

# Lusoma Gazette

## WEAVING COMMUNITY INTO STRATEGY

Strategy is only as strong as the people who help draw it. When communities define priorities, strategy becomes not just a plan, but a shared journey rooted in trust and relevance.

OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE  
CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

## RETHINKING CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LASTING GROWTH

Capacity building is not a one-time event; it is stewardship. It is about strengthening institutions so they can serve communities with clarity, dignity, and lasting impact, long after any single training has ended.

Scan me



# FROM THE EDITOR

January has a way of slowing us down just enough to notice ourselves again. The year is still new, the calendar still mostly clean, and yet many of us are already carrying the weight of what came before. We enter this year with fresh notebooks and familiar questions, quietly wondering what this season will ask of us, and whether we will show up differently this time.

Looking back, last year was full. Full of learning, stretching, honest conversations, moments of surprise, and quiet wins that didn't make headlines but mattered deeply to the people involved. It reminded us that growth is rarely loud, and progress is not always neat. Some of the most meaningful shifts happened slowly, in conversations, in rethinking old habits, and in choosing to pause when speed felt easier.

At Lusoma, reflection is not a luxury or a year-end ritual; it is a responsibility we return to often. It helps us ask better questions, notice patterns more clearly, and make decisions rooted in both evidence and care. As we begin this year, we carry forward a set of simple but powerful questions that continue to guide us: What worked? What didn't? What did we learn? And how can we do better together?



# FROM THE EDITOR

The articles in this Gazette reflect that ongoing journey. They speak to choosing people over performance, actively listening to communities, and rethinking familiar practices such as strategy, capacity building, and partnerships. They remind us that meaningful change rarely moves in straight lines. It looks more like curves, pauses, and the occasional sharp turn, unfolding through dialogue, trust, tension, adjustment, and persistence.

One lesson stands out strongly as we step into this year: personal growth shapes everything around us. Strengthening your own clarity, patience, and skills is not just self-improvement; it directly influences the teams you work with and the communities you serve.

When we intentionally invest in our own capacity through reflection, learning, and experimentation, it ripples outward. Our decisions become more grounded, collaboration more thoughtful, and work more resilient. Personal growth becomes a quiet form of stewardship, how we show up daily matters far beyond ourselves.

As you read this issue, I invite you to read slowly. Let the stories and questions linger. Reflect on where you grew, where you struggled, and how you show up differently this year.

We are deeply grateful to our partners, peers, and communities for continuing this journey with us. May this year meet us with clarity, humility, and renewed purpose.

Warm wishes for a grounded and hopeful new year,  
The Lusoma Team

Editor

*Abigail Joy Mwendé*

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## **Images**

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# A YEAR ROOTED IN PURPOSE

As we step into a new year, I find myself carrying forward one lesson that stayed with me long after the calendar changed: when nonprofits put stakeholders before shareholders, honor people over performance metrics, and choose dignity over speed, impact becomes deeper, more authentic, and more sustainable.

Local solutions are not just an idea; they are a lived truth. Over time, I have witnessed the power of communities naming their own challenges, shaping their own responses, and defining success on their own terms. This way of working is not theoretical; it is practical, resilient, and deeply human. Alongside this, I have learned the importance of valuing ourselves as practitioners, our labor, our vision, and our role in stewarding social change. The past year reaffirmed something essential for me: doing good must also benefit those who do the work.

Entering this year, I do so with a renewed commitment to African-rooted ways of working that honor community, interdependence, and the cyclical nature of life. In our traditions, every season matters, the beginnings, the growth, the transitions, and even the uncomfortable in-betweens. None are wasted, and all carry wisdom.

