

WHEN CITIZENS MET POWER



A Year of Data, Participation & Change

Contents



01

A Year in Review

A note from our Executive Director, and 2025 at a glance

02

Our Programmes

Kilifi, Nandi & Homa Bay · data governance · media & AI · Maono Space

03

Partnerships

The funders and partners who make our work possible

04

Financial Overview

2025 highlights and our transparency commitment

1

A Year in Review

From one flagship county to an ecosystem of citizen infrastructure.



Note from the Executive Director

2025 was the year our work broadened decisively. For five years we tested a simple but stubborn idea: that citizens who are invisible to data, to public records and to their own governments cannot meaningfully participate in the decisions that shape their lives. This year, that idea grew from a model proven in one county into an ecosystem spanning county governments, national media institutions and, increasingly, artificial intelligence.

We deepened our roots in Kilifi, where citizen-generated data now routinely reaches the Governor's desk and shapes cabinet-level decisions. We extended the model, for the first time at real scale, into Nandi and Homa Bay counties — testing whether practices built in one county can travel to others with very different politics, capacity and history.

We opened an entirely new frontier with AI Mtaani — helping ordinary Kenyans, and county governments themselves, understand and shape how artificial intelligence will affect their lives and institutions. We also made Sabasi, our home-grown data-collection tool, free for everyone — because tools built to be used, not licensed, are the ones that spread furthest and do the most good.

None of this would be possible without our partners, our donors, and the communities we serve.

Thank you.

Jay Bhalla



“Citizens who are invisible to data cannot meaningfully participate in the decisions that shape their lives. From one county to an ecosystem — this year proved that an idea built with communities can travel anywhere.

— Jay Bhalla, Interim Executive Director

2025 At a Glance

A year of extending a proven model — new counties, new media infrastructure, and a first step into AI.

3

counties in deep partnership — Kilifi, Nandi & Homa Bay

371

public facilities mapped by 70+ community enumerators in Kilifi

218+

indicators on the Kilifi health dashboard informing county decisions

4×

increase in Homa Bay's HIV-prevention budget after reviewing county data

149

participants at the launch of AI Mtaani in Kilifi

2,000+

learners trained through our global citizen-data course with the World Bank & UN

145

community organisations strengthened through Maono Space

2

Our Programmes

Building open, informed communities across Kenya and East Africa.



Citizen Voices in Kilifi

From citizen data to the Governor's desk

For years, communities in Kilifi were largely excluded from the data and policy conversations shaping their own development. Young changemakers mobilised through the Maono network and the Kilifi Youth Assembly set out to change that: having already mapped every health and education facility and every registered business in the county, in 2025 they turned to mapping over 3,764 county development projects, ward by ward.

On 1 October 2025, the groundwork culminated in something Kilifi had never seen: at Maono Space in Malindi, Governor Gideon Mung'aro and his full cabinet sat with citizens to review the data together, ward by ward. The sessions ran late into the night — not a single official left early.

Governor Mung'aro committed to treating citizens and the county administration as two "parallel governments," and to a public launch of the Kilifi County dashboards. The model is now being adopted by Nandi and Homa Bay.



Photo: citizens & cabinet reviewing data at Maono Space, 1 Oct 2025

“At least we can see something changing in our area.”

— Kilifi resident

“It will no longer be business as usual.”

— Governor Gideon Mung'aro

3,764+

Projects mapped ward-by-ward

Oct 1

First citizen-cabinet dialogue

2

Counties adopting the model

Extending the Model

NANDI — Measuring whether services actually work

We strengthened the county's CSO/CBO network for data-driven advocacy. The Nandi County Youth Bunge Association adopted a data-protection policy and is building a community-owned data portal (nandi.opencounty.org). A community scorecard assessed services across all six sub-counties.

133	119	166
water projects	health facilities	schools



Photo: Nandi scorecard fieldwork

Deepening Open County Work

Transparency, citizen voice, and improved service accountability built from the ground up. In 2025, the work deepened significantly in each county, moving from building data systems to actively using them for planning, budgeting, and citizen advocacy.

