



**malaika**  
empowering me

# Tomorrow Within Reach: Leveraging the **SDGs** to Transform Today

An impact report on Malaika's contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals in the Democratic Republic of Congo

*September 2023*

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# Foreword

When I started Malaika in 2007, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) weren't yet a thing. We focused on education for girls: that was our key priority.

But when the SDGs were launched in 2015, I took the world's bet seriously: that by 2030, if we all do our part, we could end poverty, inequalities, and set up the next generations for success.

I often like to say that a rising tide lifts all boats. To me and to Malaika's team, the SDG framework has challenged us to see our work through the more holistic approach of sustainable development, and pushed us to fight back silos.

Working for girls means also working for their families and communities. All the Goals we are contributing to are intertwined. And that beautiful package leads to a model that shows that you can educate a girl without keeping her family in poverty, and give her a community she can be proud of.

So many actors are working hard to advance the SDG agenda in DRC and Africa. We are one of them, but are grateful for all the other leaders doing this necessary hard work. I hope this report gives you a sense of what is achievable when we take this global agenda seriously.

Sincerely,

**Noella Coursaris Musunka**  
Malaika Founder and CEO



# Introduction

Malaika's **mission** is to empower girls and their communities through education and health programs. Our **vision** is that the girls who graduate from our school will move on to become the future leaders of the DRC.

At the heart of Malaika is our girls' school, which provides a free, quality education to students in Kalebuka. From their entry at around age 5, until their graduation 12 years later, our students have access to not only a basic education - but a world-class one. Girls are exposed to high quality courses from mathematics and the arts to coding and sports. The school currently supports over 400 girls, whose uniforms, books, and educational expenses are all subsidized by Malaika.

## A village, an opportunity

But our work doesn't end there. Alongside the girls, our work is directly benefiting 35,000 community members. By investing in initiatives that promote the well-being of the community and environment around the girls, we are building a sustainable and replicable, supportive ecosystem designed to keep our students thriving from girlhood through adolescence.