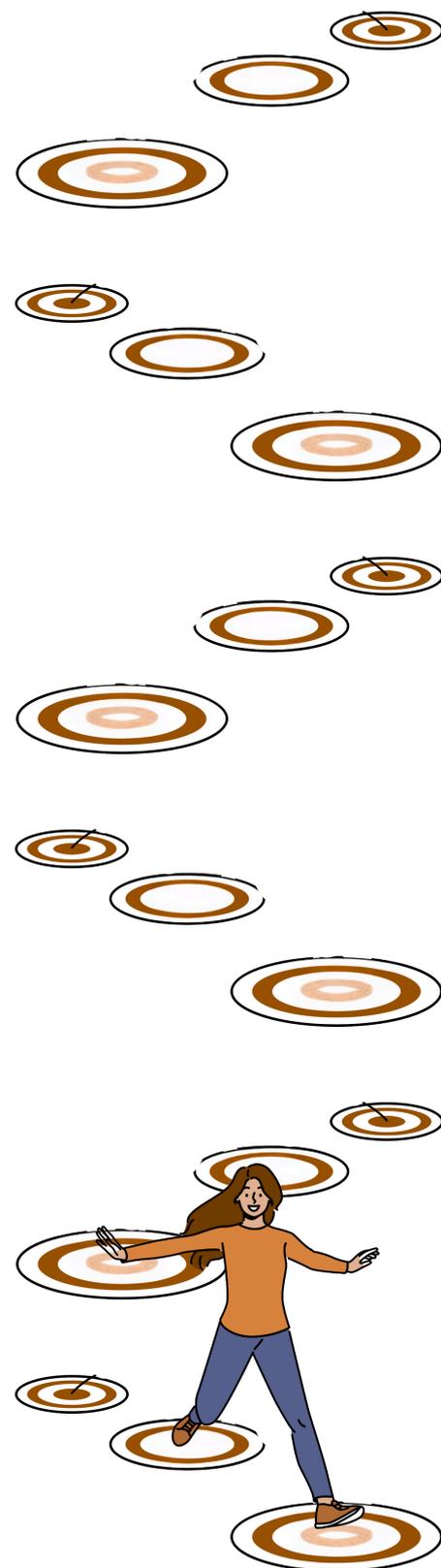
This year, I am leaning more intentionally into that rhythm. Choosing approaches that feel grounded, humane, and culturally aligned. Strengthening institutions not just to deliver programs, but to nurture people, protect values, and grow futures. This work will continue to be guided by one simple belief: When we root ourselves in who we are, our impact becomes impossible to ignore.

# A YEAR ROOTED IN PURPOSE

That is why I encourage you to grow yourself while building your community, because the two are inseparable. Our work is strongest when it is grounded in our values and in the wisdom of the communities that raised us.

The social sector is at its best when we choose people over performance, when we listen before we act, and when we honor the dignity and brilliance that already exists locally. As we move forward, may we remember that transformation is not a straight line. It has seasons of birth, growth, and transition. Each season deserves to be acknowledged. Each step, even the difficult ones, shapes who we become.

So, as you serve this year, enjoy the journey.  
Hold hope closely. Stay rooted in community.



# THE HEARTBEAT OF EVIDENCE:

REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING, DATA, AND HOMEGROWN SOLUTIONS IN 2025

“Wakati hauna subira” time has no patience, and as we begin a new year, we pause to take stock, reflect on what our data, our stories, and our lived experiences have taught us about change, growth, and the power of homegrown knowledge and solutions. As the MEAL practitioners that we are, we have gotten into the habit of asking What did we do? What did we learn? And how will we do it better next time? Fully cognizant that these questions aren't just for the purpose of tracking progress but it's about accountability, and clarity. Clarity of purpose, of process, and of partnership.

At Lusoma, 2025 reminded us that data is not merely numbers and graphs, it is a mirror. It removes bias, strips away assumptions, and reveals truths we might not have expected. Many times, the evidence surprised us. What we thought would work didn't. What began as small, passionate ideas endured because they were grounded in local experience and wisdom garnered from participatory process.

Across the sector, the lessons underscored a global truth, the data gap remains a barrier to access, to equity, and to growth.

Whether in access to healthcare, education, or livelihoods, missing data obscures disparities.

By collecting and analyzing data with care, and through lenses shaped by local experience, we begin to uncover the stories that statistics alone cannot tell. When communities help define what data matters, the results are more relevant, more ethical, and more transformative.