KILIFI — From Data Collection to Data Use

218 indicators

117 health and sanitation indicators

Kilifi remains the Open Institute's deepest county partnership, and 2025 marked a step-change in how that data is being used. The Kilifi health dashboard has expanded to track over 218 health, sanitation, and citizen-generated indicators. Late 2025 marked key progress as county technical teams were trained to actively upload departmental data, transforming them into hands-on contributors to the platform. Demonstrated at the Kilifi Health Scientific Symposium in December 2025, the consolidated system supports Universal Health Coverage by curbing waste, enhancing transparency, and improving disease surveillance alongside maternal and child health tracking.

Currently, the initiative provides technical assistance to the Kilifi County Health Management Team (CHMT) to translate this data into Cabinet-aligned policy briefs—spanning the RMNCAH Act 2025, new immunisation schedules, and maternal-newborn care—successfully driving local healthcare leadership to connect real-time data directly to decision-making on the ground.

HOMA BAY — From an MoU to a budget line

Following an MoU, an October 2025 inception meeting launched digitisation of the County Statistical Abstract 2024 (homabay.opencounty.org) — a validated baseline with broad departmental buy-in, covering Health, Education, Agriculture and Social Protection. A County Data Strategy is agreed, and a dashboard launch is imminent.



Photo: Homa Bay MoU signing / inception meeting

KES 8.5M → KES 33M

After county data revealed rising HIV infections, Homa Bay nearly quadrupled its HIV-prevention allocation in the 2025/26 budget.

Advancing Data Governance in East Africa

The first-ever East Africa Data Governance Conference • 26–27 February 2025

Building on the National Data Governance Conference convened two years earlier with Amnesty International Kenya, this time the conversation expanded regionally — bringing together more than 150 participants from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and the Netherlands.

Kenya's Data Protection Commissioner, Immaculate Kassait, announced a major milestone: validation of a unified East Africa Data Governance Policy Framework. Speakers pressed the conversation beyond technical compliance and into culture and equity — asking what an African approach to data governance actually looks like.

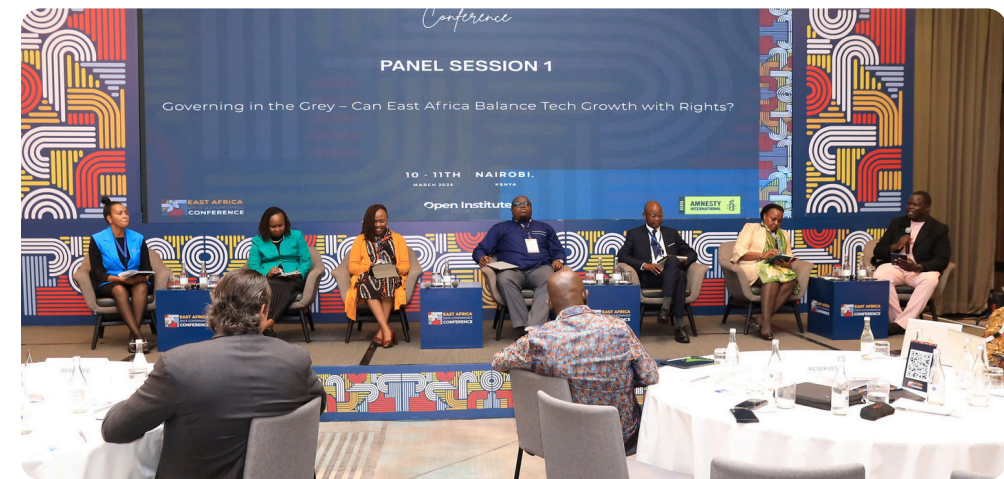
The conference reinforced a call for practical regional collaboration, and strengthened the case for citizen-centred design — simplified, multilingual data protection law, and grassroots campaigns like #FichaUchi.

“What is our East African culture around data governance, and how do we embed it within society and future generations?”

— Davis Adieno, Board Chair, Open Institute

“Through thoughtful data governance, we can build a technological future rooted in our rich linguistic heritage, leaving no one behind.”

