



# VSO Netherlands 2022-2025 Strategy

Making change happen

# 1. Key insights and reflections

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## Looking back 2019-2021

As an organization, we are proud to have started two large new programs in the past two years. With the Make Way program and the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment, VSO Netherlands has enlarged its impact and visibility. As we identified our ambitions for 2022-2025, we have first explored important trends and developments that will affect international development, and in particular the work of VSO. Additionally, we recognise a number of international developments that are relevant for our new strategy.

## External trends and developments

We are witnessing a number of **intersecting crises** that affect the lives of the most marginalised and that reverse progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including climate change and the depletion of natural resources and livelihoods, conflict and displacement and the Covid-pandemic and its effects on health systems, gender equality and poverty levels.

At the same time, there is enhanced political oppression and **shrinking civil space** in several countries, in addition to increased polarisation and political or military conflict.

If we turn to international development itself, we find more critical thinking on the role of donors from the global North, including INGO's and a call for **shifting the power** and localisation of aid.

There is enhanced **competition for development funding**, both in the space of grants as well as private donations. This amplifies the importance of both impactful and evidence-based interventions as well as relatable stories and personalised messaging to supporters. In addition to an emphasis on **partnership building** and working in complementarity to others, both in strong NGO alliances as well as in public-private partnerships, engaging with the **private sector**.

Meaningful **youth engagement**, and a focus on youth empowerment, participation and resilience is becoming more recognised as a means to address key development challenges, particularly in light of the work and education gap. At the same time, the **nexus** between humanitarian and development interventions is becoming more important and the ability to work in fragile spaces. **Digitalisation** continues, with many affects, including on the future of work as well as on the organisation of social and civic movements.

Over the coming years, VSO's strategy will evolve, also in recognition of new drivers in international development, such as the climate emergency and the Covid-19 pandemic. The global pandemic and climate change have both raised awareness of how fragile our global community is. We are all at risk but some face being made much more vulnerable than others. Creating a fair world for everyone means every person has an equal opportunity to realise their rights to a safe, healthy and purposeful life.

VSO will focus on marginalization, vulnerability, discrimination, justice and equality. And we will be even more committed to our core approaches: social inclusion, accountability and resilience. We will focus more on systems change and adopt an explicit rights-based approach. This means that in terms of engagement, we will put more emphasis on policy change and building capacity to hold duty bearers to account. Creating a fair world means re-imagining our social, economic and political systems to be more equal and more just. It means making sure everyone's voice is heard and that they have a choice. It means making sure that those living in fragile places can be supported to thrive. It means people can hold institutions, governments and organisations, including VSO, to account and can influence the decisions that affect their lives. We will focus more on supporting youth action and have a more explicit ambition around our technical support on the global standard on volunteering for development and on creating and enabling environment and policy framework for volunteering. We see a role for ourselves as a thought leader and will be building on evidence and research showing impact and the effectiveness of our volunteering for development approach.

## 2. Our vision and evidence of success

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Our efforts throughout the next three-year strategy will be guided by the idea of targeted growth in line with the foundation we have created between 2019-2021. We envision 2022 – 2025 as a strategic growth period. More specifically, we have identified five priority areas that guide our way of working.

### 1) Deliver high quality and impact

By 2025, we have created impact for our primary actors, notably in the field of youth employment and SRHR for youth with compounded vulnerabilities, by successfully delivering two large scale programs. We have built our technical knowledge base through these programs, and shown our success to key donors, partners and other stakeholders.

In our programs, we have established successful approaches and replicated these across new projects. Especially in the area of youth participation and youth action. Activating and bringing together young men and women will be a key entry point and guiding area of focus throughout our activities. In addition to being an implementer, we are increasingly looking for a brokering / catalyzing role. Our focus on lobby, advocacy, knowledge development to enable system level change has been enhanced. We include new operating and volunteering models, including e-volunteering, hybrid volunteering and leveraging of the volunteering network. Our impact is evidenced by externally corroborated research.

### 2) Diversify our portfolio of projects

We have been able to actively leverage our expanded knowledge base and successes for active lobbying and positioning with our priority donors. This has resulted in a diversified portfolio of a number of smaller to larger programs that impact the lives of our primary actors. We have addressed topics that concern them and affect them in their everyday lives.

### 3) Build strong profile and relations with stakeholders

Showing the effects that we have been able to achieve with our projects underpins our general profile with stakeholders and our audience, further transforming our profile from a 'volunteering sending' to a 'changemaker supporting' organisation. We seek to nurture long term relations with our supporters.

### 4) Bold and entrepreneurial

We dare to make choices and aim to strike a balance between ambition and realism in what we can do. We say no to opportunities that do not contribute or fit with the organizational direction and identity. We continue to be driven by our signature hands-on entrepreneurial spirit within the broader VSO framework.

