



DEEP
LEARNING
INDABA

Urunana

Impact Report
Deep Learning Indaba
2025



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DEEP LEARNING INDABA Rwanda 2025

Message from the Trustees

Thank you for taking the time to read this Impact Report, and for your continued interest in the Deep Learning Indaba. Your support, whether as a volunteer, partner, donor, or advocate, makes this work possible.

This report marks an important moment for the organisation. For the first time, we have chosen to frame our work not primarily in terms of activities delivered, but in terms of the change we are working to enable across Africa's AI ecosystem. The events, programmes, and communities described here remain central to our mission; what is new is our commitment to more clearly articulate *what is different because the Indaba exists*, and to hold ourselves accountable for that ambition.

The past year was one of our most ambitious to date. The scale of participation at the annual Indaba, the growth of IndabaX across the continent, the launch of formal archived proceedings, and the expansion of mentorship and innovation pathways all speak to the depth and maturity of the ecosystem that has grown around this community. At every step, we have sought to preserve what has always defined the Indaba: a service-driven culture, strong volunteer leadership, and a focus on strengthening African AI for Africans, by Africans.

We are particularly proud of the shift introduced in this report: a new Theory of Change and measurement framework that reflects the long-term nature of the change we are trying to achieve. Careers are shaped over years. Institutions are strengthened gradually. Communities endure because people return, lead, and bring others with them. This report sets an honest baseline for understanding those trajectories. In future years, we intend to deepen the evidence behind them.

None of this work happens in isolation. The Indaba continues to exist because of an extraordinary community—organisers, mentors, reviewers, speakers, and participants—who give their time and expertise despite significant constraints. Their dedication embodies the spirit of Ubuntu that underpins the Indaba and gives us confidence in what African AI can continue to become.

As funding landscapes evolve, sustained support remains essential to maintaining and growing this impact. If one request accompanies this report, it is that you continue to connect us with individuals and organisations who share our commitment to strengthening African AI ecosystems and can support this work over the long term.

We are grateful for the trust placed in us, and we look ahead with both ambition and humility, to learning more rigorously from our work, and to stewarding this community responsibly in the years to come.

*On behalf of the Board of Trustees
Dr Emily Muller*

Executive Summary

988

Indaba in-person attendees

47

Countries with IndabaX

390

Travel Grants

40%

Female attendees

25

Mentorship sessions

38

Sponsors & Partners

277

Research posters

19

Archived Proceeding Publications

200+

Virtual attendees

135

Mentorship pairs

6000

IndabaX attendees across Africa

130

Communities registered

Key Achievements

In 2025, the Deep Learning Indaba delivered its largest and most ambitious programme to date, while deepening its role as a pan-African platform for advancing AI research, talent, and community.

- **Scaled continental convening:** 1,000 in-person participants from 47 African countries, with an additional 200+ virtual attendees, reflecting sustained growth in reach and demand.
- **Expanded access and inclusion:** 390 travel grants enabled participation from across the continent, maintaining broad socioeconomic access at scale.
- **Strengthened research pipeline:** Launch of the first full, peer-reviewed Indaba proceedings, with 19 papers archived in PMLR, alongside 277 research posters and a growing culture of scholarly exchange.
- **Deepened talent development:** Delivery of 25 structured mentorship sessions during the Indaba, complemented by year-round mentorship programmes with 135 pairings supporting career progression, publication, and leadership development.
- **Ecosystem growth beyond the annual event:** Continued expansion of IndabaX across 47 countries, supporting locally led AI communities and institutional capacity.
- **Operational delivery at scale:** Successful delivery of a six-day conference and parallel programmes, coordinated by 67 volunteer organisers, marking operational maturity and coordination.

Strategic Learning

Delivering the largest Deep Learning Indaba to date marked an inflection point in how the organisation understands both its impact and its responsibilities at scale. The 2025 programme demonstrated that operational delivery has reached a high level of maturity, enabling the Indaba to convene at scale while maintaining broad access and technical depth. At the same time, the year made clear that the most meaningful effects of the Indaba extend well beyond visible outputs such as attendance, sessions delivered, or papers published.

The primary strategic learning is that the Indaba's deepest value lies in longer-term outcomes — shaping confidence, career trajectories, leadership capacity, and institutional strength across Africa's AI ecosystem — yet these outcomes have not, until now, been systematically evidenced. As scale has increased, this gap between activity and evidence has become more pronounced. In response, 2025 marked a deliberate shift: the articulation of a clear Theory of Change and the introduction of an outcome-focused measurement framework to better align ambition, delivery, and accountability.

The year also surfaced a second, related insight: future impact will depend less on continued expansion alone, and more on focus, prioritisation, and optimisation at scale. As the Indaba grows, maintaining quality, coherence, and participant experience requires stronger curation, clearer pathways from participation to sustained outcomes, and organisational learning that informs design choices year on year. Together, these lessons signal a transition from a phase defined primarily by growth, to one shaped by intentionality, evidence, and long-term value creation.

Looking Ahead

Looking ahead, the Deep Learning Indaba will focus on consolidating impact rather than expanding activity for its own sake. Priorities centre on embedding measurement and learning across programmes, strengthening pathways from participation to sustained outcomes through mentorship and publications, and continuing to support locally owned ecosystems through IndabaX. Operational learning from delivering at scale will guide more focused design and resourcing, ensuring that quality, coherence, and long-term value remain central as the organisation matures.

Our Theory of Change

The Deep Learning Indaba exists to Strengthen African AI, for Africans, by Africans. Our Theory of Change describes how we believe our work creates that change, and how we will know when it is happening.

In 2025 we evolved our impact framework from seven areas to six, reorganising around the clearest causal logic: the people we develop, the research and innovation we support, the ecosystems we build, the influence we exercise, the community we sustain, and the organisation that makes it all possible.

Area	Title	Description	Key Outcomes
People	Talent & Leadership	Building a generation of skilled, confident African AI practitioners and leaders	<i>Critical mass of expertise; growing cohort of leaders</i>
Pipeline	Research & Innovation	Supporting African AI research and strengthening the pathway from ideas to impact	<i>Globally competitive research; visible publications; innovation pipeline</i>
Ecosystem	Ownership & Capacity	Strengthening the institutions and ecosystems that allow African AI to thrive on its own terms	<i>Continental capacity; institutional strengthening</i>
Influence	Thought Leadership	Ensuring African AI experience and insight shapes the global conversations that determine AI's future	<i>DLI recognised as trusted voice; African perspectives in global conversations</i>
Pulse	Community & Belonging	Fostering a vibrant, collaborative, and sustainable AI community	<i>Belonging; diversity; active participation</i>
Organisation	Foundations / Organisational Learning & Sustainability	Strengthening DLI as a sustainable, high-impact organisation	<i>High-standard delivery; governance; sustainability; continuous learning</i>



1. People

Talent & Leadership: Building a generation of skilled, confident African AI practitioners and leaders

An overarching mission of the Deep Learning Indaba is to build a critical mass of AI talent on the continent. This is achieved through delivering technical sessions at the annual Indaba with education as the core focus, as well as providing mentorship support and networking opportunities to build confidence and opportunities to pursue a career in AI.