# THE HEARTBEAT OF EVIDENCE:

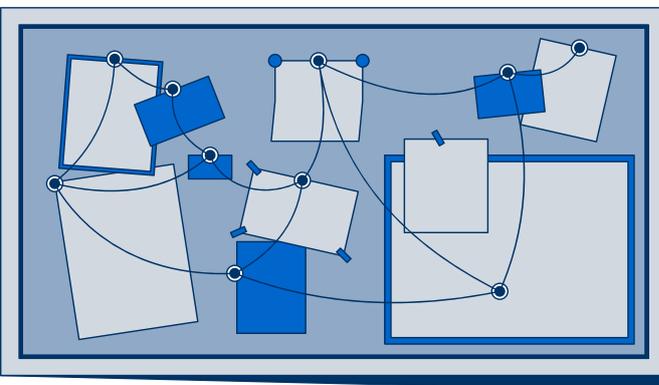
REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING, DATA, AND HOMEGROWN SOLUTIONS IN 2025

As we collect and interpret information, we should not forget to ask: Where is the center of knowledge located?

For too long, development practice has operated from a single axis of truth often outside our own axis of experience thus undefining what counts as knowledge, and how it should be validated.

This year, Lusoma remains committed to challenging “the error of sameness,” the notion that one-size-fits-all interventions can solve every community’s challenges.

Our participatory approach to research reminds us that every society has its own epistemology - its own ways of perceiving reality, knowing truth, and assigning value.



*“We see data not as a tool of control, but of connection. When we gather evidence from our own lived realities, we not only make better decisions, we also restore dignity to the process of knowing itself.”*  
- Nyakairu Ngovi



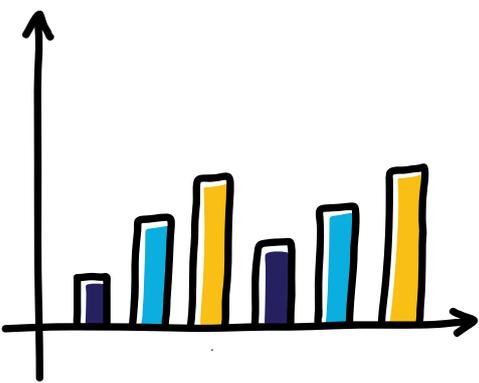
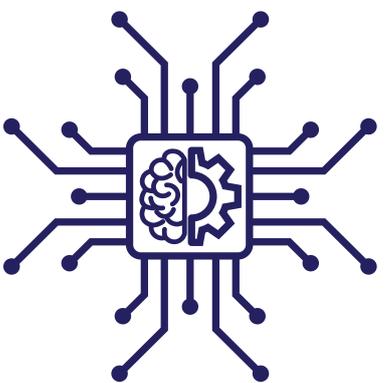
# THE HEARTBEAT OF EVIDENCE:

## REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING, DATA, AND HOMEGROWN SOLUTIONS IN 2025

Indigenous methodologies emphasize reciprocity, a mutual exchange between researcher and community, and the recognition that people are not just subjects of study, but custodians of knowledge.

As we step into 2026, we invite our partners and peers to reimagine what counts as evidence and who gets to define it. The future of meaningful development lies in restoring some of the value of cultural practices, beliefs, and knowledge systems that have survived despite historical marginalization. We see data not as a tool of control, but of connection. When we gather evidence from our own lived realities, we not only make better decisions, we also restore dignity to the process of knowing itself.

So as we take stock of the year gone by, may we continue to let data drive our change, but may that data be grounded in the heartbeat of our people, our stories, and our land.





# “WHO BENEFITS FROM YOUR GROWTH?”

"The past is for our learning. The present is for our living and the future is for our longing."

- An African Proverb



At the beginning of a new year, strategy conversations tend to gather momentum. Plans are revisited, priorities are sharpened, and problems are named with renewed urgency. In one such process, an organisation set out to design a strategy focused on a familiar concern: resource scarcity. But when feedback from constituents came in, the response was unexpected. They did not ask for more funding. They asked for something far more relational: a space to connect, network, and engage.



The challenge was not money. The challenge was relationships. And in that moment, the entire strategy changed!

This experience continues to remind me that strategy, no matter how polished, is only as reliable as the people who help draw it.

## WEAVING COMMUNITY INTO STRATEGY



Across East Africa, I've seen how often plans are crafted with precision, from a distance.

For years, communities were positioned as recipients rather than contributors. Their lived knowledge was appreciated in theory but undervalued in practice. Yet when communities define what matters, why it matters, and how change should unfold, strategy becomes something else, something rooted, trusted, and sustainable.

by Susan Odongo

At Lusoma, we treat community-led solutions as a deliberate strategic choice. Communities understand their context with a clarity no external map can replicate.