### 5) Professionalize our way of working

We will further professionalize how we are organized internally, so that we can deliver the results we envision. We aim to work with a lean core team and will use flexible solutions to bring specific knowledge and expertise, especially in project countries. VSO will continue to foster programmatic expertise and enhance learning. In addition, lobby & advocacy will be a field of expertise that is growing. Furthermore, project management and donor compliance will become more important, as we continue to develop on existing areas of expertise, including public fundraising, marketing and volunteer recruitment and management.

## 3. Strategic priorities

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### 3.1 Programs

By 2025, we have taken primary actors, especially young people, as a starting point for our work, while we focus on system-level change. We have positioned ourselves as a strong and known leader in the field of Youth & Decent work, Youth & Intersectionality at the national and international level.

We have ensured a stronger focus on integrated programming across practice areas and continue to focus on the most marginalized strongly linked to vulnerability and discrimination as well as equality and justice. Inclusive decent work, intersectionality, climate crisis, and changing civic space are important themes. HDP nexus programming in fragile states is an area to explore.

#### Expansion of our Livelihoods portfolio through a major focus on Youth & Work

Our ambition is to build on our work in the current CFYE program and further invest in becoming a leading entity in the field of Youth Employment. We aim to develop replicable youth-led and youth-driven concepts that can inform key themes that youth care about, such as green and decent jobs, future of work, representation, inclusion, and women's rights. We want to work with (private sector) partners with strong content and technical knowledge in these fields.

#### Expansion of our Health portfolio through a major focus on right to health rights

We have built on our successes and learnings from Make Way, positioned ourselves as a knowledge partner, and used results to create new opportunities. Our work in Health has been linked more explicitly to our core strengths as an organization: we have invested in existing health rights and the right to access quality comprehensive and inclusive health services through a focus on health advocacy and social accountability of marginalized groups. We have become visible and effective in health advocacy through SRHR lobby platforms.

#### Integrated Vocational Training is our niche focus in Education

In 2025, we have profiled successful vocational training models from current programming and identified ways to scale this. We have identified and pursued spin-off opportunities from CFYE related to TVET. We lobby for accountability in primary and vocational education, shifting the power and strengthening the voice of youth in education planning and monitoring.

#### Cross-Cutting Areas of Focus

In the upcoming years, VSO's Core Approaches have been well integrated into our work. The core approaches have especially been important in our interventions in fragile states. We have positioned ourselves as a knowledge partner and within the organization, there are more resources, time, and space for evidence building and learning. Together we have identified a strong variety of partners (CSO, social enterprises, Pan African partners, INGOs, companies) that complement our strengths with specific technical expertise, as well as technically strong knowledge partners (universities).

### 3.2. Volunteering for Development

In 2025, we have adopted more flexible operating models, reflected on new ways of working and by applying Volunteering for Development. Our Volunteering for Development method recognises the importance of relationships in forging a shared understanding and commitment and building collective action to lasting change. Through community, national and international volunteers, it brings together a diversity of perspectives and experience to generate insights, innovate ideas and undertake actions that can address the underlying causes to complex problems facing our communities. Volunteering will evolve towards more flexible, hybrid and localized models: international and corporate volunteers will be engaged through hybrid and e-volunteer solutions more and more, while more emphasis will

be placed on national youth volunteers who will be co-designing and leading work in communities on the ground. Blended volunteering will continue to be applied. It inspires and ignites the potential for active citizenship everywhere across the globe to step forward and drive the change that will create a fair world for everyone.

### 3.3 Communications

By 2025, the Changemakers we support are central to our external communications. Within the field of development cooperation we want to show that we are a knowledgeable, effective organisation, and a great partner to cooperate with. We make smart use of our budget and capacity by being creative and use our resources wisely. We will focus on a niche audience, rather than large-scale campaigns.

### 3.4 Public Fundraising

Public fundraising is essential to the work of VSO, as the funding from our donors makes our work possible. The field of public fundraising in the Netherlands is changing, this provides both opportunities and threats. Looking at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, we see the following for the coming years:

- **Strengths:** The international character of the organisation, and the changemakers we work with, provide great examples of our work, which work well in fundraising.
- **Weaknesses:** Our limited familiarity among the Dutch public makes it more difficult to attract new donors
- **Opportunities:** Technological developments allow us to work more efficiently and effectively. Being able to reach different target audiences with the right message through the right channels, allows us to make more effective use of our limited budgets.
- **Threats:** As we see the Dutch fundraising landscape change, younger donors show different behaviour in giving, and they expect to have a different kind of relationship with the charities they support. We are anticipating a (growing) need to customize our communications with our donors in order to live up to their expectations.

## 2025

We aim to personalize our communications with our donors, making sure they feel involved with our work and truly feel connected to VSO. We know for example that younger generations are looking for a different kind of involvement with the charities they donate to. Although our structural givers form the solid base of our public fundraising income, we will keep looking for ways to promote new ways of giving.