

MFA SWEDEN AND UNICEF OFFICE OF INNOVATION

A Catalytic Partnership Unlocking Global Impact

🌀 The UNICEF Office of Innovation (OOI) is working to shape a world where every child, everywhere, thrives. **Sweden's catalytic investment in OOI reflects global leadership for social impact through innovation** by unlocking local solutions by governments and entrepreneurs poised for global impact, aligned specifically around our shared values of gender equality, health and wellness, and resilient economic growth.

HEADLINE IMPACT

Since 2014, UNICEF's innovation efforts have piloted and scaled over **200 solutions** in **136 countries**, reaching **38 million people directly** and **181 million indirectly**. Since 2021, with the adoption of the catalytic OOI architecture made possible by Sweden at the heart of the bold investment thesis, OOI has scaled **46 solutions** in **90 countries**, unlocked over **\$40 million in additional financing** from a range of public and private partners and successfully **incubated a robust innovative finance function** for UNICEF which is now embedded, growing and maturing in our private partnership division.

UNICEF's current organizational reform efforts to be fit for the future of development aid will have impacts on the OOI architecture in the next strategic plan cycle (2026-2029). The changes proposed will see successful OOI incubation efforts around learning and water innovation functions transition to respective thematic teams within our Programme Group (PG), and the internet connectivity initiative (Giga) transition to our



🕒 OUR JOINT IMPACT

46 **solutions** scaled

90 **countries** globally

40^M **financing** unlocked (USD)

Information and Technology Communication Division (ICTD). OOI itself will also transition to be part of PG, which holds much promise for further instilling innovation as a standard practice across UNICEF's programming design and delivery, global learnings and ecosystem influence. OOI will remain firmly embedded within PG leadership structure.

Sustained funding from MFA Sweden – making up 40 per cent of the OOI annual budget over the next three years – will provide much needed stability to capitalize on our current success in attracting diverse funding streams especially from the private sector, including crypto philanthropy, big tech corporates and traditional philanthropists, climate and social impact venture capital. We envisage that by the end of 2029 MFA Sweden funding will be at approximately 20-25% per cent of the OOI annual budget, signaling the start of a staggered reduction in funding for subsequent years.

Made in Sweden: UNICEF'S Innovation Incubator and Accelerator

Current support from MFA Sweden enables OOI to identify, adapt and scale demand-driven, problem-focused and possibilities-driven solutions. We work closely with governments to anticipate sustainable integration of such initiatives within national systems. For instance:

1. OOI is leading on the adaptation of **frontier tech solutions** that bridge linguistic and cultural divides across all programming platforms.

- In Burkina Faso, **AI-powered text-to-speech and translation tools** in the U-Youth app are connecting 700,000 youth to vital content and a platform of influence in Mooré, spoken by half the population, with national rollouts planned to double participation.
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, open machine learning models, including **Meta's No Language Left Behind**, have translated humanitarian training materials into Congolese Swahili for over 20 implementing partners, ensuring faster, secure and inclusive access to critical information by frontline humanitarian responders.

With sustained MFA Sweden funding, these pilots are poised to scale to more countries and humanitarian responses, expanding equitable access to essential tools and knowledge. This portfolio of activity around AI use cases has attracted significant interest from big tech companies, including a partnership with the UK-based tech company, Arm.

2. With a global footprint of 153 solutions in 87 countries, the Stockholm-based **UNICEF Venture Fund** invests fiat and cryptocurrency in disruptive, emerging tech, the kind of early-stage open source solutions in emerging economies that are typically excluded from such advancements.

This year, backed by a three year \$4.5 million grant from Sida – including an innovative finance matching fund clause for leveraging private funding – the Fund launched a five-year fem tech initiative, a direct outcome of market-shaping analysis conducted alongside Sweden's strong health and gender impact investing ecosystem, notably with Case For Her. The initiative kicked off with a 2025 call for applications from frontier tech startups in low- and middle-income economies to develop open-source solutions that improve the health, well-being and socio-economic participation of girls and women. The call received over 1,100 applications globally – with 89 per cent of applications from women-led or co-founded start-ups – representing the strongest ever response to a call for applications in the Venture Fund's decade-long history. The initial cohort will be selected and onboarded later in 2025, with annual calls for applications anticipated.