They know the terrain, the unspoken histories, the rhythms of daily life, the constraints, and the possibilities. Co-creation, therefore, is not an event. It is a way of working.

It requires spaces that allow people to shape decisions with ownership. Story circles, dialogue forums, and strategy labs where insight emerges not only from professionals but also from collective wisdom.

Yet strategy is also about power. And there are moments when the truth surfaces painfully. In another engagement, a community leader shrugged and quietly said: "We are doing this to finish the partnership. Afterwards, we'll do what works best for us, since they do not consider our input." The words were honest. They revealed the cost of exclusion: when people are unheard, strategy becomes a compliance task rather than a shared journey.

From these experiences come a few grounded insights and practical ways forward:

- Start with community-defined priorities, not assumptions.
- Create co-creation spaces that build trust and shared ownership.
- Shift power by involving communities in governance and resource decisions.
- Use flexible funding models that enable local solutions to breathe and grow.
- Embed adaptive learning through participatory Monitoring and Evaluation approaches.

The future of development belongs to organisations willing to listen differently, share power boldly, and trust the wisdom already present in communities.

## WEAVING COMMUNITY INTO STRATEGY

When people are invited not just to validate strategy but to weave it, change becomes more authentic, more dignified, and ultimately, more transformative.

by Susan Odongo

# OPPORTUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## SHAPE AFRICA'S AI FUTURE: APPLY FOR A FULLY FUNDED SHORT COURSE

Are you a policymaker, development professional, academic, or researcher eager to understand how artificial intelligence is transforming African economies? Applications are now open for the fully funded short course on The Economics of Artificial Intelligence in Africa, offered by the Global Center on AI Governance in partnership with the University of the Witwatersrand. This five-week online programme equips participants with the tools to analyse AI's economic impact, assess policy and regulatory pathways, and engage with leading African and global scholars. Successful participants will earn a Certificate of Competence and build networks across the continent. The course runs from 2 March to 9 April 2026, and the application deadline is 9 February 2026. Learn more and [apply now](#) for this competitive opportunity to help shape AI policy and innovation in Africa.



Design Boldly. Lead Change.

# RETHINKING CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LASTING GROWTH

Capacity building has perhaps become the “multivitamin” of the development world. You take one training, attend one workshop, collect one certificate, and suddenly you are expected to operate like a brand-new institution. If only it worked that way. The truth is far more grounded: organizations grow the same way people do, slowly, steadily, and with a lot of practice and patience. This year, as we reflect on our work and the organizations we walked beside in 2025, we found ourselves returning to a few fundamental questions. Why do we really do capacity building? Are we challenging the old way it has always been done? And if capacity building is meant to create growth and impact, whose growth and whose impact are we truly focusing on?

For us, the answer begins with a simple belief: strong organizations create strong communities. When teams have clarity, structure, and confidence, communities receive better services, decisions improve, and programs become more grounded in reality. That is why we do this work. However, we have learned that capacity building is not an event or a single touchpoint. It is a journey. It is a slow unfolding of identity, values, systems, and ways of working that allow organizations to serve with intention and dignity. In that sense, it has very little to do with the training room and everything to do with what happens when the training ends.

Part of our reflection of last year involved challenging the traditional script. Capacity building has, for a long time, focused on individuals. You train a person and hope the organization benefits. However, people change jobs, roles evolve, and teams shift. The wisdom gathered in one individual does not automatically transform the institution around them. Therefore, we began to ask ourselves what capacity building would look like, if it were designed to strengthen the institution itself, not just the people in it.

# RETHINKING CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LASTING GROWTH

That question led us to change how we work. Instead of relying on isolated sessions, we supported partners to build systems that survive staff turnover, document processes so institutional memory does not live in one person's mind, strengthen communication patterns that help teams think together rather than struggle alone, and adopt tools and routines that make work easier, not heavier.

This shift has made our work feel more honest and grounded in the realities organizations face every day. Therefore, does capacity building really work? Yes, when it is practical, continuous, and connected to real challenges. It works, when leadership is engaged and when teams see the value not as an external requirement but as something that improves their daily experience. It works, when the systems introduced are simple enough to adopt and strong enough to last. It works, when it focuses on the longevity of the institution rather than the short-term growth of one employee.