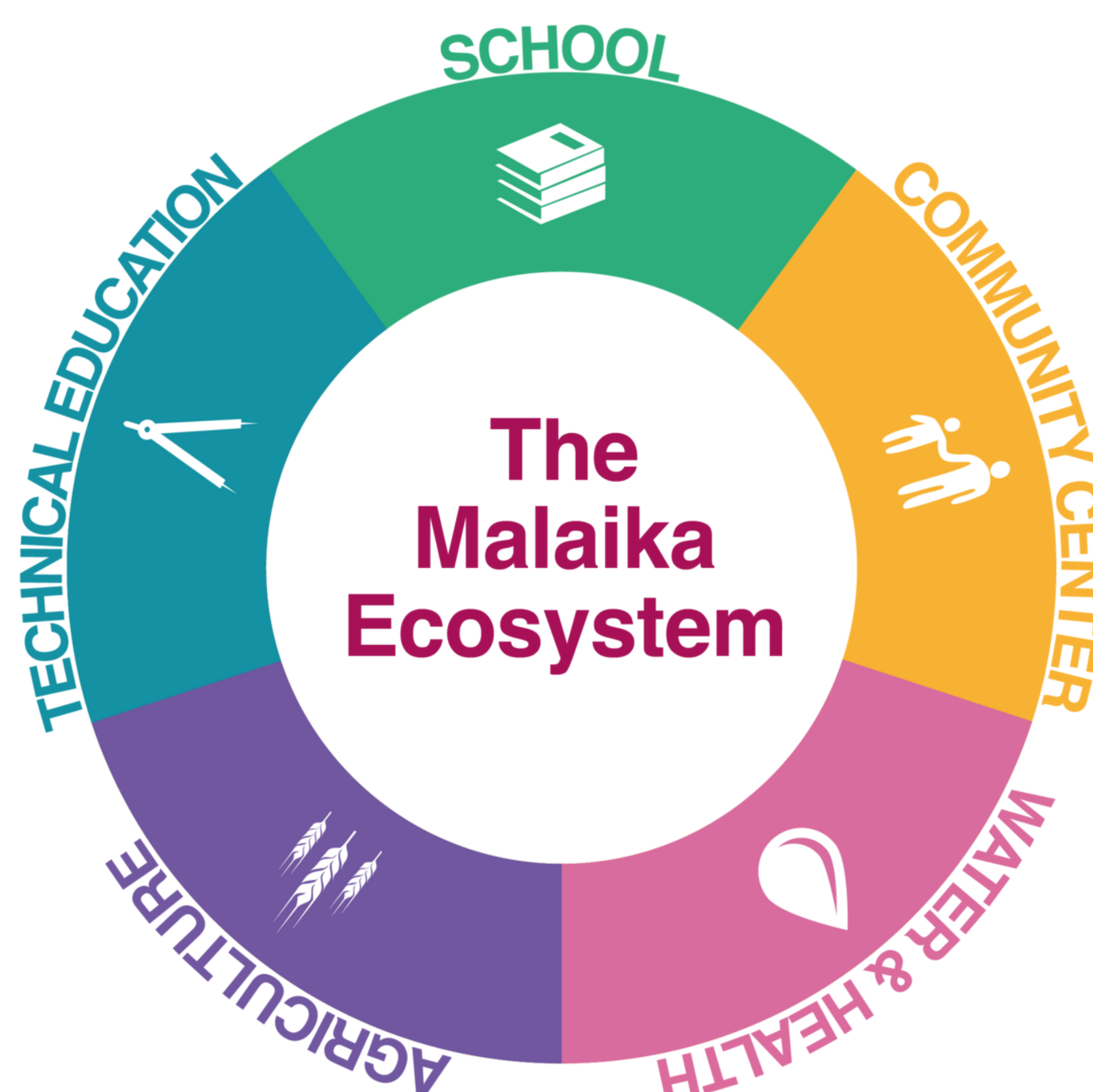
Our ecosystem approach is based on the following pillars: agriculture and farming, water and health, technical and vocational training, community support, and education.

## The Malaika Ecosystem

Our programming model is one rooted in the idea that we are co-building an ecosystem of change with the communities we serve. This ecosystem offers connectors between all of our programs, and a fluidity in participation and access that means we are trusted and supported by local leaders, families, and community members.

We operate five programs:

- the Malaika School
- the Malaika Community Center
- the Water & Health program
- the Agriculture & Nutrition program
- the Technical Education program



# Africa and the SDGs

## SDG progress on the continent

In December 2022, during the African Economic Conference 2022, the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) jointly released a status report about the SDGs on the African continent. All in all, the report is clear: Africa is lagging behind and risks falling short of meeting the SDGs by 2030. Key findings showed that:

- progress is slow in the provision of quality education for all, and resources need to be mobilized for education infrastructure (especially at the pre-primary and primary education levels), the training of teachers, and digital literacy and connectivity.
- progress is also slow regarding gender inclusivity: there is a strong need for the enforcement of legal frameworks to protect women and girls against discrimination, domestic violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation.

## Localization: A tool for progress

Development actors on the continent are embracing localization as key strategy to fast-track progress in reaching the 2030 Agenda by implementing processes that are sensitive to local opportunities, priorities, and ideas. Local actions and strategies contribute to the global achievement of the SDGs through what has been described as a grassroots-led or bottom-up approach to ending poverty and inequalities.