With sustained MFA Sweden funding, the suite of diverse partners to the fem tech initiative and wider Venture Fund will continue to grow, especially among philanthropic funds and individuals in the impact investing ecosystem. This partner profile allows a combination of grant funding for UNICEF and direct private capital investment for the growth of successful companies.



3. The four-year **Climate Ventures** initiative (2025-2029) aims to deliver a positive impact on children and their communities by sourcing, funding, developing and mentoring a continuous pipeline of climate solutions by underrepresented entrepreneurs from emerging economies, especially youth under 30 years old and women.

Annual cohort calls, focused on climate-health in 2025 and energy in 2026, mean entrepreneurs will be supported with financial and non-financial resource capital to deploy and scale transformative solutions through UNICEF's global network. Building on our inaugural Innovation Insights Dialogue 2025, we will also continue to produce and share evidence to influence more equitable flows of climate capital to underrepresented entrepreneurs.

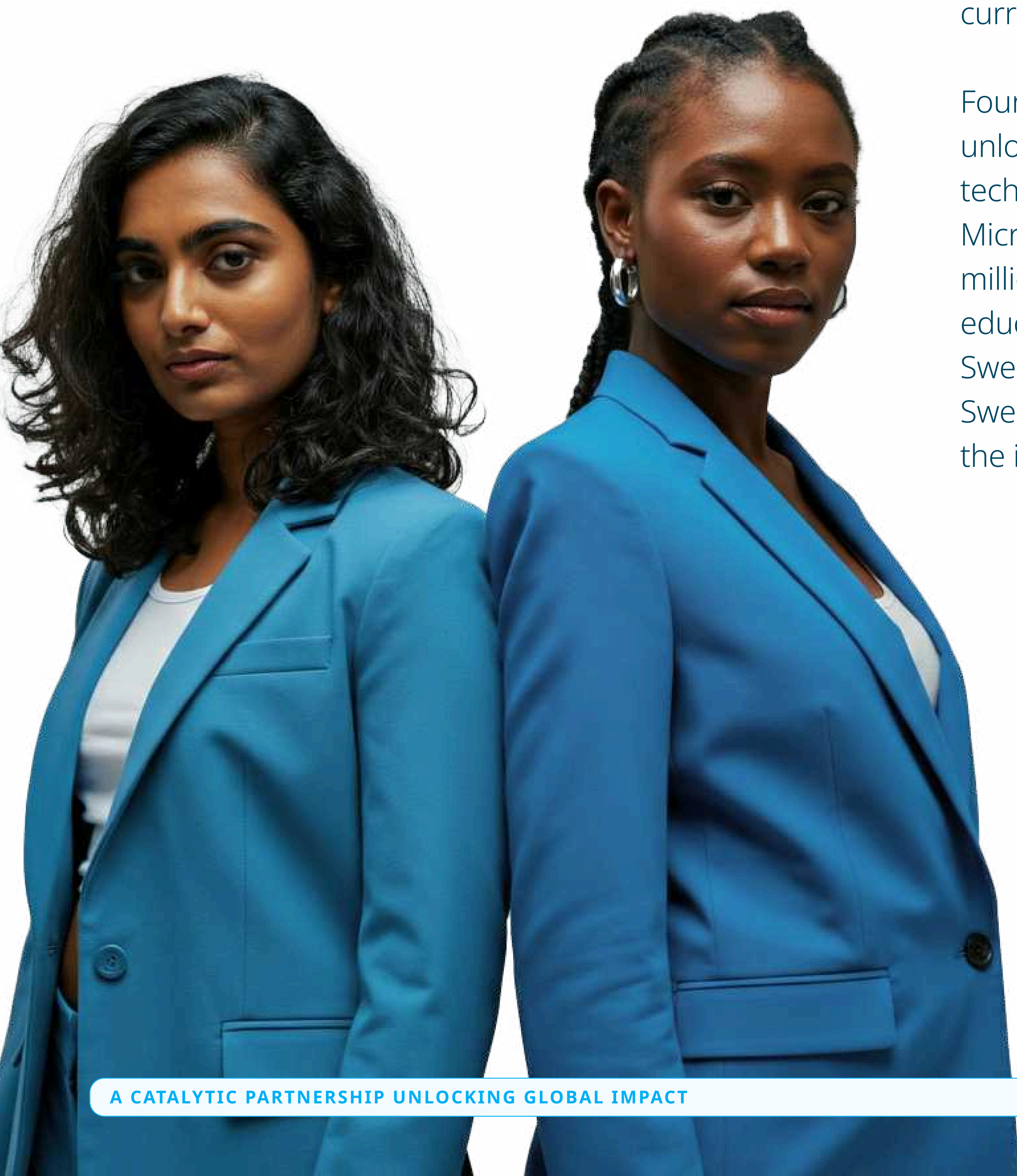
This initiative has already attracted alignment and interest with private sector and government partners, including Vinnova and Sida's grant and guarantee units, with a robust pipeline of additional partners being pursued. Sustained MFA Sweden funding is vital to seeing this initiative thrive in its initial four-year cycle, including attracting a diverse set a founding principal partners