— Dr. Melissa Omino, CIPIT



Photos: East Africa Data Governance Conference, Feb 2025

150+

Participants across the region

7

Countries represented

1

Unified policy framework validated

#FichaUchi: Bringing Data Protection to the Ground

In partnership with Amnesty International Kenya since 2021



Photo: #FichaUchi community training session, Kilifi

If the conference made the policy case for data governance, #FichaUchi makes the case to citizens directly. Its name is Swahili for "hide your nakedness," chosen to be catchy and relatable, especially to youth.

Phase Four, #FichaUchi Kilifi County, was the most personal version yet. The team trained six local "Data Champions" — respected community figures — who ran 12 community sessions reaching 359 residents directly, using storytelling and role-play rather than lecture. Weekly radio talk shows on Lulu FM and SBS Radio extended that reach to roughly 750,000 listeners a week.

The findings were sobering: low awareness of data rights, weak understanding of "consent," and fear of reporting scams. Most residents had never heard of the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner.

Upcoming plans include expanding the conversation into various counties through theatre, community dialogues and stronger partnerships.

CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

2021 - 2025

- 4 Phases
- 3 countries
- 14.5+ million accounts reached
- Perception shift:

+6 POINTS

increase in support for
Kenya's Data Protection
Act

+2.7 POINTS

increase in concern
about data rights

Maono Space

"Maono" means vision in Kiswahili. What began as a single venue in Malindi has grown into standing civic infrastructure — a place where changemakers get free space, skills-building and networks, and where county officials, journalists and residents increasingly meet on equal footing. In 2025 the space matured from one-off events into a recurring ecosystem of programmes, from AI Mtaani to the monthly Mnato Sato stage.

Maono Space is built on the belief that true and lasting development begins at the grassroots level. Our aim is to build more inclusive and resilient communities that can address social, economic, and environmental challenges. Through our Maono Space programme, we work with CBOs and changemakers in underserved communities in Kilifi County, providing spaces for work, networking, and collaboration. Through training, shared services, and small grants, we help build stronger, more inclusive, and resilient communities.

145 CBOs strengthened	35 wards in Kilifi reached	82 partners convened
---------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------

In 2025, Maono Space underwent a comprehensive strategic rebrand to deepen community ownership, updating its operations, physical infrastructure, and member structures. After a full reovation, its premises provides a professional, well-equipped environment capable of hosting high-quality events and community convenings. CBO membership is now categorized into three growth tiers (Tier 1: Early Stage, Tier 2: Developing, Tier 3: Most Established) to deliver targeted, stage-appropriate support rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