2025 in Numbers

988

In-person attendees

12

Practicals & Tutorials

70+

Structured mentorship pairings

12

Workshops

25

In-person mentorship sessions

What We Did

Annual Deep Learning Indaba — Kigali, Rwanda

The 2025 Annual Indaba was held from August 17–22 at the University of Rwanda, Kigali Campus, under the theme *Urunana*: meaning “hand in hand”. Rooted in African traditions of solidarity, cooperation, and shared responsibility, *Urunana* reflects the collective strength needed to shape the future of AI on the continent. Guided by this spirit, the event brought together 1,000 participants from 59 countries, including 47 African nations, united in advancing AI through shared knowledge and collaboration.

Workshops

Our workshop programme invites an open call for submissions and are assessed by their content, modality and quality. We received a total of 42 submissions, with a final 12 being selected for the 2025 programme. Across the [workshop programme](#), topics included trustworthy and responsible AI, with a strong emphasis on public engagement, ethics, data governance and African-centred approaches to inclusion, sovereignty and impact. Several workshops focused on AI for real-world challenges, including climate resilience, health, robotics, automation and business and finance. Emerging and rapidly growing areas were also prominent, notably Quantum Machine Learning and advanced compute infrastructure, alongside continued leadership in African NLP; addressing language diversity, resource constraints and responsible deployment.

These workshops serve to both galvanise communities of practice through the Deep Learning Indaba ecosystem, and disseminate knowledge to participants in turn increasing community participation. This has been seen over the years through the formalisation of knowledge communities such as natural language processing for African languages (Masakhane), computer vision (Ro'ya-CV4Africa), climate and sustainability (AfriClimate AI), and health (SisonkeBiotik) that originated as workshops at the Indaba. As well as summer schools and conference events which have gone on to host independent events following the Indaba such as the Computer Vision summer school and Robotics for Africa Workshop.

As well as delivering important discussions on up-to-date AI topics, the workshops also elicit participation from attendees in the form of lightning talks and hackathons. These serve to both raise the profile of attendees working in domain specific areas, as well as encourage collaboration and innovation. Lightning talk prizes include mentorship which can support attendees to pursue publication. Hackathons receive a large number of attendees, for example, the *Climate Hackathon: Hack the Carbon: Monitoring Africa's Forest Biomass from Space*, received 435 submissions on Zindi across 54 teams.

Survey responses indicate that the workshops played a meaningful role in strengthening participants' research trajectories, practical skills, and confidence. Many attendees described the sessions as highly practical and exploratory, noting that hands-on activities, access to codebases, and exposure to real-world applications "gave food for later exploration" and directly informed their current or future research. Participants also highlighted the value of engaging with practitioners, startups, and industry partners, which helped ground academic work in deployed systems and encouraged new lines of inquiry. Just as importantly, the inclusive and participatory environments fostered confidence: respondents noted gaining skills, career insight, and assurance to contribute, ask questions, and collaborate across disciplines and geographies.

"Very well organized. And a special star rating for the AI for Business and Finance in Africa. So many practical pieces of advice to learn from it"

Tutorials

In 2025, our educational programme included coding tutorials focusing on foundations of ML, Generative Models, LLMs and Reinforcement Learning. These tutorials remain [available online](#) following the event and received a total of 66 forks (up from 55 the previous year). This year, the tutorials expanded into a multi-part offering, with 9 additional online sessions continuing after the Indaba and attracting over 150 attendees. This created a deeper curriculum, opened access to more of the Indaba community, and offered certificates and awards to participants who completed the online sessions. Overall feedback from survey respondents was positive, highlighting speakers' ability to make complex concepts accessible and engaging. Many attendees described the tutorials as meaningfully contributing to their research. Suggestions to improve were limited and mostly focused on time and delivery logistics, noting that more time and advanced follow-up on real world data would be valuable, as well as Wi-Fi reliability and virtual participation.

Mentorship

Mentorship occurs throughout the year through the formal mentorship programme with a total of 135 mentor-mentee pairs in 2025. Mentorship supports matched pairings for authors in preparing their manuscripts for submission (20 pairings), after the Indaba week through Ideathon pairings to support teams develop their ideas (54 pairings), and through requested sessions for professional development and support. The mentorship programme has processed more than 1100 applications since its inauguration in 2020. In addition, across the Indaba week there are mentorship sessions in the poster session feedback and breakfast mentorship sessions with senior researchers (130 sign-ups each day).

Responses from the post-Indaba survey indicate that our mentorship model is a critical driver of long term impact. Participants consistently describe mentorship – through formal sessions, poster feedback, and informal conversations – as a turning point that transformed uncertainty into confidence, and interest into clear research and career direction. Many reported securing thesis supervisors, refining research agendas, publishing papers, initiating collaborations, or returning home to mentor others as a direct result of guidance received through the Indaba. Beyond technical learning, the mentorship experience fosters a strong sense of belonging and self belief, enabling participants to see themselves as legitimate contributors and future leaders within Africa's AI ecosystem.

Summary

Taken together, the tutorials, workshops, and mentorship activities demonstrate how the Deep Learning Indaba systematically builds a critical mass of AI talent across Africa. By combining high-quality technical education with hands-on practice, community formation, and sustained mentorship, the Indaba moves participants from exposure and skill-building to confidence, collaboration, and leadership. As this critical mass consolidates, it increasingly strengthens African research capacity, enabling researchers to generate, apply, and disseminate knowledge rooted in African priorities, and positions the community to contribute collectively to a global African AI agenda.

Outcomes: What We Know and What We Are Building

Outcome	What we know from 2025	What we are now measuring
Critical mass: Africa has a critical mass of AI expertise across disciplines and geographies	<i>Surveyed participants scored 4.5/5 for the Indaba helping shape ideas about future study/career directions.</i> <i>Hackathons were scored as the most interesting and relevant part of the programme.</i> <i>70+ mentor-mentee pairings.</i>	<i>Registration survey baseline (competency, confidence, career stage); Alumni survey at 0, 6, 12 months; Positions and opportunities identified/secured through the Indaba.</i>
Cohort of leaders: A growing cohort of leaders with responsibility to drive forward African AI	<i>7.4% teaching staff</i> <i>2.7% research fellow</i> <i>1.9% junior academic faculty</i>	<i>Alumni survey tracking seniority, decision-making roles, research direction, and publications; Analysis of career progression through Alumni survey and returning applicants.</i>

“Attending the Deep Learning Indaba was a turning point in my journey. Before Indaba, I was largely self-taught and unsure whether I was on the right path. What made the difference was not only the technical sessions, but the mentorship — the chance to speak directly with experienced researchers, receive honest feedback, and ask questions about research, careers, and life. Through these conversations, I gained clarity on my research direction and the confidence to pursue it seriously. The Indaba showed me that I am not alone, that there is a supportive pan-African community willing to guide, encourage, and open doors. It is more than a conference; it is a place where mentorship turns potential into purpose.”