4. The **Game Changers Coalition (GCC)** harnesses the video game industry to equip adolescent girls with skills in coding, design and storytelling. GCC was designed in Sweden, in a workshop attended by leading video

By the end of 2024, the initiative had trained 154,000 girls, parents and teachers across seven countries, resulting in over 3,000 girl-developed video games addressing mental health, gender equality and cultural identity. Two pilot countries, Cambodia and Brazil, have integrated the curriculum into national education policies.

Foundational support from MFA Sweden for the GCC unlocked follow-on partnerships with the video game and tech sector including the Global Video Game Coalition, Micron Foundation and Bitget, all galvanized to reach 1.1 million girls by 2027, embedding the curriculum in formal education systems for long-term impact. Sustained MFA Sweden funding and influence, especially among the Swedish video game sector, is very valuable at this stage of the initiative's growth.



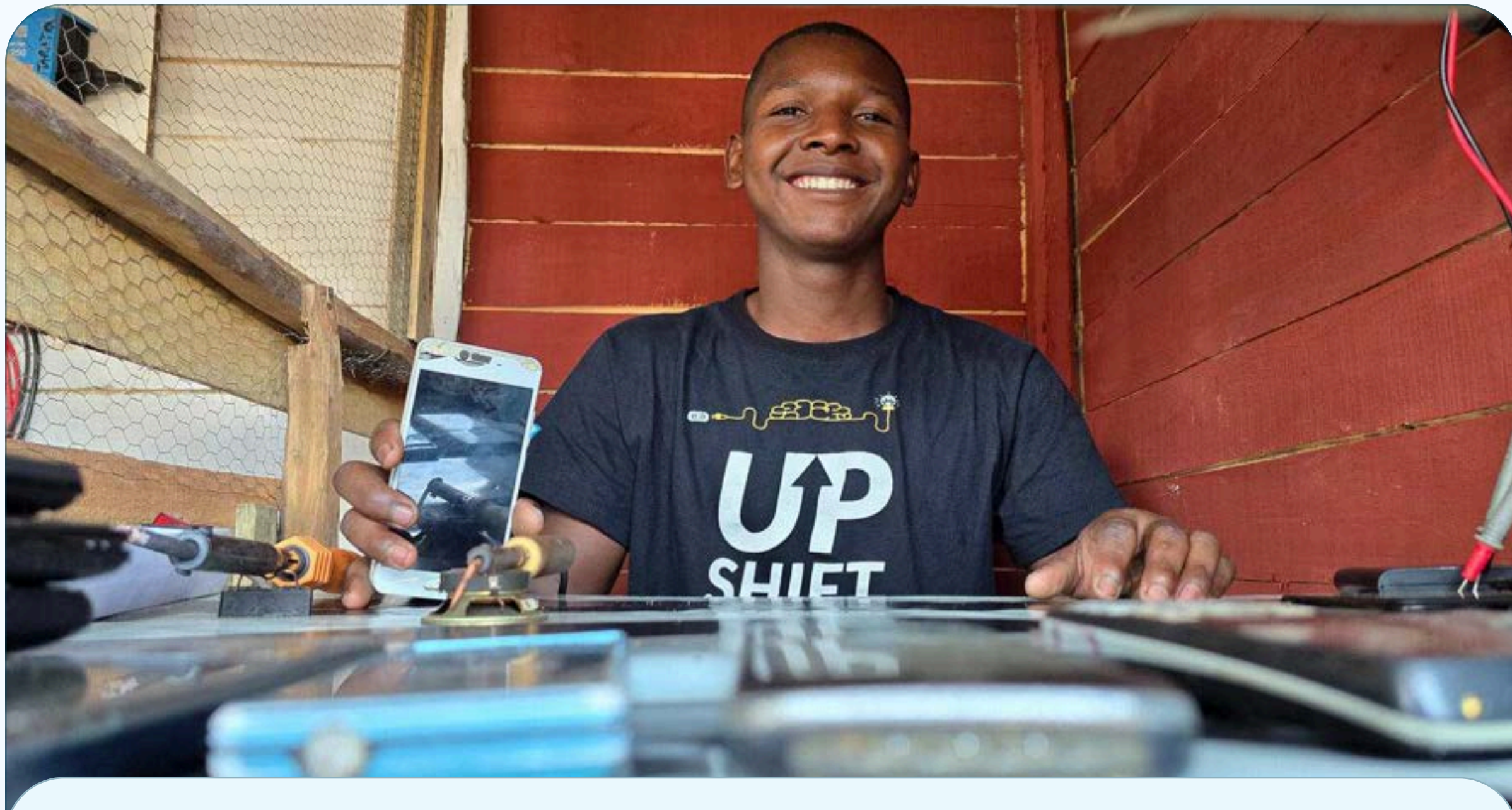


5. In 2024, the [UNICEF Innovation Nodes](#) – transdisciplinary and collaborative spaces that focus on reflecting and generating novel wisdom in new and unknown areas of potential innovation for children – engaged academics across 20+ disciplines, producing three Insight Reports, 11 Insight Briefs and three Connected Conversations that together shaped UNICEF's approach to renewable energy, AI and climate financing.

Downloaded by more than 42,000 people, these insights informed our strategies and drove action. An independent impact assessment confirmed that Innovation Nodes processes met best-in-class industry standards.

