide support.

**CONCLUSION 4.** KIOS's grantees strengthen civil societies and the human rights movements through a multifaceted and comprehensive approach. The achieved results demonstrate that KIOS's support has enabled grantees to achieve substantial, multi-level effects across various areas of the human rights work. Achievements highlight KIOS's human rights-based approach, which aims at realisation of human rights through transformative, systemic changes among different actor groups, in their interrelations and collaboration, as well as in legislation and law enforcement. The use of a systematic conceptual framework to describe how grantees strengthen civil society and achieve results could provide a clear structure for reporting and demonstrate better the relevance and effectiveness of KIOS's work.

**CONCLUSION 5.** Grantees see KIOS as a highly engaged and encouraging donor whose support extends beyond financial assistance, taking a holistic approach that focuses on long-term organisational sustainability and aiming at achieving long-term impact. KIOS actively strives to learn about and understand the human rights situations in the target countries, using a comprehensive approach that centers on close collaboration with its grantees. As a result, KIOS has a deep understanding of the operating environments and human rights situations, which is essential for relevant and effective work in supporting grantees. However, human rights work takes time, and changes do not happen quickly. While KIOS's funding mechanism is well-regarded for its functionality, and many partnerships are long-term and many grantees have received support for a long time, grants are from one to three years. Continuous applications consume resources and create uncertainty about the continuity of operations. Longer-term funding phases would provide security and stability for organisations.

**CONCLUSION 6.** The implementation of a strategy and thematic division has brought greater focus and clarity to KIOS's grant portfolio, which is a positive development for aligning projects directly with KIOS's goals. Long-term staff members with significant expertise and networks are valuable assets, enhancing KIOS's ability to select appropriate grantees. While beneficial in some respects, the portfolio has partly grown in a somewhat organic manner, which has resulted in a lack of transparency and limited collective understanding within KIOS.

## 3.2 Recommendations

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**RECOMMENDATION 1.** Provide more structured learning and networking opportunities for grantees, along with capacity-building in both established and emerging thematic areas. Emphasise the importance of strengthening grantees' own capacity. Implement KIOS guidelines more consistently. Carry out regular monitoring visits to all grantees.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.** Continue to support the grantees with a multifaceted, human rights-based approach, as this has proven effective in achieving substantial and systemic changes. Consider creating a conceptual framework through which it can be systematically and clearly reported how grantees strengthen civil society and the results they achieve through their work.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.** Continue the holistic approach and the diverse support for grantees; it is the added value in KIOS's grant-making. Consider extending the duration of the funding phases to provide longer-term support for long-term grantees, aligned with the MFA's 4-year programme cycle. This would offer greater security and organisational stability for grantees in the rapidly changing world. Focus on maintaining good responsiveness to grantees. Consider making small improvements to the application process based on grantees' suggestions in the report.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.** Develop and implement more formalised and transparent processes for building and managing the grant portfolio. This could include more frequent internal reviews, discussions, and especially proper documentation, ensuring that all staff have a shared understanding of the grant portfolio's direction and rationale.

### 1. Terms of Reference

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## Terms of Reference for Programme Evaluation for KIOS Foundation

August 2024

### 1. Background to the evaluation

KIOS Foundation was established in 1998 by 11 Finnish NGOs working with human rights, peace and development. The foundation is primarily funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland. KIOS advances the realisation of human rights as defined in the human rights treaties and instruments of the United Nations, as well as in regional human rights instruments.

KIOS is committed to ensuring that human rights are universally respected and upheld and focuses on advocating for the rights of marginalised and excluded groups, as well as individuals in vulnerable positions. By partnering with human rights defenders (HRDs) and their organisations in developing countries, KIOS actively supports and amplifies their critical work. Additionally, KIOS engages in robust human rights advocacy and communication efforts to further its mission.

Recognising that human rights cannot be imposed from outside, KIOS sees itself as an enabling partner for local HRDs, their organisations, and movements. Our core mandate is to provide comprehensive support, empowering HRDs and their organisations in the Global South to continue their work in a safe, sustainable, and effective manner, tailored to their unique environments.

The supported human rights work is mainly on a transformational level of Human Rights-Based Approach, and all the priorities and implementation strategies are set by the HRDs and the organisations themselves. KIOS's strategy also emphasises a regional approach to grant-making and support, fostering regional synergies, building civic space, and protecting human rights defenders at risk.

KIOS's support for human rights defenders and their organisations is delivered through four strategic pillars:

- i. Identifying and funding relevant local human rights actors in the Global South (i.e. grant-making programme).
- ii. Capacity and network building as well as mentoring when needed.
- iii. Advocacy, communications and strategic alliance building.
- iv. Knowledge building and learning.