— An 2025 Indaba Attendee



2. Pipeline

Research & Innovation: Supporting African AI research and strengthening the pathway from ideas to impact

The Indaba strengthens Africa's AI research ecosystem by creating platforms for knowledge exchange, fostering collaboration and increasing the visibility of African AI research.

2025 in Numbers



What We Did

Publications Track

For the Deep Learning Indaba 2025 publication proceedings, 95 papers were submitted and assessed through a double-blind peer-review process. A total of 87 reviewers were recruited, each reviewing between four and eight papers. Reviewers were supported through a reviewing mentorship and training programme, delivered in collaboration with the Indaba Mentorship Programme, which provided guidance from experienced reviewers, training on effective reviewing, and feedback on review quality. 19 papers were accepted and presented in the Research in Africa Showcase during the Indaba, and have since gone on to formal archived publication in [Proceedings of Machine Learning Research](#). The Indaba publications programme deepened its mentorship commitment in 2025 working to ensure high quality publications, as well as formalised archived proceedings in collaboration with PMLR, supporting global access and persistence.

The 2025 proceedings span a broad range of foundational and applied research. A substantial portion centers on African languages, covering natural language processing, speech recognition and synthesis, machine translation, and evaluation of large language models, with a strong emphasis on multilingual and low-resource contexts. Other contributions investigate fairness and bias in machine learning, particularly in health and education.

Applied studies address challenges in agriculture, climate and environmental monitoring, wildlife conservation, and public health, alongside advances in computer vision, reinforcement learning, robotics, and edge computing. Increasingly, this work also reflects a growing focus on sustainable AI, including energy-efficient model design, resource-aware deployment, and environmental impact of machine learning systems.

"The State of Large Language Models for African Languages: Progress and Challenges" Hussen et al., 2025

Despite Africa being home to over 2,000 languages, this study finds that current AI language models support only 42 of them — leaving more than 98% unrepresented. Evaluating 20 models across three categories, the authors reveal stark disparities in language and script coverage, with just four languages dominating across all systems. Key barriers include data scarcity, tokenization biases, and the high cost of training. The paper concludes with a practical roadmap — from community-driven data collection to specialised models — charting a path toward more inclusive AI for Africa's linguistic diversity.

Overall, the collection highlights research that integrates methodological innovation with practical solutions tailored to African contexts, while acknowledging the importance of sustainability and responsible AI development.

Awards

The Deep Learning Indaba Awards recognised and celebrated excellence in African machine learning, artificial intelligence, and related fields, highlighting contributions that advance research, innovation, community service, and real-world impact across the continent. Through these awards, the Indaba aims to acknowledge outstanding individuals and teams whose work strengthens African AI ecosystems.

Maathai Award Winners

The award encourages and recognises work by African innovators that shows impactful application of machine learning and artificial intelligence.



Yousri Kessentini, Maathai Award Winner
Digital Research Center of Sfax, SM@RTS Laboratory
Associate Professor

Yousri Kessentini's work demonstrates how AI can be ethically applied to preserve and democratize access to historical knowledge. By developing scalable tools to restore and transcribe degraded handwritten documents - especially in rare or endangered scripts - his project enables institutions in low-resource settings to protect and share their cultural heritage. The work directly benefits scholars, educators, and the public, particularly across Africa and the Middle East, where archival infrastructure may be more limited.

"This award is a powerful recognition of my commitment to impactful, inclusive AI. It reinforces my belief that research rooted in purpose can truly create meaningful change in society."

Pfunzo Maba, Maathai Award Runner-up
SignToAll Team, Student

Pfunzo Maba's work on a real-time sign language translator is a compelling example of inclusive, Africa-centered AI innovation. The project addresses a significant social challenge, the communication divide experienced by Deaf individuals, by using computer vision and ML to build an affordable, SASL-based translator. What makes this project especially valuable is its community-driven foundation. The team engaged with Deaf users to understand their needs and design a tool that would work in low-resource settings without requiring expensive equipment or internet access.



"This award honors our journey as three young women using AI to build a South African Sign Language translator that promotes inclusivity and bridges communication gaps in local communities."

Cheikh Anta Diop Award Winners

The Anta Diop Award recognises and encourages excellence in research, teaching and community service by early to mid-career academics and researchers at African universities, in any area of artificial intelligence, and computational and statistical sciences.



Jordan Felicien Masakuna, Cheikh Anta Diop Award Winner

University of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Associate Professor

Jordan F. Masakuna has comprehensive and impactful engagement with the African AI ecosystem, spanning mentorship, teaching, and cutting-edge research, highlighting his dedication to advancing local talent and addressing pressing societal challenges. His research in anomaly detection, robotics, and medical AI is both thorough and socially relevant, with promising results for global impact. His teaching practice exemplifies a commitment to integrating advanced research into student learning, thereby creating a pipeline of well-prepared AI professionals. Jordan's vision for Africa's AI future, emphasizing inclusivity, sustainability, and contextual relevance, is not only aspirational but also actionable. His clear articulation of steps—such as establishing local AI hubs and promoting open-source tools—demonstrates a practical path forward. Overall, Jordan exemplifies the qualities of a visionary and dedicated leader.

“This award encourages my continued commitment to impactful, community-driven AI research and recognizes the value of collaborative innovation.”

Steven James

Cheikh Anta Diop Award Runner-up

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Senior Lecturer and Deputy Director of the RAIL Lab

Dr. Steven James stands out as a dedicated and impactful academic whose contributions span research, teaching, and community development within African AI. His work is marked by technical depth, evident in top-tier publications and a coherent research agenda and a commitment to building capacity through structured supervision and mentorship. His leadership in initiatives like the RAIL Lab and his consistent support for the Deep Learning Indaba ecosystem underscore his dedication to inclusive, pan-African engagement. Dr. James exemplifies a model of academic excellence that balances global competitiveness with local relevance, and his strategic approach to talent development and research visibility marks him as a future-shaping leader.



“I’m proud to be honoured by the Deep Learning Indaba. It serves as meaningful recognition of the scientific contributions my students and group are making to the field.”