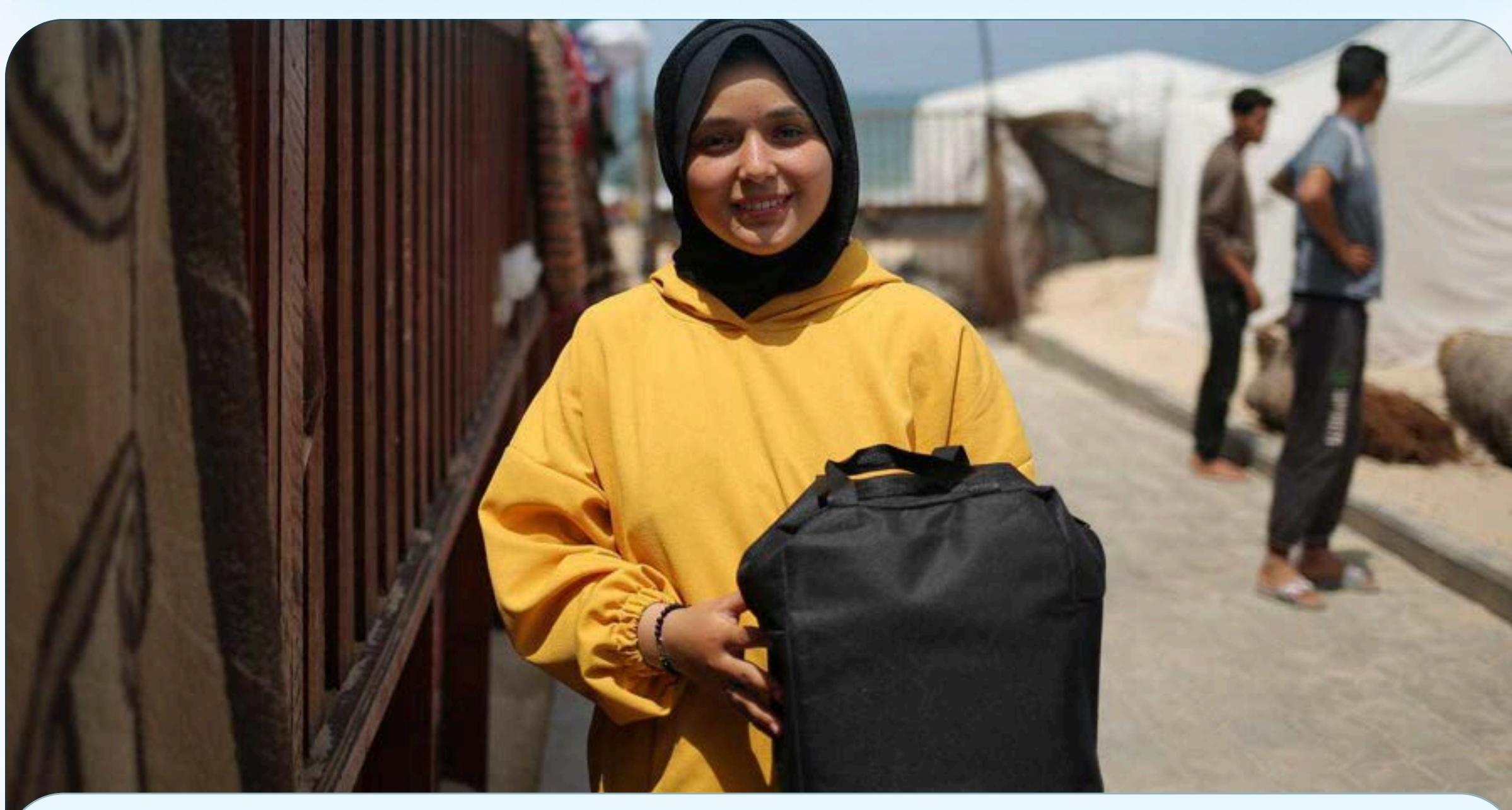
Beyond gathering information, the Innovation Nodes played an important role in positioning children and young people as active participants in research and development. Through collaborations with Harvard University, California College for the Arts, University of Technology Sydney and Rhodes University, the Innovation Nodes are ensuring innovation is inclusive, equitable and responsive to the realities of young people worldwide. With sustained MFA Sweden support, we are exploring Swedish academic partnerships, including a relationship with the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences (IVA).





ARCHITECTS OF THE FUTURE

By 2024, Sweden's investment in UNICEF's youth social innovator accelerator, **UPSHIFT**, helped it expand to 56 countries, equipping 5.2 million young people with the skills and confidence to address challenges affecting their communities – totalling 145 million learning hours. In addition, **FunDoo**, a digital life coach for adolescents, scaled to 15 countries, in 2024, now reaching 1.7 million users.



INNOVATING THROUGH CRISIS

Since its initial investment supported by MFA Sweden and Innovation Norway, the **Kits that Fit** initiative has scaled to nine countries and reached 1 million people. This approach puts people at the centre of humanitarian response, tailoring support to community needs and strengthening local economies through local sourcing.

Recognized globally with the 2024 Gold Anthem Award for social innovation, Kits that Fit is now shaping UNICEF's broader emergency response strategies, demonstrating what it means to scale responsibly and deliver dignified, people-first aid.



SCALING CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Through Sweden's transformative support, young climate innovators like Noemi Florea can scale their innovative solutions with support from UNICEF's global networks. Noemi's affordable water purification system, **Cycleau**, costing under USD \$500 per unit, transforms wastewater into safe drinking water for schools and communities. In 2025, UNICEF Tajikistan purchased several units, bringing demand-driven solutions to scale and delivering real impact for children and families.

BLOCKCHAIN FOR HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

UNICEF's Venture Fund investee, Rumsan, a female-founded company, scaled **Rahat**, an open-source digital public good that strengthens humanitarian cash assistance for unbanked communities. Rahat has scaled from Nepal to Indonesia, Kenya and Pakistan. Backed by UNICEF's global network and mentorship, Rahat is now being explored by governments and humanitarian actors for anticipatory cash assistance, demonstrating how Sweden's investment is helping local innovators scale solutions and enable socio-economic participation for the marginalized.