KIOS directs its support to focus countries in East Africa and South Asia, including Kenya, Uganda, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In 2022, KIOS made 22 new funding decisions and another nine in 2023.

The MFA granted KIOS a total sum of 7 000 000 € for the programme period 2022-2025.

## **2. Rationale, purpose and objectives of the evaluation**

This evaluation serves the dual purpose of accountability and learning. It should give an assessment of the results achieved so far in this programme period in strengthening the capacities of the grantees of KIOS Foundation. It should assess the role that KIOS plays in strengthening its grantees' organisational and technical capacities, and the strengths and weaknesses of KIOS' modalities in capacity-building and grant making approaches. KIOS' grantee capacity-building is directly related to its impact-level objective of building a strong, more independent and pluralist human rights movement that contributes to the realisation of human rights. KIOS' grants include grantee capacity building based on their own stated wishes, an expert assessment of their specific needs and what is possible within KIOS's budgetary constraints.

The evaluation will feed into the planning of the next programme period (2026-2029) and the strategy process of KIOS.

The objectives of this evaluation are

- To increase understanding of the best ways to support the strengthening of the civil society through KIOS' grantees,
- To increase understanding of how KIOS has managed to build the organisational and technical capacities of its grantees,
- To give recommendations to the development of KIOS' grantee capacity-building and partnership management work,
- To give recommendations to the development of KIOS' tools & practices in grant-making.

## **3. Scope of the evaluation**

The evaluation focuses on the KIOS programme implementation period (2022-2025) up to now.

The evaluation will be guided by parts relevant for CSO projects of the Evaluation manual of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (based on the OECD/DAC and EU criteria). The evaluation will utilise OECD/DAC criteria, particularly relevance, coherence, impact and sustainability in the context of KIOS' grant-making mechanisms.

## **4. Issues to be addressed and evaluation questions**

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

- 1) How do the grantees consider that KIOS' support has improved their organisational and technical capacity in any the following areas:

- Human rights work in general
  - Advocacy
  - Communications
  - Networking
  - Leadership
  - Organisational management
  - Financial management
  - Security of human rights defenders
  - Results-based management
  - Risk management
  - other areas?
- 2) From the grantees' perspective, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the different capacity-building modalities and mechanisms used by KIOS?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses in KIOS' grantee selection process?
  - How could KIOS develop the ways in which it supports the grantees' organisational management?
  - How has KIOS succeeded in supporting its grantees throughout the project cycle (planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting)? What are the strengths and weaknesses?
  - In the grantees' experience, does KIOS's capacity building operate in a similar way to other donors, or how does it differ?
- 3) How does the KIOS programme strengthen civil societies and respect for human rights in the grantees' operational contexts?
- In which ways do the grants strengthen the civil society and respect for human rights? How could this be reinforced?
  - How do the grantees assess the changes in the targeted groups and their operating environment? Could they do it more effectively?
  - What is the grantees' experience of KIOS' understanding of the human rights context and relevant challenges and how could this be strengthened? How similar or different is it to other international donors?
  - Do the grantees see any new emerging human rights issues and risks in their operational environment?
  - Is there sufficient funding in the grantees' operational environment?

## 5. Methodology

The evaluation team is expected to use its professional skills and experience in defining the most relevant approach and methodology for the evaluation. Proposed methodology for the evaluation should be comprehensive to ensure a broad view of KIOS's work in building grantees' capacity.

The methodology is recommended to include:

- 1) A desk review and analysis of documents,

- Key documents from the Foundation including
    - Programme document 2022-2025
    - Sample of project documents (funding decisions 2022-2024)
    - Annual reports of 2022 and 2023
    - Funding criteria, project forms, management tools
  - Other key documents
    - Relevant guidelines from the MFA
- 2) Preparing online questionnaire (1) to KIOS’s grantees during this programme period (around 40) and online interviews with selected grantees (6-8)
  - 3) and discussions with KIOS representatives.

The methodology will be agreed on with the evaluator at the start of the project.

## 6. The evaluation process and schedule

The evaluation is expected to take 12-15 working days.

KIOS will select the evaluator(s) based on their proposals of interest. These proposals, including a work plan with the suggested evaluation criteria, budget, and the CVs of the evaluators should be submitted by 2.9.2024 by email to [applications@kios.fi](mailto:applications@kios.fi) with the title “KIOS Foundation Evaluation”.