Kambule Doctoral Award Winners

The Kambule Doctoral Award recognises and encourages excellence in research and writing by doctoral candidates at African universities, in any area of computational and statistical sciences.



Lexy Andati

Kambule Award Winner

Rhodes University, South African and South Africa
Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO)
Postdoctoral Research Fellow

Lexy's thesis presents a comprehensive and technically accomplished spectropolarimetric study of Pictor A, one of the most well-known southern radio galaxies. Lexy has successfully integrated observational techniques, data calibration, and scientific interpretation to extract new insights into the magnetic field structure of this source. A major strength of the work lies in its emphasis on reproducibility and accessibility, exemplified by the development of three custom software packages and the public release of data products.

"This award affirms my work has not been in vain. It's a recognition of our interdisciplinary research, and Africa's growing contribution to radio astronomy and data science! I am truly humbled."

Geraud Nangue Tasse

Kambule Award Runner-up

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Lecturer

Geraud Nangue Tasse's thesis is an impressive piece of work in reinforcement learning, especially in the areas of compositional and lifelong learning. He introduces World Value Functions and new ways to combine tasks using logic and time, helping create learning agents that are more efficient, safer, and better at generalizing, solving major challenges in today's RL systems. His work also explores how to connect natural language with formal instructions, which is important for using RL in real-world robots and assistive tools. The research is strong both in theory and in practice, with solid testing in environments like BabyAI, gridworlds, and robotics simulations. Geraud's story and training under top African AI researchers show his growth and dedication. Geraud is clearly on the path to becoming a key figure in the future of machine learning in Africa.



"This award is a deeply meaningful recognition of my academic journey and a reminder of the importance of community, perseverance, and contributing to Africa's scientific future."

Alele-Williams Masters Award Winners

The Alele-Williams Masters Award recognises and encourages excellence in research and writing by masters candidates at African universities, in any area of computational and statistical sciences.



Cynthia Amol

Alele-Williams Award Winner

Maseno University, Department of Computer Science
PhD in Computer Science Student, Caribou Pan-African
Women PhD Scholars Collective in AI & Livelihoods

Amol Jayne Cynthia's thesis on "A Code-Switched Swahili-English Political Misinformation Detection Model" is a high-quality piece of research that is both technically sound and societally relevant. The creation of the "PolitiKweli" dataset is a standout achievement, providing a much-needed resource for the under-resourced Swahili-English language pair. This dataset, focused on the critical issue of political misinformation, particularly within the Kenyan electoral context, has the potential to spur further research and development in the region.

"I am honored to receive the Alele-Williams Masters Award. Her legacy of excellence in education and research is inspirational, challenging me to contribute to developing fair and inclusive AI."

Keneilwe Mokoka

Alele-Williams Award Runner-Up

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Senior Integration Engineer

Keneilwe Mokoka's thesis stands out as a significant and impactful contribution to the growing body of research focused on African languages and their integration into machine learning and AI frameworks. The work is well-timed, addressing a critical and persistent gap in NLP research, which often overlooks the linguistic diversity of the African continent, especially low-resource languages that face challenges such as limited data availability and fewer computational tools. Moreover, the thesis is not only academically rigorous but also socially relevant. By focusing on Southern African languages, Keneilwe contributes to the broader objective of making AI tools more inclusive and equitable, enabling technology to better serve diverse linguistic communities

"This recognition is a full circle moment for me because I worked very hard throughout my Master degree journey. It's the icing on the cake for this already incredible achievement."



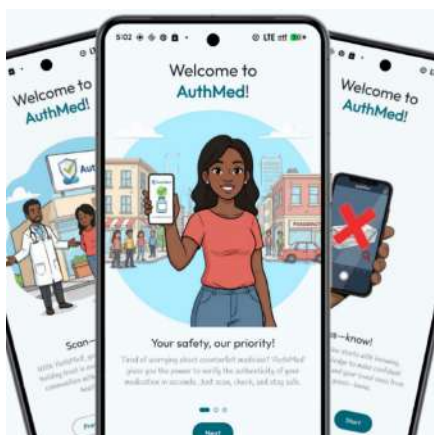
Ideathon Programme

The Deep Learning Indaba Ideathon reached its fourth edition in 2025, receiving 54 applications, an increase from the 29 applications received in 2024. Since its inception, the Ideathon has grown to support both research-focused projects and application-based projects, reflecting growing community interest. In 2025, 11 submissions were research projects, with the remaining 43 application-based. During the Indaba week, two 2024 winning teams presented their work, alongside a networking lunch and mentorship session. Following the Indaba, all 54 teams were matched with mentors to support the development of video pitches. Of these, 35 applications progressed, with 14 invited to pitch (10 application projects and 4 research projects) to a panel of judges. Four winning teams (two research and two application-based) and ten honourable mentions were announced in December 2025.

Process changes introduced in 2025, shifting the majority of the Ideathon activity to after the annual Indaba, contributed to an increase in research submissions from 5 in 2024 to 11 in 2025. Key lessons highlight the need to adjust mentorship engagement mechanisms, clarify scope between research and application tracks, and reconsider how best to support the growing number of startup-stage projects, which increasingly exceed the Ideathon's original design and evaluation framework.

Application-track Winners

Team AuthMed: Combating Counterfeit Medications



Counterfeit medicines claim thousands of lives across Africa annually. AuthMed combats this crisis with an AI-powered Mobile Application that allows users to verify drug authenticity instantly. Leveraging Computer Vision and Multi-Modal Machine Learning (YOLO), the app analyzes packaging and visual features against a trusted database to detect fakes with high accuracy.

Designed for Africa's growing smartphone market, AuthMed outperforms limited competitors by offering a universal, scalable safety tool. By empowering patients and healthcare professionals to identify substandard drugs, AuthMed aims to save lives, restore trust in health systems, and provide crucial data to regulators for better policy-making.

DawaMom: AI-driven digital health platform to improve maternal health and cervical cancer prevention

DawaMom is an AI-driven digital health platform designed to enhance maternal health and cervical cancer prevention in low-resource settings. It provides women with personalised pregnancy support, symptom triage, and health education while enabling early risk identification using machine-learning tools. For cervical cancer, DawaMom supports midwives through AI-assisted visual evaluation and clinical decision support, improving screening accuracy where specialist access is limited. The platform integrates seamlessly with community clinics, ensuring timely referrals, follow-up care, and continuity of services. By combining mobile access, AI models, and human-centred design, DawaMom helps reduce delays, improve outcomes, and strengthen primary healthcare delivery at scale.



DawaMom helps reduce delays, improve outcomes, and strengthen primary healthcare delivery at scale.