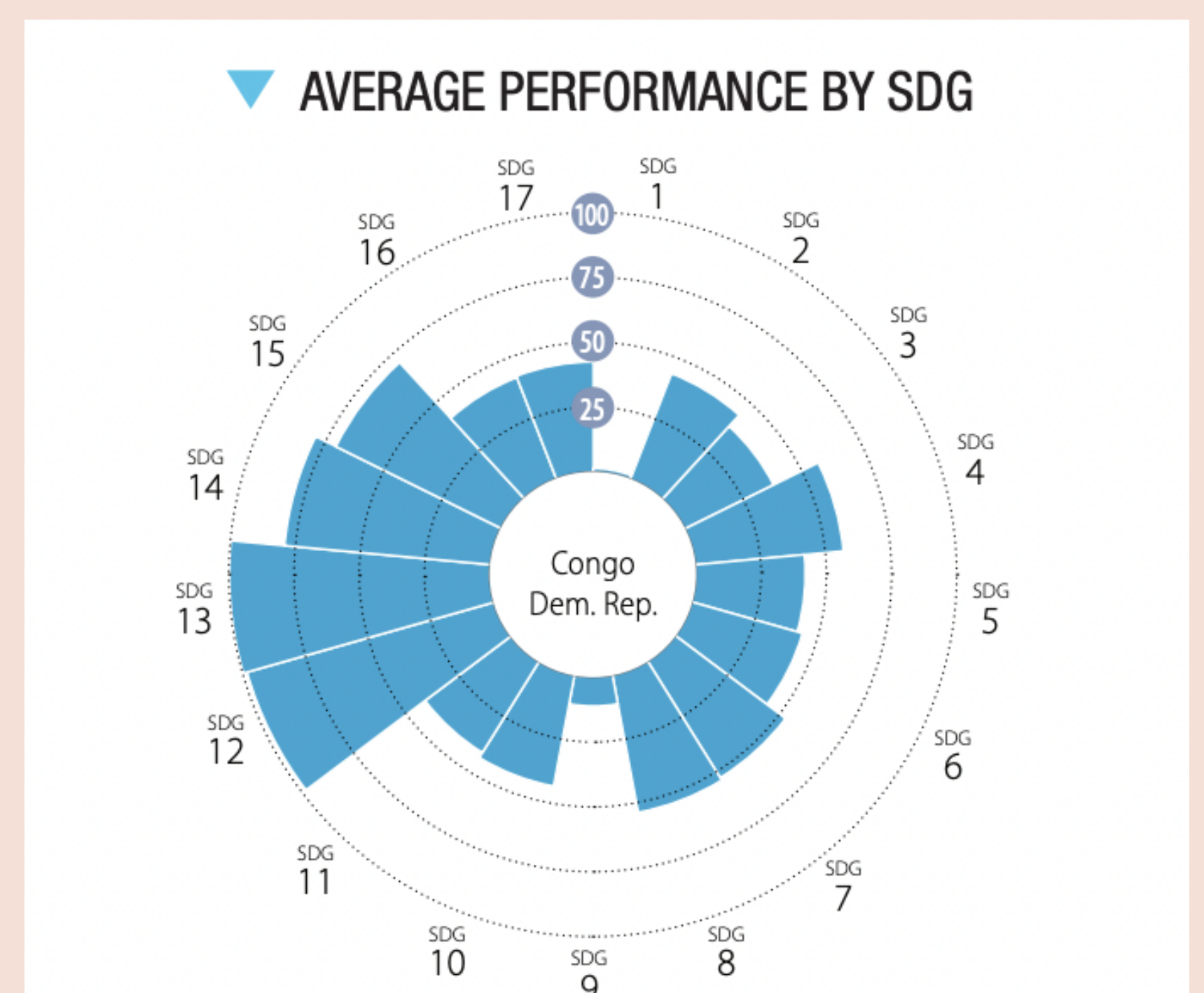
This is a bet that Malaika has committed to as well. Like many others, we have invested in putting communities and girls at the center of a holistic and systemic approach to ending poverty and implementing some of the key objectives of the SDGs.

## SDG country profile: DRC

**SDG Index Rank: 159 out of 166**

**SDG Index Score: 48.6 out of 166**

In its reporting to the High Level Political Forum of July 2023, the government acknowledged that the country was not on a good track to reach the SDGs by 2030. It shared that its key priorities were universal health coverage, access to water and electricity, the diversification of its economy, and fighting climate change. It also highlighted the obstacles it faces due to the complexity of the internal political and social context, including the presence of conflict in the eastern part of the country.