Made in Sweden: Innovation Strategies at Global Scale

UNICEF's innovation function centralized and delivered through OOI has seen the development of strategic approaches to scale impactful initiatives by leveraging the organisations global reach. Support from Sweden affirmed OOI's capacity to pursue radical shifts in some of greatest threats to the future of children - the global learning crisis and the impact of climate change on health.

1. In 2024, we doubled down on digital learning solutions evolving edtech pilots to learning tools embedded in national education systems administered to ensure the delivery of long-term impact. Our [Global Learning Innovation Hub](#), led the development of UNICEF's global education strategy (2025-2030) setting a trajectory of rapid impact to reach **4 million teachers and 120 million students across 40 countries by 2026**. Partnership with OpenAI on the Assisted Digital Textbooks will fuel our drive towards this ambition with the use of AI to transform standard books into interactive, adapted virtual versions that help all children learn better, including children with disabilities.

2. In the East Asia and the Pacific, everyday, over 100 deaths of children five are linked to air pollution. Our possibilities driven approach to innovation is unlocking rapid development and deployment of AI powered sensors for air quality monitoring. The successful installation of 148 real-time air quality monitoring sensors in schools across Laos this year is a precursor to deployment across 11 more countries.



SCALING BEST IN CLASS DIGITAL LEARNING TOOLS IN UKRAINE.

Building on support from global tech giant - Arm- to develop the Tinkering with Tech programme, the **EdTech for Good Framework and the Learning Cabinet**, the UNICEF Learning Innovation Hub is supporting the design of a **Center of Excellence for Innovation and Technology in Education (CITE)** in collaboration with the ministries of Digital Transformation and Education and Science in Ukraine. **Through CITE, programmes like Tinkering with Tech and EdTech tools in the Learning Cabinet will be implemented.**

Recent collaboration sessions with experts from Google, EdTech Estonia, OpenAI and UNESCO holds the promise of establishing a highly adaptive education system in Ukraine. This has the potential to scale **best in class EdTech** tools to develop interactive and accessible content that enhance inclusive learning experiences and outcomes for students including children with disabilities.



AMBITIONS FOR GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY

To date, **Giga** has provided products and services in 34 countries and territories. The number of schools with access to connectivity among these countries has risen from 14,500 to 24,000, benefiting 11 million students. Overall, Giga has mapped 2.13 million schools across 142 countries.

3. Backed by the Danish government, [the Sustainable WASH Innovation Hub](#) draws on public and private expertise to develop technologies for use in the world's most water-insecure nations and has led to large scale transformational initiatives with the potential to impact over 100 million people across Africa with improved water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

This includes [More Water More Life](#), a scheme which combines satellite data, digital mapping and local knowledge to locate deep groundwater sources, helping to improve drilling efforts in regions affected by water scarcity, such as Somalia and Kenya.

We are currently designing a [Sanitation Financing Facility](#) to support regional expansion in Africa, with scoping completed in several countries. The Facility would help in securing hundreds of millions of dollars of financing, including by exploring Sida guarantees.

4. In 2024, UNICEF's [UTEST](#) initiative expanded a youth-centred model for HIV prevention across West and Central Africa, reaching over 4.4 million young people (aged 15–24) with self-care tools like HIV self-testing and oral Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

The initiative blends conventional and digital delivery, leveraging social media, geo-mapping and AI to create discreet, accessible entry points to care. UTEST's ecosystem model – coordinating public health services, private pharmacies and youth navigators – has connected over 340,000 adolescents to vital information and referred more than 1,600 to care.

MFA Sweden's catalytic funding is essential to UNICEF's approach to scale, moving beyond pilots to reshape systems and deliver lasting impact. With continued support, we see much growth in the area of innovation for health and wellness, including AI-supported in-service training and tools for community health workers. We will continue to coordinate with Karolinska University and other global health experts in Sweden institutions.



Leveraging Nordic Public and Private Sector Support

Our partnership is grounded in the belief that grant funding alone is not enough. We are committed to unlocking the innovation wealth of Sweden and the Nordics for sustainable social impact globally.

These alliances are moving beyond pilots to scale what works, driving real impact across health, climate, education and water. Across the Nordics, government investment is playing a central role, including Sida's support for the **Venture Fund's fem tech initiative** and explorations on use of the guarantee instrument, Denmark and Finland's MFA-led **OOI WASH and Learning Innovation Hubs**, as well as NORAD's support for our leadership in digital public goods that aims to democratize technology advancement real-time.