Research-track Winners

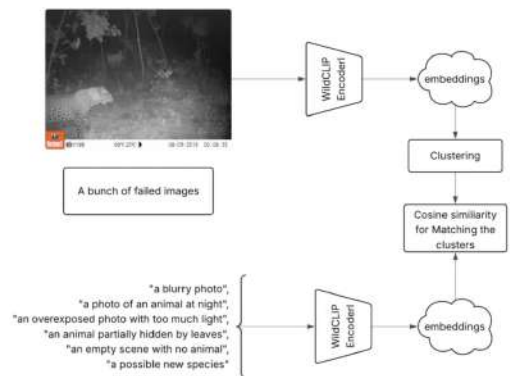
Ikirere Orbital Labs Africa: ML-Driven Satellite Safety & Coordination



IkirereMesh is a system that helps satellites avoid collisions and work together safely. It watches how satellites move, predicts possible close calls, and suggests small adjustments to keep them at a safe distance. The system has two parts: a ground-based planner that runs detailed simulations, and a lighter version that can run directly on CubeSats. Our goal is to make space operations safer and more accessible for African universities and research labs. With IkirereMesh, African teams can learn, experiment, and even launch their own small satellites for climate monitoring, connectivity, and scientific research.

Bias: Endangering species & Model Performance

Current AI models for wildlife camera traps achieve high overall accuracy but systematically fail to detect the species that matter most for conservation—endangered, nocturnal, and rare animals like leopards and pangolins. This research develops uncertainty-aware AI that prioritizes detecting threatened species by incorporating IUCN conservation data and specialized training techniques. By flagging uncertain detections for expert review rather than making unreliable predictions, the system ensures conservation resources focus on the species that need protection most, directly improving population monitoring for Africa's most vulnerable wildlife.



Winners have received micro-funding to support research and organisational costs in scaling up their projects. Details of the teams can be found on the website: <https://deeplearningindaba.com/2025/2025-ideathon-winners/>.



Outcomes: What We Know and What We Are Building

Outcome	What we know from 2025	What we are now measuring
Research pipeline: African researchers produce rigorous, high-quality work that is competitive globally	19 high-quality papers reviewed with PMLR archival pathway; year-on-year improvement in submission quality; 2 research-based projects funded through the Ideathon.	<i>Tracking of publications linked to DLI participation; conference proceedings and citation rates; best paper and honourable mention awards</i>
Impact: African AI research is visible, cited, and recognised in leading global venues	DLI publications published in open-access archive PMLR	<i>Invited talks attributable to DLI — Alumni Survey; positions on programme committees and boards; recognition in global AI leadership lists; publications from DLI attendees — Desk Research</i>
Innovation pipeline: A stronger pathway from ideas to deployment and application	2 application-based projects funded through the Ideathon to promote initial scale.	<i>Projects making measurable progress from idea to prototype; projects registered as companies or joining accelerators; follow-on funding received — Post Ideathon Programme Survey</i>

“This year, I presented my first first-author paper at the Publications & Research track. The constructive feedback and encouragement I received gave me confidence to pursue more ambitious research directions and to see myself as part of a global research community.”

— An Indaba Beneficiary



Reinforcement Learning from
Humanist Feedback:
Attempting an RLHF Approach
to A2B Training

Robots
M.A.I.

Addressing 20-Week Management Graduate Practice
Requirements: A Case Study in West Africa
Using a Hybrid of Online and On-Campus
Delivery Models for Distance and Short-Distance in Education

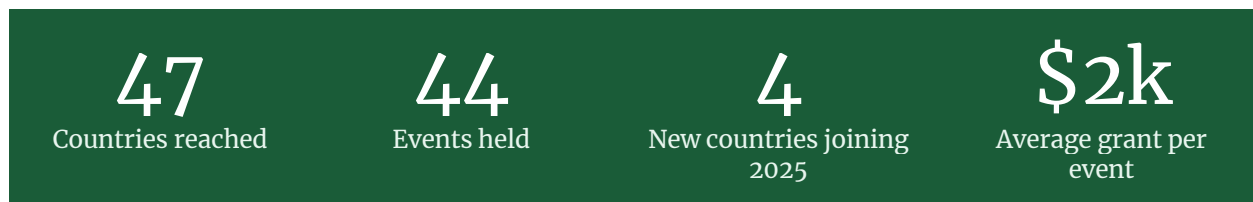
Strengthening Africa's
Ururana

3. Ecosystems

Ownership & Capacity — Strengthening the institutions and ecosystems that allow African AI to thrive on its own terms

The IndabaX programme was born from a simple conviction: if the Indaba model could be reproduced at country level, more people could learn, contribute, and take ownership of how AI is built and used across Africa. In 2025 we continue to have reach in 47 countries, close to our goal of every African nation having an active AI community.

2025 in Numbers



What We Did

IndabaX Across the Continent

47 countries were selected to host IndabaX events in 2025; 44 events took place (3 did not proceed due to organisational or funding challenges). Organising teams submitted proposals covering content, outreach strategy, budget, and inclusion plans. Events ranged from single-day gatherings to multi-day hybrid formats with hackathons. New entrants for 2025 include Gabon, Seychelles, South Sudan, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Highlights included Burkina Faso hosting 300+ attendees with 50/50 gender split at the hackathon finals; Ethiopia's Adama Science and Technology University attracting 300+ participants; Ghana's KNUST event drawing 300+ with the Responsible AI Lab; Uganda hosting 300+ across two events.

Affiliated Communities

In 2025, the Deep Learning Indaba (DLI) Community Committee made significant progress in strengthening connections with AI communities across Africa through the [Community Challenge](#), a flagship initiative designed to deepen engagement and collaboration. The challenge attracted over 130 community submissions from more than 20 countries, demonstrating strong continental reach and growing alignment with the Indaba ecosystem. Through structured evaluation phases and a focus on impact, inclusivity, and sustainability, communities were encouraged not only to showcase technical solutions but also to document their local impact, leadership models, and lessons learned. This approach fostered stronger ties between grassroots communities and DLI, increased visibility for their work, and created a platform for cross-community learning and collaboration.

Beyond participation, the initiative translated into tangible impact through recognition, funding opportunities, and deeper ecosystem integration. The top three winning communities, spanning health, education, and environmental solutions, were supported with significant awards and invited to present at Indaba, further strengthening their connection to the broader AI community. The process also surfaced key ecosystem insights, including increased participation from women and early-career practitioners, and a clear demand for more cross-border collaboration. Overall, the Community Challenge not only elevated community-led innovation but also strengthened engagement between DLI and

local ecosystems, creating a growing repository of best practices and reinforcing Indaba's role as a unifying platform for Africa's AI communities.