Source: the Sustainable Development Report, 2022



# Malaika's SDG journey

## From educating girls....

We started off with the dream of educating every single girl living in Kalebuka. Almost 50 million girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are not in school. Girls are 1.5 times more likely to not have access to education, and two-thirds of the global illiterate population are women. In Kalebuka, the community where we run our programs, only 4% of women and 10% of youth are literate. In the DRC alone, 7 million children are not in school. We wanted to prove that these numbers can change, and that access to quality education for girls can happen in the most remote and poor communities in the country.

## ...to embracing the SDGs as a mechanism to empower communities.

But we are now doing so much more. While girls' education remains core to our mission, we have created a holistic model that ensures girls' ecosystem - their families, their communities - is also strengthened in the process. Our programmatic evaluation wasn't just about adding projects here and there, but about creating an SDG-inspired ecosystem that would address the key inequality markers in the communities we serve, in order to truly leave no one behind and allow girls the opportunity to thrive alongside their families and community members.

## Our SDG localization model

When it came to embracing the SDG framework to strengthen our programmatic model and amplify our impact, local leaders, community members, and the students themselves identified new areas of impact that Malaika needed to tackle. What resulted was an integrated empowerment model that enabled new impact pathways that went beyond just the girls' lives and education to reach the full community.

## How we got there

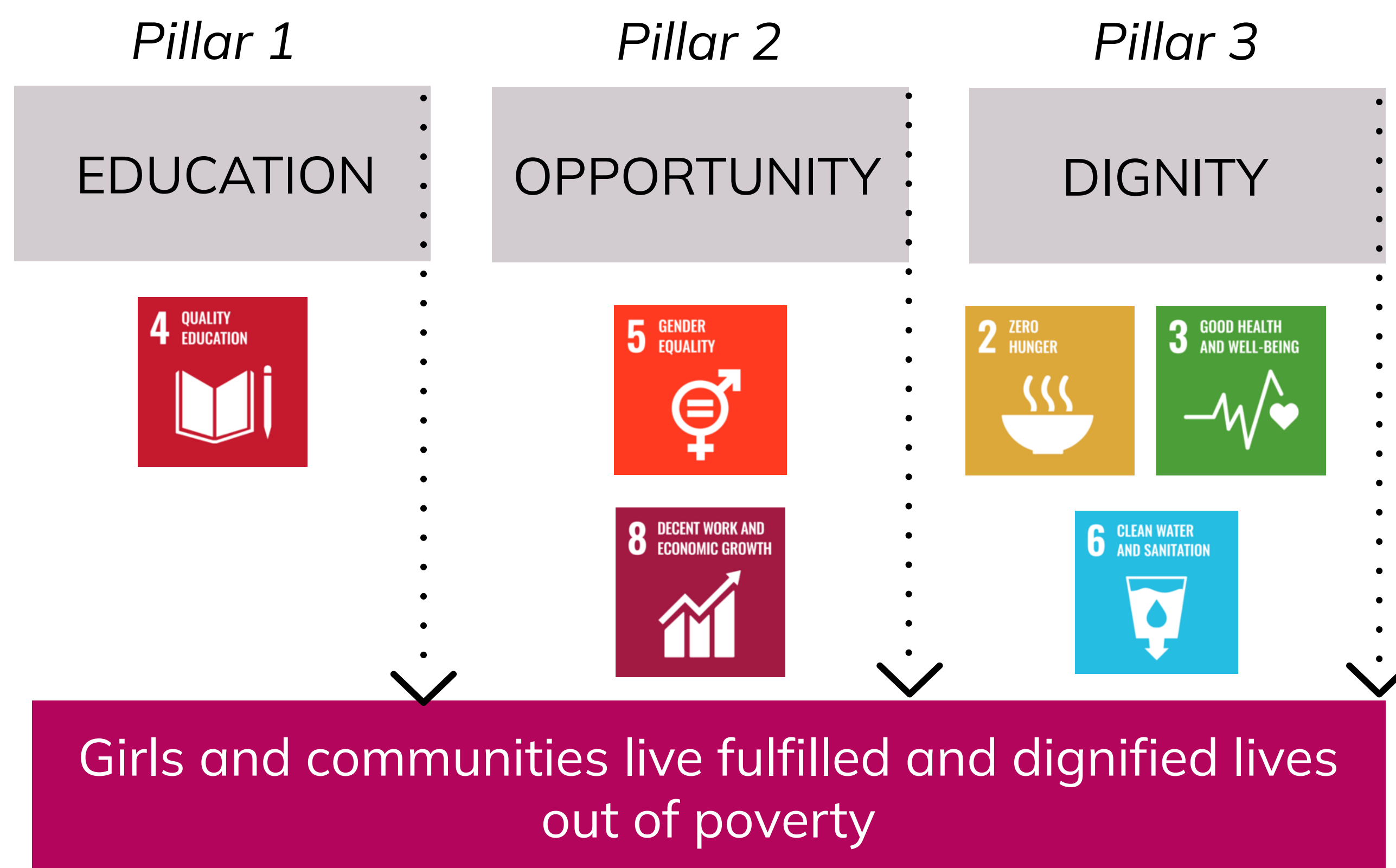
When the SDGs were launched, Malaika took it to heart to make sure it was leaving no one behind, and to also have a realistic understanding of what it would take for girls to succeed on all fronts — not just academics — in order to live dignified and fulfilled lives. Over the period of a few years, the team, the girls, and community leaders and members built a robust programmatic model that now directly impacts a total of six SDGs from Agenda 2030. Here's how we got there:



## What it looks like

While the core mission of Malaika remains to provide free and quality education to girls, we've also taken on the responsibility of uplifting their families and communities out of poverty, to ensure our impact is multi-generational, and taking a holistic, all-encompassing approach.

Malaika has integrated its SDG programming in the following three-pillar model:



### EDUCATION

Our EDUCATION pillar fulfills Malaika's core mission: to give girls a free and quality education so they can live fulfilled and dignified lives. The Malaika School has built a local system around education, working with parents and community members to include them in the academic and personal successes of all students. This pillar offers a constant reminder that educating girls in rural parts of Africa doesn't have to mean diminishing academic standards nor limiting access to STEM and digital literacy.

### OPPORTUNITY

Our OPPORTUNITY for all pillar recognizes that educating girls without having a systems-change objective in local communities simply doesn't reach the same kind of impact. While girls can be successful in school, they cannot dismantle the inequalities in their households and communities without radical shifts in how people think of their successes, how their families and neighbors are included in opportunity cycles, and without collective social and economic empowerment.

### DIGNITY

While we could have stopped at Pillar 1 & 2, this third pillar - DIGNITY - was born out of the realization that indicators of empowerment and wellbeing cannot limit themselves to economic indicators. The community had a huge role in helping us identify water access, health, and social wellbeing as key factors in their capacity to lift themselves out of poverty. At Malaika, DIGNITY for all is front and center to our commitment to making progress on the SDGs by 2030.

# Impact Pillar 1: EDUCATION

Through activation of SDG 4 programming, we manage to secure a multi-generational cohort of educated girls. But it's not just the numbers of girls who attend school that matters: it's also the quality of the education they receive. Overall, Malaika is directly contributing to the following SDG 4 outcome targets:



**SDG 4 : Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**

SDG 4 targets	Malaika results
<p><b>Universal primary and secondary education</b> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education.</p>	<p><b>4.1</b> 430 girls are enrolled in our school: 251 in primary classes and 179 in secondary classes. Our completion rate at the primary level is close to 100% (the national rate in DRC is of 75%). Secondary completion rates are also close to 100%.</p>
<p><b>Equal access to technical/vocational and higher education</b> By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.</p>	<p><b>4.3</b> 196 women and men are enrolled in vocational training programs hosted at our Community Center. At the Malaika School, our first cohort of secondary school graduates is moving on to higher education: 100% of all graduates will be continuing their studies in September 2023.</p>
<p><b>Relevant skills for decent work</b> By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.</p>	<p><b>4.4</b> Our first cohort of graduates in technical training (spring 2023) ended up with 53% of participants finding decent employment within less than three months after completion of training. We trained 80 young people in mechanics and electricity.</p>
<p><b>4.6 Universal youth literacy</b> By 2030, ensure that all youth (...) achieve literacy and numeracy.</p>	<p><b>4.6</b> Our literacy test results are an outstanding 100% success for all students at the Malaika School. We're also providing literacy classes for boys and girls who are not in school through our Community Center: we currently have 159 children enrolled in them.</p>
<p><b>4.7 Education for sustainable development and global citizenship</b> By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote (...) human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.</p>	<p><b>4.7</b> Malaika's primary and secondary school curriculum explores all the following courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rights of children, women, and girls</li> <li>• Peace and non-violence</li> <li>• Diversity and inclusion</li> <li>• STEM, IT, scientific, and technical studies leadership development</li> <li>• Global citizenship (through exchanges with people from all over the world)</li> <li>• Sexual and reproductive health and rights</li> </ul>





Culture



## Impact Pillar 1 in pictures



### The Malaika School

provides girls age 5 - 19 with free quality education in Kalebuka, DRC.



### The Community Center

provides community members with sports activities, vocational and professional training, and community organizing.



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



## Zoom in: Malaika's first graduation

The construction on the Malaika School started in 2009. 14 years later, the first cohort of students graduated from high school on July 27, 2023. A total of 17 girls received their diploma, with more than half of them the first to graduate from high school in their families.

The graduation ceremony, featuring hip-hop star and actress Eve, a longstanding Malaika Ambassador and President of the Class of '23, was a testament to the hard work and dedication of the students, their parents, and their communities. Also there to cheer on the girls were Malaika's technical and financial partners, volunteers, international and local donor community members. Malaika works collaboratively with students to create tailored and comprehensive higher education pathways, making sure that the girls are equipped with the resources and tools to follow their dreams.

All 17 graduates are continuing their education at university to study topics like journalism, architecture, medicine, and law, with some even attaining scholarships to study abroad.



*“My first day at Malaika was very difficult, because I was scared and didn’t know where I was, but now [that I’ve graduated], I’m very happy because I’ve learned many lessons, and believe my dreams will become true” -*

*Frida, 19 years old*

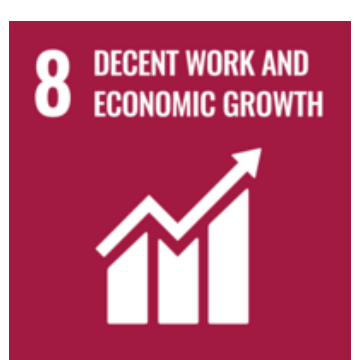
This first graduation marks a huge milestone in Malaika's EDUCATION pillar, as the first full cycle of primary education ends for the first students we welcomed more than a decade ago. New programming is being developed to address the needs of girls and young women in secondary cycles, including how to maintain financial support, provide mentoring, and continue to champion them and their families as they go through this second cycle in their education.

# Impact Pillar 2: OPPORTUNITY

Our second impact pillar is opportunity for all.