Alongside these public investments, the Nordic private sector is also stepping up to unlock new possibilities including Innovation Norway's backing of **Kits that Fit** and the solar energy initiative **Project Alpha**. Ericsson is a long-standing partner for our school internet connectivity initiative, **Giga**. We've aligned with Sweden's private sector expertise for instance with **Case for Her** and Norrskén in advancing fem tech investments, and gaming companies in the design of the **GCC** initiative. We have rich technical exchanges with Karolinska University and Vinnova. And we have active dialogues with many others, including with SEB on use of blockchain, Fjälräven, IKEA and others.



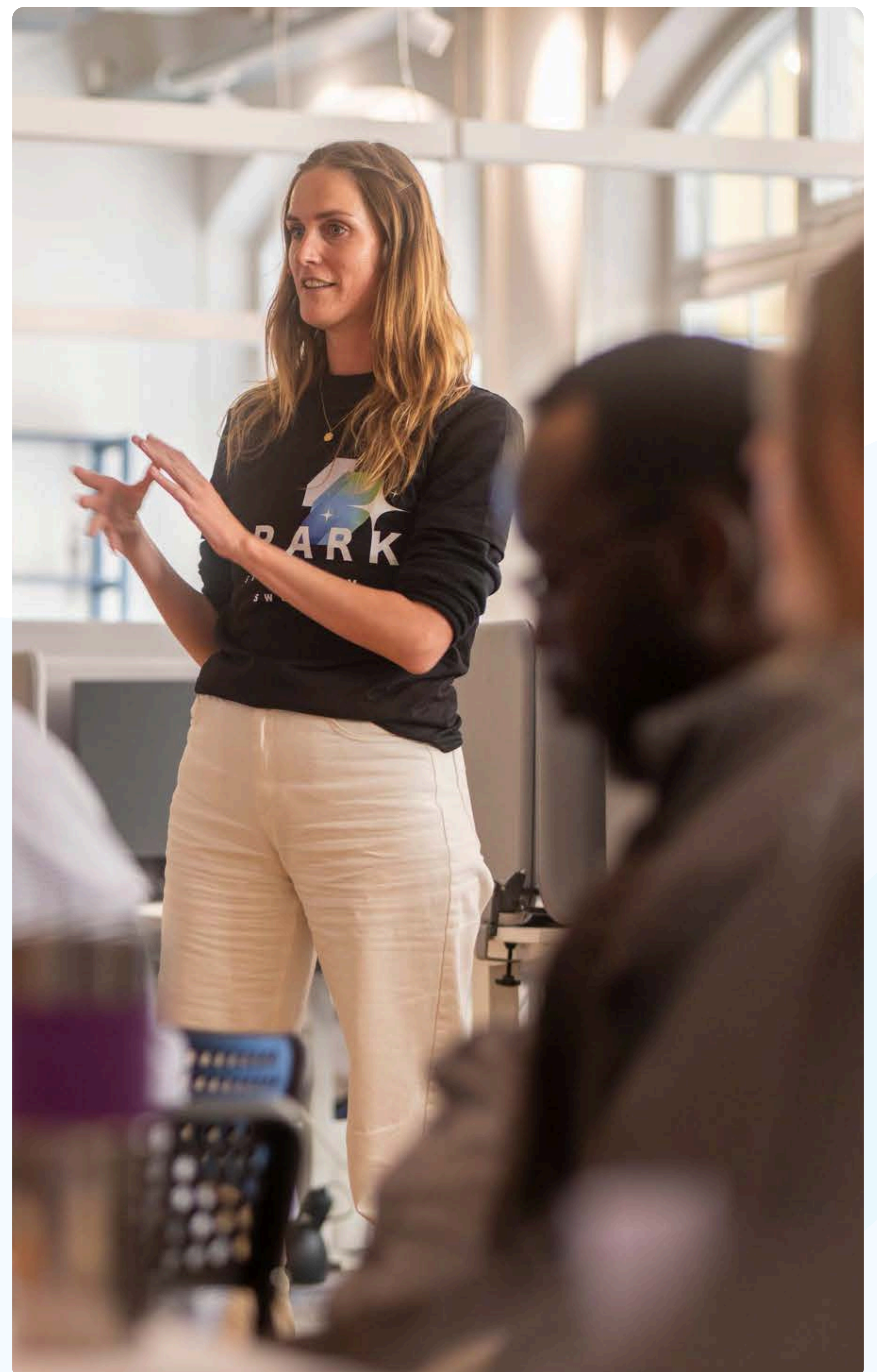
SPOTIFY & UNICEF IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Spotify was attracted to combine the music innovation with UNICEF's traditional mental health well-being programming models. The results is an inspirational partnership supporting young people affected by the war in Ukraine. Through the 'Our Minds Matter' initiative bespoke content addressing a wide range of mental health and well being needs on the music platform in Ukrainian, Polish and English offering trust.