Outcomes: What We Know and What We Are Building

Outcome	What we know from 2025	What we are now measuring
Continental capacity: More African countries have active, self-sustaining AI ecosystems	300+ attendees in 4 African countries Near continental scale reach	IndabaX sustainability survey: event continuity, co-financing, organiser retention; spotlight on new and sustained communities — Qualitative IndabaX Survey
Institutional strengthening: African institutions have greater capacity to independently lead, teach, fund, and govern AI	Partnership with University of Rwanda	Partnerships between IndabaX and local organisations; outcomes facilitating dialogue with national bodies; organiser leadership engagement with broader AI ecosystem — IndabaX Survey

“In the Indaba I have found a community of like minded Africans passionate about changing the world through AI, Data and ML. I first heard of the Indaba early in my career from a colleague. In 2021 when I heard IndabaX was starting in Zimbabwe I jumped at the opportunity to get involved because Indaba's reputation had preceded it! I spoke at IndabaX Zimbabwe 2021 to 2023.

In 2024 I applied to speak at IndabaX SA and to my surprise I was accepted. What I experienced at IndabaX SA was so inspirational that I had to apply for the main regional Indaba in 2025 and I am so glad I did! We have just come from Rwanda (an opportunity to experience a country I had heard so much about and wanted to see for myself, made possible by a grant from the Indaba!) and what a community! With each year it's becoming clearer that if any individual / organisation in Africa claims to be in the forefront of AI, Data or ML and they are not part of the Indaba community, those claims are questionable”

— An IndabaX Beneficiary





4. Influence

Thought Leadership — Ensuring African AI experience and insight shapes the global conversations that determine AI's future

Influence is a new impact area for DLI and naming it explicitly is itself an act of intentionality. The Deep Learning Indaba has shaped African AI since its inception: through the people it develops, the research it supports, the ecosystems it builds. But in 2025 we are formalising that voice for the first time; articulating what DLI stands for, how it convenes, and how the insight it gathers from its community flows back out into the global conversations that determine AI's future.

Influence is the area where our activities and measurement is most nascent. In 2026 we will build the systematic capture of community insight that will allow us to make this causal chain visible: community experience → DLI synthesis → ecosystem learning.

Outcomes: What We Know and What We Are Building

Outcome	What we know from 2025	What we are now measuring
Recognition: DLI is recognised as a leading thinker and trusted voice shaping African AI	Sustained partnerships and engagement from global organisations Continued increase in number of applications	Count of publications, reports, and policy briefs; speaking invitations received and accepted — Internal Tracking; appearances in global AI leadership lists — Desk Research
Impact: African perspectives and insights are visibly present in and shaping continental and global AI conversations	Co-founder and Trustee Vukosi Marivate elected to UN Independent International Scientific Panel on AI	Instances of African representation in major AI governance processes — Desk Research; citations of DLI perspectives in global AI agendas; strategic partnerships established — Internal Tracking

♥ 5. Pulse

Community & Belonging — Fostering a vibrant, collaborative, and sustainable AI community

Community has always been at the heart of the Deep Learning Indaba. From its earliest days, DLI has recognised that lasting change requires more than skills and knowledge, it requires people who feel they belong, who stay engaged over time, and who bring others with them.

2025 in Numbers

2974
Applicants

44%
Female participation

120
Faculty members

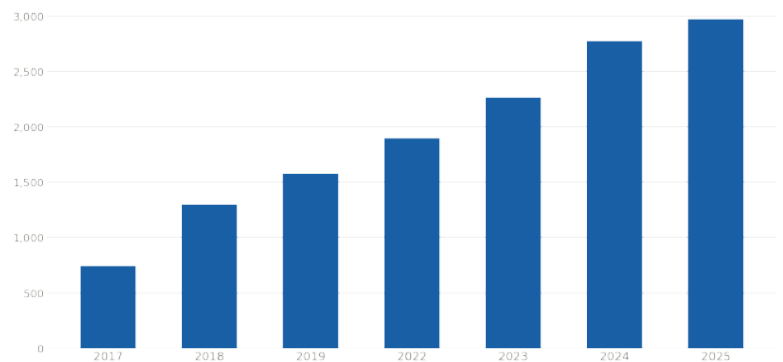
300+
Volunteer applications

What We Did

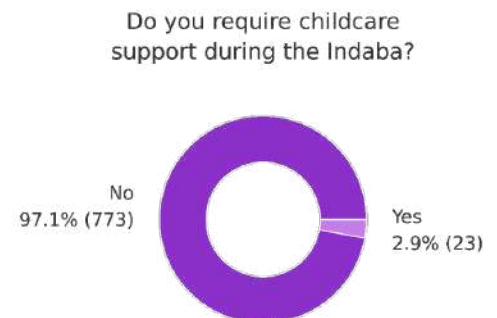
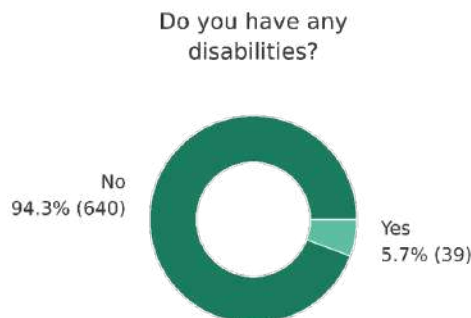
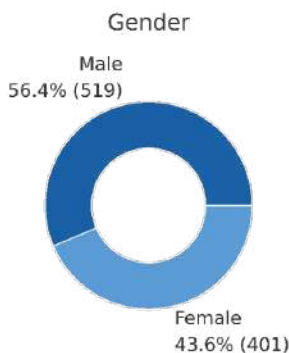
Applicants and Attendees

The reputation of the Deep Learning Indaba has created widening participation across the continent. This is reflected in a growing number of applicants year on year. From the final set of attendees, we have 43.6% female participation. 39 individuals answered Yes to having a disability, and further details include the majority reporting vision and hearing disabilities, and two requiring wheelchair accessibility. In order to enable a smooth Indaba experience for all attendees, our venue was wheelchair accessible, and we supported additional accommodations needed such as wheelchair rental and a mothers feeding room with a nanny.