Beyond employment, we wanted to **create and nurture a culture of opportunity** in the communities we serve that was strongly rooted in **inclusion and equality**. This meant focusing on SDG 8 and SDG 5 by investing in:

- equipping community members with new skills through vocational training and professional certifications that are adapted to their age group and their local context and job market
- supporting girls as they built their own dreams and higher education and career paths post-graduation as well as including new opportunities for those who aren't in school through sports for social development and training
- creating a culture of celebration of opportunity and collective success anchored in solidarity



**SDG 8 : Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**



**SDG 5 : Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

SDG 8 targets	Malaika results
<p>By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value</p>	<p><b>8.5</b> Through our 15 partnerships with local and national private sectors partners, we've ensured that 56 young people and parents of our school's students have found decent employment.</p> <p><b>8.6</b> Through our internship referral initiative, we've placed 12 young people into internships with local and national private sector partners.</p>
<p>By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training</p>	

SDG 5 targets	Malaika results
<p>Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</p>	<p><b>5.5</b> Malaika's team is women-led, and we are actively supporting our students post-graduate journeys so they can become leaders in the political, social, and economic spheres of their country.</p>



# Impact Pillar 2 in pictures



5 GENDER EQUALITY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



"After training with Malaika in mechanics in April 2023, I found a job in a local company. I started working five months ago. I have a positive impression of my work, thanks to it I deepened my professional experience!"

Kamina Lydia  
23 years old



# Impact Pillar 3: DIGNITY

Through activation of SDG 3, 6, and 2 programming, we are ensuring girls, their families, and their fellow community members have access to basic needs, including water, food, and nutritional support. We are focusing on the following SDG 6 and SDG 2 outcome targets:



**SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**



**SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**



**SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**

SDG 2 targets	Malaika results
<p><b>Access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food.</b> By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.</p> <p><b>End all forms of malnutrition</b> By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.</p>	<p><b>2.1</b> We've integrated nutrition and access to healthy food at the Malaika School. Since we've opened, around 520 girls have benefited from our free meal initiative. Currently (in 2023), 430 girls and 50 staff members get a free healthy and nutritious meal every day.</p> <p><b>2.2</b> Access to food is also an integral part of the rest of our programs. During the pandemic, we distributed bags of food to help students' families who were experiencing food scarcity as a result of the crisis.</p> <p>We've also taken on the role of ending malnutrition in Kalebuka. Our agricultural project engages over 200 community members at all times, and produces an average of 50 kg of fruits and vegetables for weekly consumption at the school.</p>

SDG 3 targets	Malaika results
<p>By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases.</p> <p>By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes</p>	<p><b>3.3</b> We've distributed some 12,000 mosquito nets to 918 houses in Kalebuka since 2017, directly impacting more than 20,000 people. This has led to a huge decrease in malaria cases and subsequent deaths. We lead yearly community sensitization efforts on World Malaria Day led by local leaders with the help of our students and team.</p> <p><b>3.7</b> Providing clean water and educating around hygiene has drastically reduced water-borne diseases. Malaika has also built partnerships with local hospitals and supports them in acquiring the medical equipment they need to care for women. We've donated 10 containers of 40 feet (40 pied) with medical instruments to 10 main hospitals in Lubumbashi and Kipushi, which have served for childbirth, postpartum care, and various surgical operations.</p>



# Impact Pillar 3: DIGNITY (continued)

SDG 6 targets	Malaika results
<p>By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.</p>	<p><b>6.1</b> Malaika has installed 30 wells that provide free and safe access to community members any time of the day all year round. Some 18 villages have access to the wells, and more than 45,800 people now have safe and free water.</p>





# Impact Pillar 3 in pictures



**6** CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



**3** GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



**2** ZERO HUNGER



# Lessons Learned

Building our work around the SDG promise has been a learning journey that has benefitted our organization and the local communities we serve. Together, we have grown into a better understanding of how to sustain our collective impact beyond short and medium term results.

We've learned that:

## #1 **The only way to build strong connectors between SDG programming is through an ecosystem approach.**

An ecosystem approach helps drive resiliency, solidarity, and sustainability. For us, its been about addressing major societal trends in the communities we serve in parallel yet connected tracks. This means looking beyond thematic priorities and enabling local leadership and decision-making around the priorities and issues that are most infringing on collective development and empowerment, all the while looking at individuals' rights and opportunities as a key priority in itself.