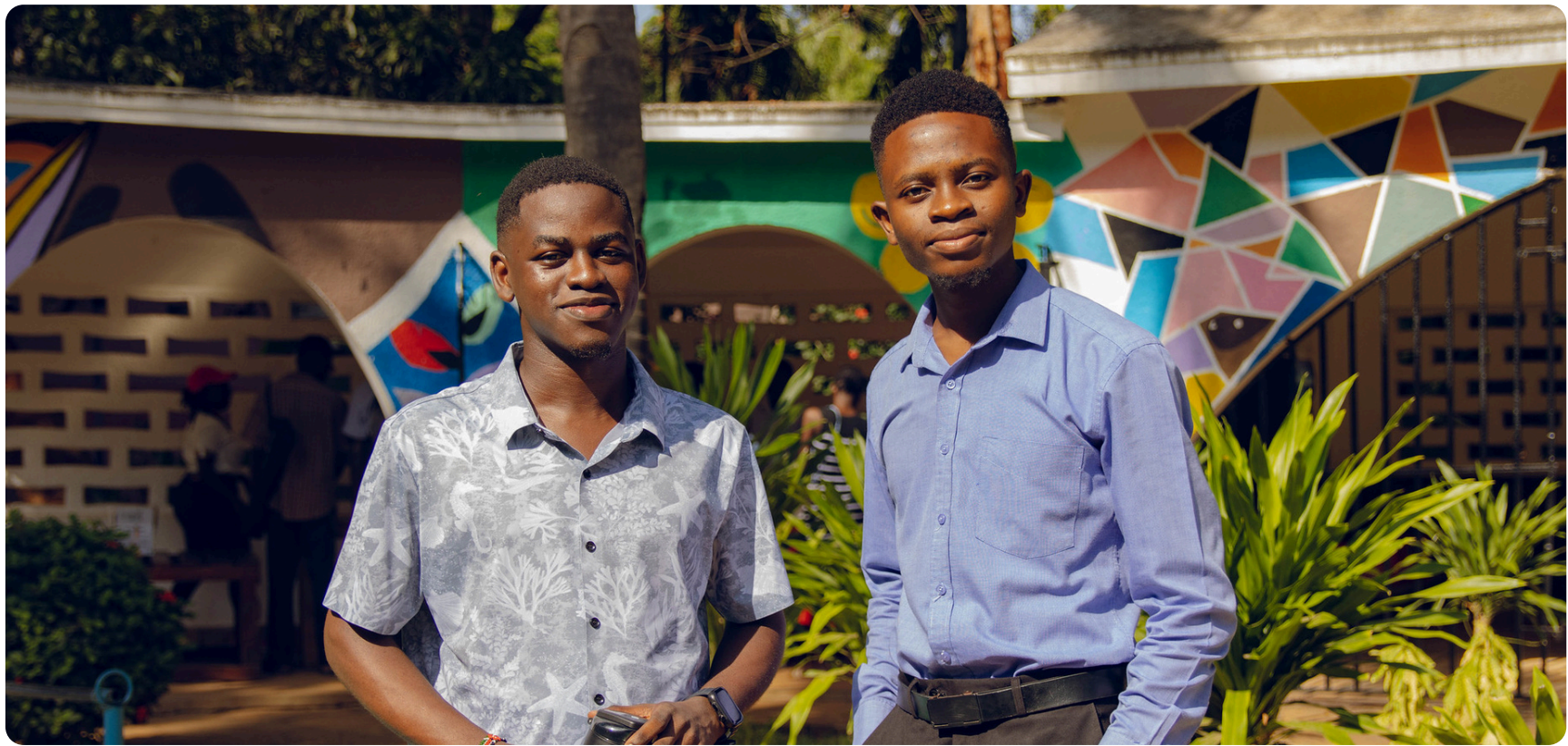


Photo: Maono Space members from Hope for Future CBO at a acommunity event at the space

In Focus

AI Mtaani: Bringing Artificial Intelligence to the Local Community



Photo: AI Mtaani launch, Maono Space, Nov 2025

Launched on 18–19 November 2025, AI Mtaani is built on a simple conviction: communities should not just experience the impact of AI — they should understand it, use it, and shape how it works for them.

The two-day introductory event at Maono Space reached 149 participants — youth, teachers, changemakers and small business owners — with foundational concepts, responsible use and hands-on demos, delivered kwa lugha ya mtaa rather than technical jargon: free AI tools for content, business records and schoolwork on day one, then data rights, algorithmic bias and online safety on day two.

Maono Space now plans to scale this into a long-term programme, and has begun scoping a countrywide Data & AI Maturity Assessment with county governments — the first subnational AI-readiness assessment planned in the region.

149

Participants at the AI Mtaani launch

21,000

- Training goal:
- 1,000 teachers
 - 10,000 students
 - 10,000 small business owners

Mnato Sato: Our Local Stage, Our Own Stories



Photo: Mnato Sato stage night

Every last Saturday, Mnato Sato turns Maono Space into a community stage — open to any performer, no auditions. It has grown to draw crowds as large as 580 people, featuring 35+ thespians and 45 musicians and poets. Alumni performers created Malindi Got Talent, and are now hired for community dialogues and CSO events.

80+

performers

580+

attendees

Tools & Global Reach

Home-grown tools and Kenyan lessons, carried into a global curriculum.

Sabasi — Now Free for Everyone

sabasi.io

Our African-built survey tool has underpinned nearly every citizen-data exercise in this report — from Kilifi's facility mapping to the 2023 survey of 16,300 women across 730 savings groups. In 2025 we made the newest version of Sabasi free, removing the cost barrier for smaller CBOs and grassroots organisations.

A Global Platform for Citizen Data

with the World Bank & UN

Together with the World Bank's Data Academy and the UN Collaborative on Citizen Data, we co-developed the online course "Understanding the Copenhagen Framework." Since launch it has trained 2,000+ learners worldwide — carrying lessons from Kilifi, Nandi and Homa Bay into a global curriculum.