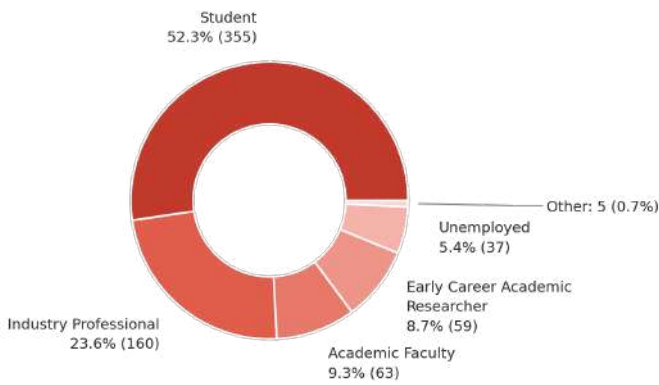
Applicants per year



Attendee Demographics Overview



Attendee category

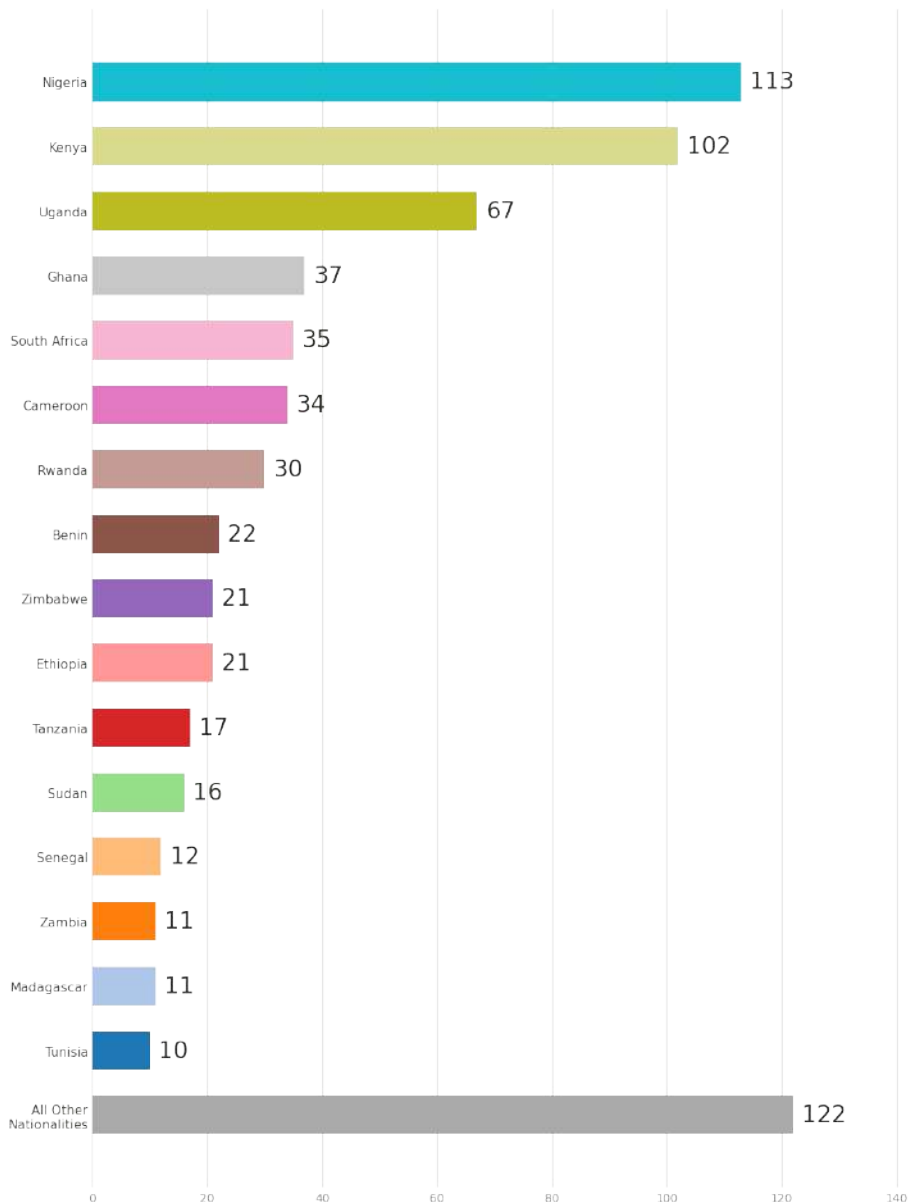


The majority of attendees were students with a mix across undergraduate (122), masters (138) and doctoral researchers (98).

Continued efforts to increase the number of academic faculty resulted in 120 early career researchers and academics.

There were a total of 54 countries represented at this years' Indaba, with a majority from Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda.

Distribution of participants by nationality



Giving back

At the end of each year's event, we invite the community to give back as volunteers. In 2025, more than 300 people registered their interest in volunteering with the Indaba as an organiser. Across applications, a consistent motivation emerged: Indaba is experienced as a community of shared purpose, where participants feel a strong sense of belonging and responsibility for its continuity. Many prospective volunteers described a journey from participant to contributor, emphasising gratitude for mentorship, collaboration, and opportunities they themselves had benefited from, and a strong desire to ensure others experience the same sense of welcome, connection, and possibility. Volunteering was frequently framed as an act of service; giving back to a pan-African movement that fosters inclusive spaces, strengthens relationships across the continent, and builds collective ownership of Africa's AI future. One applicant captured this sentiment particularly powerfully:

"The Deep Learning Indaba is more than a conference, it is a movement that embodies the future I want for Africa... building Africa's AI community is as important as building the technology itself."

Outcomes: What We Know and What We Are Building

Outcome	What we know from 2025	What we are now measuring
Belonging: Community members feel an empowered sense of belonging and connection to African AI	Dedicated WiML session; Repeated applicants;	<i>Reported sense of belonging — Alumni Survey; Annual Community Survey on inclusion experience; equity analysis of access to central programmes</i>
Diversity: Communities are increasingly representative across gender, geography, discipline, and background	44% female attendance at annual Indaba; 47 countries represented;	<i>Alumni database stratified by country, gender, career stage, and institution — Baobab Analysis; year-on-year diversity trends — Post-survey Analysis</i>
Active participation: Community members move from passive attendance to active contribution	300+ volunteer applications;	<i>Proportion of alumni moving into organiser or contributor roles — Baobab Analysis; percentage of repeat applicants year on year; Slack activity and community-led meetups — Platform Analysis</i>

"Attending the Deep Learning Indaba 2025 was an inspiring and life-changing experience for me as a Software Engineering student. I was exposed to new knowledge, mentorship, and a vibrant AI community that strengthened my passion for technology and collaboration. I am motivated to volunteer for Indaba 2026 because I want to give back to the community that has empowered me. My goal is to support other participants the same way I was supported, and to contribute my skills to ensure the event runs smoothly and leaves a lasting impact on everyone who attends."

— An Indaba Beneficiary



DEEP LEARNING INDABA CAMEROON 2023

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6. Foundations

Organisational Learning & Sustainability — Strengthening DLI as a sustainable, high-impact organisation

An organisation with the ambition to strengthen African AI across an entire continent requires foundations that can bear the weight of that ambition. In 2025 DLI continued to professionalise its governance, diversify its funding, and build the infrastructure for the next phase of its growth.