Building a UNICEF Fit for the Future

Beyond these flagship initiatives, MFA Sweden support allows OOI to support UNICEF in embedding innovation as a discipline to ensure that country-level solutions are rigorously tested and scaled. The 5D Innovation Framework guides the identification, validation and scaling of high-impact solutions.

Initiatives like **COMPASS** and **SPARK** further embed innovation in national strategies and organizational culture. In 2024 alone, COMPASS supported 10 country offices to develop governance models and roadmaps that could impact up to 200 million children, while SPARK's second phase, also backed by philanthropic funding, is reinforcing a culture of proactive problem-solving across the organization and beyond. In its second year, SPARK received responses with 146 solutions from 72 UNICEF country offices all collaborating with partners across government, academia, the private sector and civil society.



Shaping and Influencing Global Alliances

OOI engages within a strong global ecosystem through the UN Innovation Network and the UN 2.0 initiative. This cross-UN alignment for innovation impact was on display in 2024 with the UN Tech Envoy's Office and Sweden and Zambia's leadership to shape the [Global Digital Compact](#) to secure strong recognition of digital public goods and open-source solutions, laying the groundwork for a sustainable ecosystem that fosters locally-driven digital transformation. Through focused engagement with six countries (2022–2024), OOI has demonstrated how open-source solutions and local capacity-building are key to long-term impact. In Brazil, Ghana, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon and Sierra Leone, integrating digital public goods and open-source technology into digital entrepreneurship curricula and supporting local tech startups has helped unlock new opportunities for children and communities.



🔗 SPARKING LOCAL INNOVATION

SPARK 2.0 and **COMPASS** are bringing critical resources and expertise to UNICEF country offices and local partners – governments, startups, and communities alike. The second SPARK Accelerator Week held in April 2025 illustrates this impact: eight innovation teams – collaborations between UNICEF and country level private sector collaborators - from Bolivia, Ethiopia, Iran, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Mozambique and Pakistan convened to scale locally designed solutions in solar energy, AI for early childhood learning and climate resilience, and digital tools for health workers and immunization. These partnerships and investments are unlocking the potential of local solutions to deliver transformative, lasting impact for children and families.

OOI also represents UNICEF in numerous global innovation communities of practice including the International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA), where UNICEF is joined by other leading public and private organizations at the forefront of shaping public sector innovation, including FCDO, Gates Foundation, Mastercard Foundation, OECD, Sida and others. We also represent UNICEF in World Economic Forum communities of practice such as the Edison Alliance.

Our Joint Commitment: Shared Purpose

MFA Sweden's investment in OOI is already delivering measurable results across climate action, gender equality, humanitarian response, health and digital inclusion. This partnership reflects Sweden's global leadership in harnessing innovation as a key to unlocking value-driven results, and catalyzing others to join in a collective, shared purpose.

OOI is delivering this vision by driving possibility-led, problem-focused solutions that are transforming lives in this and coming generations. These solutions are attracting the interest and sparking the imagination of diverse partners across public and private sectors, from Sweden, the Nordics and the globe.

In this current environment of reduced official development assistance, sustaining and expanding this investment is essential. Innovation is essential, not an option.

Now is the time
to build on the
momentum of the
measurable results
we've achieved
together in 3 years,
ensuring that the
promise of
innovation reaches
every child,
everywhere.