CSOs Data Commons

with the SDGs Kenya Forum

In 2025 we laid the groundwork for a shared data platform to reduce silos among non-state actors — making it easier for civil society organisations to find and reuse one another's datasets. Launch targeted for 2026 (data.csodata.ke).

3

Financial Overview

Transparency in our operations — audited highlights for 2025.



2025 Financial Highlights

A strong financial position — sound stewardship despite reduced donor funding. (USD millions)

Indicator	2025	2024
Total assets	1.19	0.71
Net assets	0.33	0.36
Revenue recognised	0.77	1.61
Total expenditure	0.74	1.59
Operating surplus	0.03	0.02
Cash & cash equivalents	0.57	0.25
Deferred restricted funds	0.85	0.34

+68%

Growth in total assets, driven by cash holdings that more than doubled — strengthening liquidity for future programmes.

\$1.26M

In new restricted funding secured in 2025; \$0.85M remained deferred at year-end, to be recognised as programmes are implemented.

98%

of income came from donations & grants (USD 0.76M) — the continued confidence of development partners.

31 / 69

31% of expenditure was to programme services (USD 0.23M); 69% sustains the institutional capacity behind multi-year programmes.

Financial Stewardship & Transparency

The Open Institute remained financially resilient throughout 2025 despite a lower level of revenue recognition compared to the previous year. The Institute secured USD 1.26 million in new restricted funding, maintained prudent expenditure management, and closed the year with USD 0.85 million in deferred funding to support programme implementation in future periods.

While recognised revenue reduced following the completion of several major donor-funded initiatives in 2024, expenditure declined proportionately — enabling the Institute to maintain a positive operating surplus and continue investing in institutional capacity. Total assets increased by 68% to USD 1.19 million, supported by a significant increase in cash and receivables.

The increase in deferred funding demonstrates the continued confidence of our development partners and provides a strong foundation for programme delivery in the coming years.

OUR COMMITMENT

- Annual audit reports are publicly available on our website.
- We disclose all donors contributing \$100,000 or more, with descriptions of the areas their support advances.
- The Open Institute Trust is verified by NGOSource (equivalent to a U.S. public charity) and registered in Kenya.
- This work is licensed under Creative Commons BY-SA 4.0.



Partnerships

Collaboration drives our impact.



Funders & Strategic Partners

FUNDERS

Luminate

Citizen infrastructure, Maono & active citizenship — flexible, multi-year support since 2020

Gates Foundation

Strengthening sub-national data value chains — Kilifi, Nandi & Homa Bay

Hewlett Foundation

General operating support & data governance convening

Wellcome Trust

Programme support

GIZ

Data rights & protection campaign

Ford Foundation

Maono Space community infrastructure

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

- Media Council of Kenya — Maono media hub partnership
- Association of Freelance Journalists — media-ethics partnership
- Council of Governors & County Governments of Kilifi, Nandi & Homa Bay
- World Bank Data Academy & UN Statistics Division — Copenhagen Framework course
- SDGs Kenya Forum — CSOs Data Commons
- Amnesty International Kenya · Qhala — data governance & maturity assessments



What's Next

2025 proved the model. 2026 is about scale.

1

Scaling Open County Work

Extending the Kilifi model of citizen-generated data and direct citizen–government dialogue to more counties, building on early momentum in Nandi and Homa Bay.

2

Institutionalising Citizen Data Use

Moving citizen scorecards and project dashboards from one-off exercises into standing systems counties maintain — turning the Kilifi dashboard commitment into a replicable template.

3

Strengthening Governance Partnerships

Deepening regional data governance work with Amnesty International Kenya and East African regulators, translating the 2025 policy framework into practical, enforceable standards.

4

Expanding Community Spaces

Growing Maono Space's footprint — AI Mtaani and Mnato Sato — as infrastructure for both accountability and creative civic life, with ambitions to train teachers, reach students, and support small businesses at scale.



Fostering open, informed communities where citizens actively engage with transparent governments for sustainable development.

GET IN TOUCH

hello@openinstitute.africa · openinstitute.africa · malindi.maono.space

9 Riverside, Nairobi, Kenya · P.O. Box 50474 – 00100 · The Open Institute Trust, registered in the Republic of Kenya