## #2 **Measuring the progress of our SDG model is complicated due to lack of local data and statistics.**

Exploring the correlation between the Education pillar and the Dignity and Opportunity pillars has been challenging due to the absence of strong baselines and basic statistical data. As a small non profit, we also lack the funding to conduct large-scale quantitative research. However, we are committed in continuing to grow our Monitoring & Evaluation and datasets to be able to offer some more comprehensive analysis of how the model is fast-tracking positive change at the local level. We also want to develop a more robust quantitative research model that will allow us to measure the Dignity pillar with more efficiency.

## #3 **The ecosystem approach - and a multi-SDG implementation roadmap - demands a different kind of framing than the traditional Project & Programs one our sector usually offers, both in funding and project management.**

This model demands a form of project management deeply anchored in collective decision-making and integrated to local governance mechanisms (both formal and informal). Project-based funding proposals fail to highlight the ecosystem approach due to the need to prioritize thematic issues and activities, rather than looking at the holistic ecosystem needs for girls, their families, and the communities overall.



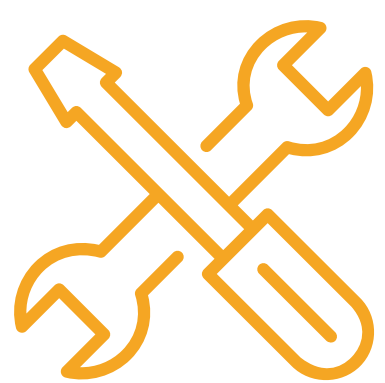


# Recommendations for practitioners



## FOR DONORS

1. **Prioritize SDG funding mechanisms that go beyond thematic focus:** invest in communities and their ecosystems, rather than through a restricted thematic lens.
2. **Invest in community and grantee dialogue** to better understand how to adapt funding mechanisms to those implementing ecosystem approaches to implement the SDGs at local level.



## FOR IMPLEMENTERS (non profits, local organizations, etc)

3. **Prioritize an SDG ecosystem approach** through collective programmatic design led by the different groups of the communities you serve.
4. **Share your implementation journeys** so others can be inspired and learn from them.
5. **Check out the Malaika Toolkit**, a comprehensive set of tools and courses to help develop your own ecosystem approach in local rural communities anywhere in the world.



## FOR PUBLIC FIGURES

6. **Lend your support and visibility to a community or organization that is implementing an ecosystem approach** to reach the SDGs.
7. **Share your experience and testimony to increase SDG funding** for grassroots organizations and local leaders.

“

**Without a collective push to fast-track SDG progress between now and 2030, we will fail in our promise to girls and their communities.**

**Let's continue to prioritize mobilizing resources and support for local organizations and their incredible efforts to thrive and end inequalities, once and for all!**

”

**EVE**

**Malaika Goodwill Ambassador  
Singer, Actress**



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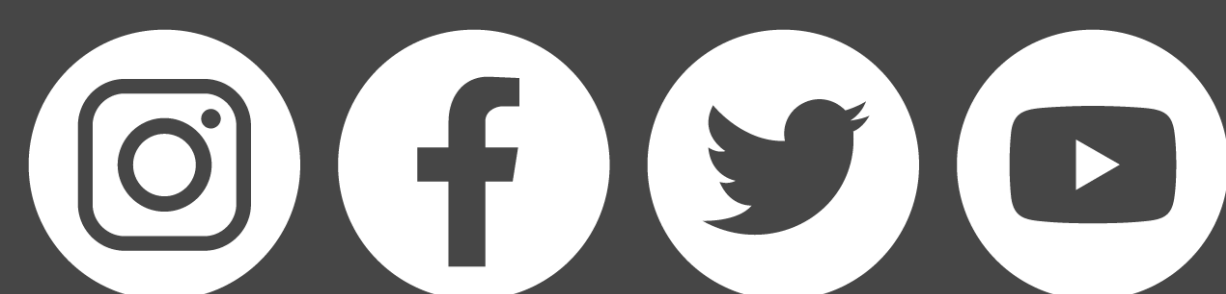
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# Aksanti! Thank You!



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Thank you for reading.



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