The question that has shaped us the most, however, is this: if capacity building is about growth and impact, whose growth are we measuring?

At Lusoma, we have come to believe that capacity building is not support, it is stewardship. It is not just about strengthening staff; it is about strengthening the communities that staff serve. True growth is felt in better services reaching people who need them, in programs that respond more accurately to lived realities, in organizations that make decisions rooted in evidence and experience, and in partners and funders who engage with more trust, clarity, and accountability. That is the kind of growth that matters to us.

# RETHINKING CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LASTING GROWTH

As we get our plans for the year ready, we remain committed to helping organizations build foundations that last, foundations that hold steady through leadership transitions, funding cycles, and sector pressures. We have witnessed that, when institutions are grounded, aligned, and intentional, the communities around them feel the impact long before the report is written.





# UPCOMING EVENTS

25

FEB

International Conference on Sustainable Globalization

Nairobi, Kenya

1 - 3

MARCH

IEDC's Leadership Summit  
Navigating the Now, Shaping the Next:  
Leadership that Evolves

Washington, D.C, USA

9 - 20

MARCH

Commission on the Status of Women  
Human Rights

UNHQ New York, USA

22 - 24

APRIL

The Global NGO Stakeholders Summit  
2026

Nairobi, Kenya

# OUR PARTNERSHIPS IN MOTION: WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER RESULTS

As a new year begins, partnerships often enter a familiar phase of recalibration. Goals are revisited, expectations are clarified, and ways of working are tested again in practice. Across many partnerships, Lusoma included, one familiar tension often resurfaces: the space between evidence-based recommendations and initial expectations. This is not a flaw in collaboration; it is a natural moment of friction where diverse interests, lived experiences, and unconscious biases meet. In these early stages, adoption can feel slow, not because the ideas lack merit, but because people are still wrestling with what the change might mean for their roles, priorities, and identity.

Over time, as results begin to take shape and evidence becomes tangible, we see something shift. Dialogue deepens. Pushback softens. Shared understanding grows. Through joint reflection, we have learned to integrate partner expertise with research-driven information, creating solutions that honour both wisdom and data.

One of the more complex lessons has been navigating pushback culture, that instinctive hesitation to fully engage with new ways of working. It often hides behind practical concerns but is anchored in human realities: fear of losing influence, competing priorities, unspoken assumptions, or simply the comfort of the familiar. Recognizing this has taught us the value of patience, timing, and true co-creation.

# OUR PARTNERSHIPS IN MOTION: WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER RESULTS

We are learning that difficult conversations are not signs of broken partnerships but invitations to clarity. Differences of opinion are rarely due to misunderstanding; more often, they reveal deeper misalignments in interests, incentives, or expectations. When surfaced with empathy and transparency, these moments become opportunities for alignment rather than points of rupture.

The lessons are not always easy, especially when they intersect with pressure to deliver results. Yet, every collaboration has affirmed one truth: what matters is not the absence of challenge, but our collective ability to transform these moments into shared learning, trust-building, and better outcomes. Our partnerships remain in motion, growing, stretching, and deepening.



# #LUSOMACHALLENGE

As we step into 2026, we invite you to pause... not to linger in the past, but to notice what it has already taught you. Think about the moments where growth was possible, where challenges nudged you to think differently, and where your choices shaped not just your work, but the teams and communities around you.

This year, Lusoma is raising the bar... and we are inviting you to do the same. Our challenge is simple: commit to a practice of reflection and accountability in your work, decisions, and interactions. Notice how your personal growth, clarity, and intentionality ripple outward; strengthening teams, shaping partnerships, and improving impact in your communities (and maybe even making meetings slightly less chaotic).

We are not challenging imperfection. Rather, we are asking for presence: for curiosity, honesty with yourself, and the courage to adjust course when the lessons of the moment invite it. Let reflection guide your actions, let accountability shape your choices, and let the bar you raise set a standard for meaningful, lasting change.

As you carry this challenge into 2026, may it inspire you to show up with purpose, patience, and intentionality, and to celebrate the quiet wins (and the occasional “oops” moments) along the way. The work of growth is collective, and every step you take strengthens the journey of those around you.

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