2025 in Numbers

390

Travel grants

38

Major donors and funders

67

Volunteers

44

IndabaX grants disbursed

What We Did

Delivery

In 2025, the Deep Learning Indaba in Rwanda marked a significant increase in scale and reach compared to 2024. In-person attendance grew from 600+ participants in Senegal to 1,000 attendees from 43 African countries, with an additional 200+ participants joining virtually, alongside an increase in travel grants from 200 to 390. Research engagement also expanded, with paper submissions rising from 62 to 96, and the introduction of the first full Deep Learning Indaba proceedings, accepting 19 papers. Poster participation increased from 150 to 277, and mentorship activity more than doubled from 10 sessions to 25 sessions. Community and ecosystem engagement continued to expand, with 47 IndabaX events across 47 countries and 130 communities registered for the hackathon, compared to a smaller startup-focused programme in 2024. While women's participation shifted from 50% to 40%, overall organisational delivery remained consistent, supported by 67 organisers, 19 chairs, and 36 volunteers in 2025, compared to 80 organisers, 15 chairs, and 40 volunteers in 2024.

Governance

The Board of Trustees strengthened its oversight of finances and operations while maintaining focus on the changing landscape and beneficiary needs. Board succession is more actively considered, risks are formally logged and reviewed, and a longer strategic view is taken, with a framework extending to 2027.

Sustainability

More than 7 of our donors and partners have been consistent funders for over 4 years, contributing to more than half of our annual budget. The largest single donor supports less than 15% of the annual budget. While we believe there is a strong diversity across big tech, smaller private companies, philanthropies and startups, we continue to seek multi-year commitments which will enable greater sustainability.

Organisational Learning

Feedback from the organising team indicates that the 2025 Indaba represented a clear step-change in operational maturity and delivery at scale, while also surfacing important lessons to inform how the event should continue to evolve as its size and ambition grow.

Areas of strong performance

Overall, organisers reflected that the 2025 Indaba was among the most successfully delivered editions to date, marking an increased organisational capacity to coordinate complex, parallel programmes without compromising participant experience. The team advanced multiple programme components simultaneously, demonstrating greater confidence in managing scale and interdependencies.

Significant progress was observed in logistics and operational flow. Accommodation arrangements, particularly dormitories, showed marked improvement compared to previous years, with smoother access, improved cleanliness, and more reliable utilities. Similarly, the programme schedule benefited from greater structure and punctuality, reducing friction for participants and contributing to a more predictable and professional experience.

A defining strength of the 2025 Indaba was the resilience and adaptability of the organising team. Organisers consistently noted the ability to identify and resolve issues in real time, with teams stepping in collaboratively to address challenges as they arose. This problem-solving capacity was attributed both to a strong culture of collaboration and to the effectiveness of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) in coordinating on-the-ground delivery.

Feedback also highlighted the quality of core programme content, particularly keynotes and workshops. Workshops experienced strong attendance, supported in part by a slightly more focused programme, while keynote sessions were widely regarded as intellectually strong. Organisers further noted improvements in the integration of IndabaX participation, with a more intentional emphasis on coherence and outcomes rather than density, helping to preserve the collective impact of the overall programme.

Key challenges and learning points

Alongside these successes, organisers identified several areas requiring further refinement as the Indaba continues to operate at scale.

Despite the high quality of content, attendance at some keynote and programme sessions was lower than expected. This highlighted a need to better focus participant attention and reduce dispersion across too many parallel activities. There was strong consensus that future editions should place greater emphasis on curation and quality assurance, potentially through more centralised planning and strengthened review processes, to ensure consistently high engagement across sessions.

Poster sessions were again identified as an area requiring improvement. Recurring challenges related to flow, management, and overall participant experience suggest that incremental adjustments are unlikely to be sufficient, and that a more fundamental redesign is needed.

Food provision generated mixed feedback. While catering quality was generally well regarded, it was not always well matched to the scale of the event. Long queues, insufficient portions at peak times, and limited access to drinking water underscored the importance of prioritising reliability, accessibility, and throughput over complexity when catering for 1,000+ participants.

Programme intensity also emerged as an important consideration. While spreading the event over six days helped reduce daily pressure, it may have contributed to attendance drop-off in some sessions. Organisers noted the potential value of introducing more informal

networking and “chill” spaces to balance structured programming and support sustained engagement.

Finally, organisers identified a need to strengthen support for certain cross-cutting functions. In particular, the sponsorship and prizes workload—currently embedded within the main sponsorship committee—creates pressure at critical moments despite its relatively contained scope. There is a clear opportunity to improve efficiency and sustainability by delegating this function to a dedicated individual or sub-team.

Summary learning

Taken together, the feedback suggests that the primary challenge facing the Indaba is no longer basic delivery, but optimisation at scale. The 2025 event demonstrates strong foundations in logistics, team coordination, and content quality. Future impact will depend on tightening focus, strengthening quality control, and ensuring that operational design—across catering, session flow, and resourcing—remains proportionate to the size and ambition of the conference.

This reflective learning process is central to the Indaba’s commitment to continuous improvement and responsible growth, ensuring that increased scale continues to translate into meaningful, inclusive impact.

Outcomes: What We Know and What We Are Building

Outcome	What we know from 2024	What we are now measuring
Delivery: Programmes are consistently delivered to a high standard	Annual Indaba delivered successfully in Kigali with 900+ attendees. 44 IndabaX events held. Mentorship, publications, ideathon, and hackathon programmes all completed. Positive participant feedback across all programme elements.	<i>% programmes completed on time, on budget, and meeting quality criteria — Internal Tracking; volunteer satisfaction scores — Volunteer Survey</i>
Governance: DLI has effective governance and organisational resilience	Active Board with finance and operational oversight; formal risk register; succession planning in progress; external audit process in place; improved financial management for international transfers	<i>Risk register maintained and reviewed; succession plan in place; external audit completed annually; budget approval process followed consistently</i>
Sustainability: Long-term operational and financial sustainability is maintained	Active move toward multi-year commitments; donor base diverse; lean cost basis maintained despite growing programme scope	<i>Number of funding sources; % from largest donor; multi-year commitments as % of total budget — Internal Tracking; funder satisfaction — Funder Survey</i>
Learning: DLI continuously learns from its programmes and community to improve its work	This report itself is evidence of learning; the shift to outcome-based reporting reflects strategic learning about how to evidence and communicate impact.	<i>MEL system implementation; evidence from programmes informing future design — this will be formally tracked from 2025 onwards</i>



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Kigali, Rwanda



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Acknowledgements

Volunteers and those who give their time in service of Africa and her peoples are the lifeblood of the Indaba's work. We thank all of them for their service and for being living exemplars of the spirit of Ubuntu that is one of our core values.

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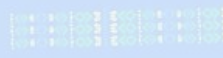
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End Matter

Urunana: Impact Report for
Deep Learning Indaba 2025

Issued: May 2026

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