If you have any questions related to the assignment, contact KIOS Executive Director Kim Remitz by email to [kim@kios.fi](mailto:kim@kios.fi)

Timeline for the evaluation:

Activities	Estimated Schedule
Contracting of evaluators	September 2024
Kick-off meeting	September 2024
Inception report	September 2024
Inception report meeting	September 2024
Interviews	October 2024
Draft Report	October 2024
Presentation of the Draft Report	October 2024
Final Report	November 2024

## 2. List of documents reviewed

- Annual Reports 2022 and 2023
- Criteria for assessing grant applications
- Final report for capacity development support for KIOS implementing partners in Uganda 2022
- Final Report template KIOS 2024
- Grant Application Form
- Grant Closure documents 2022-2024
- Grant Closure template Sep2024
- Grant Management and Reporting Guide
- Grant Proposal Template
- Joint Evaluation of Foundations, 2020
- KIOS Assessment Report June 2023
- KIOS Programme 2022-2025
- KPMG Review of KIOS Final Report
- Lista meneillään olevista ja uusista rahoituksista 2022 ja 2023
- Lista päättyneistä rahoituksista ja niiden tulosesimerkit 2022 ja 2023
- Procurement Guidelines for Grantees
- Programme Level Risk Matrix
- Rahoitusprosessi
- RBM capacity assessment tool
- Results Framework 2022-2025
- Risk Matrix 2024
- Seurantataulukko suositusten kehittämistoimista
- Strategic Plan of Action 2021
- Vuosiraporttilomake 2023

## 3. List of organisations interviewed

<b>Selected grantees for interviews (8)</b>
<b>Nepal</b>
1. International Institute for Human Rights, Environment and Development (INHURED)
2. Youth Advocacy Nepal (YAN)
<b>Kenya</b>
3. Center for Justice Governance and Environmental Action (CJGEA)
4. Independent medico-legal unit (IMLU)
<b>Sri Lanka</b>
5. Equite Sri Lanka Trust (Equite)
6. Women's Political Academy (WPA)
<b>Uganda</b>
7. Anonymous
8. Twerwaneho Listeners' Club (TLC)
<b>KIOS Foundation, staff (8)</b>
<b>Former KIOS Foundation's employees and current employees on leave (4)</b>
<b>Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, staff (3)</b>
The Unit for Civil Society (KEO-30)
The Unit for Human Rights Policy (POL-40)
Embassy of Finland, Nairobi, Kenya

## 4. Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation questions	Data sources	Data collection methods
<p>1. How do the grantees consider that KIOS's support has improved their organisational and technical capacity in any of the following areas (<i>effectiveness, sustainability</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human rights work in general</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Networking</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Organisational management</li> <li>• Financial management</li> <li>• Security of human rights defenders</li> <li>• Results-based management</li> <li>• Risk management</li> </ul>	<p>All grantees (app. 40) from 2022-2025 programme period</p> <p>KIOS staff</p>	<p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>In-person workshop</p>
<p>2. From the grantees' perspective, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the different capacity-building modalities and mechanisms used by KIOS?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has KIOS succeeded in supporting its grantees throughout the project cycle (planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting)? What are the strengths and weaknesses? (<i>Efficiency, sustainability</i>)</li> <li>• How could KIOS develop the ways in which it supports the grantees' organisational management? (<i>Relevance, sustainability</i>)</li> <li>• In the grantees' experience, does KIOS's capacity-building operate in a similar way to other donors, or how does it differ? (<i>Coherence</i>)</li> </ul>	<p>All grantees (app. 40) from 2022-2025 programme period</p> <p>KIOS staff</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews</p>	<p>Online questionnaire</p> <p>In-person workshop</p> <p>Interview</p>
<p>3. How does the KIOS programme strengthen civil societies and respect for human rights in the grantees' operational contexts?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In which ways do the grants strengthen the human rights movement and civil society? How could this be reinforced? (<i>Impact, relevance, sustainability</i>)</li> <li>• How do the grantees assess what have been the changes in the targeted groups and their operating environment? (<i>Impact, effectiveness</i>)</li> <li>• Do the grantees see any new emerging human rights issues and risks in their operational environment? (<i>Relevance, sustainability</i>)</li> <li>• What is the grantees' experience of how KIOS strives to understand the human rights context, the operational environment and its challenges in its target countries? (<i>Relevance</i>)</li> <li>• What are the strengths and weaknesses in KIOS's grant portfolio? (<i>Relevance</i>)</li> </ul>	<p>4 grantees from Nepal</p> <p>7 selected grantees from Kenya, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Uganda</p> <p>KIOS staff</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews</p>	<p>Online workshop</p> <p>Interview</p> <p>In-person workshop</p> <p>Interview/questions via email</p>