ANNUAL REPORT
2024-2025

OPEN CITIES LAB

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Although this report covers March 2024 - February 2025, we share it with you in August 2025; a moment that feels both like a continuation and a new chapter for Open Cities Lab. Much has changed in recent months, including shifts in our leadership structure, but the reflections and milestones shared here capture a pivotal year in our journey toward deeper, more scalable impact.

FOREWORD FROM THE CEO

As we approach our 10-year anniversary, I am struck by how far Open Cities Lab (OCL) has come and more importantly, how deeply we remain committed to our founding purpose: build better African cities with people at the centre, using open data, design thinking and collaborative partnerships to make public services fairer, faster and future-ready. This past year has been one of intentional growth, deep reflection and strategic alignment as we lay the foundation for scaling our work while staying true to our mission.

One of the most significant milestones of the year has been our Chief Strategy Officer, Richard Gevers, presenting at the **United Nation's OPSOS for Good symposium in New York**. He spoke about the importance of having the right people in the room and the value of open source curation to digital transformation in cities, issues that have long been at the core of our mission. It was an incredible opportunity and speaks to the ways in which our dogged pursuit of open data and digital justice remain as relevant as ever. As an organisation this year also saw us develop our 2030 Scale Strategy, a rigorous, analytical framework that charts our path to reaching 100 cities by the end of the decade. This strategy marks a decisive shift from bespoke pilots to a portfolio of scalable, user-centred tools, growing wider and deeper so cities do not just adopt technology, they transform systems for good. In this way, scaling for us is not just about expanding our footprint but it's about scaling *impact*. That's why we've defined success around four core indicators: strengthening local government, enabling national digital infrastructure, empowering residents and equipping civic actors. This integrated approach seeks to support our wide range of stakeholders to use data as a lever for long-term change.

As part of this evolution, we've taken critical steps to align our internal operations with our future ambitions. Inspired by dialogue at Luminate's 2024 convening, we implemented a co-leadership model that brings together the strengths of two executive roles: the CEO, focused on delivery and operational efficiency, and the Chief Strategy Officer, focused on partnerships and long-term vision. This has brought fresh dynamism to our leadership and clearer accountability across the organisation.

We also undertook a strategic recruitment drive to strengthen our team, bringing in new talent across key areas. One of the most fulfilling developments this year has been the realisation of a long-held dream: the launch of our graduate programme. In December 2024, we welcomed our inaugural cohort - Nondumiso Sihlangu (Data), Keotshepile Maje (Development), and Kaylin Harrison (Product Management) - each bringing a strong sense of purpose and curiosity about the role of data and technology in building just, inclusive cities.

None of this would be possible without the unwavering support of our partners, funders, collaborators and the city officials, journalists, and residents who continue to inspire our work. Thank you for believing in our mission and for being part of this journey with us.

With gratitude and determination,

Megan Wadge
Chief Executive Officer
Open Cities Lab

OUR VISION

A city where every resident regardless of income, identity, or location can access the essential services they need with dignity and ease. In this vibrant thriving urban space, digital and physical infrastructure at both local and national levels work together to deliver equitable, efficient, and human-centred services that improve everyday life and empower African communities to participate fully in shaping their future.

We believe better cities start with people.

We believe that service design exists to solve the disconnect between how government services are designed and how people actually experience them. It ensures public services are effective, inclusive, and human-centred so that they deliver real value, build trust, and work for everyone.

We believe that by opening data, co-designing tools and building local capacity, we can improve evidence-informed decision-making and ultimately support more effective service design and delivery in urban spaces.

We operate through four mutually reinforcing impact pillars that equip city officials with data skills, residents with participatory tools, storytellers with open datasets and national ministries with shared digital infrastructure. Rooted in collaboration, we meet partners where they are - listening first, co-designing second - which leaves them with the skills and systems to keep improving long after a project ends. This integrated approach seeks to build public services that are equitable, responsive, and ready for the challenges of tomorrow.

OUR MISSION:
Designing Solutions for Complex Urban Realities

At the heart of our work is the challenge that public services don't reach people as they should, especially those that need them most. Too many residents in African cities, especially those marginalised by income, identity, or geography, struggle to access the services they need with dignity and ease. This is largely due to poor service design, weak delivery systems, and underdeveloped digital and data infrastructure, which leave governments without the data, capacity, or strategies required to respond effectively to community needs. At the same time, residents, journalists, and civil society actors lack the tools, data, and platforms to engage meaningfully, hold power to account, or shape decisions that affect their lives. The result is a cycle of inefficient service delivery, eroded trust, low civic participation and weakened accountability across the public sphere.

Problem Statements:

1 Cities often manage data in a fragmented and reactive way, making it difficult to plan effectively or deliver quality services. Without the right systems, standards, and skills, their digital and data efforts remain disconnected from real policy and service delivery needs.

2 National governments are expected to deliver inclusive, efficient public services but often lack the infrastructure and capacity to do so. Heavy reliance on foreign-built systems and low digital readiness make it difficult to build sustainable, context-appropriate solutions.

3 Many residents in African cities struggle to access the services they need due to poor service design and weak connections to government. Limited opportunities to participate, lack of information, and broken communication channels erode trust and reduce accountability.

4 Civic actors like journalists, NGOs, and researchers lack the data, tools, and support to hold government to account or engage the public effectively. Without strong networks, resources, or capacity, they are unable to drive transparency or push for better governance.

IMPACT SNAPSHOT: 2024/25 in Numbers

13

Tools Developed
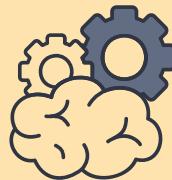
23

Capacity-building resources developed
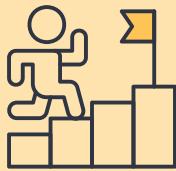
37

Training and support sessions held

12

Conferences attended

18 organisational partnerships

5 data strategies and policies produced

19 learning, sharing, & collaborative events hosted

61 data stories supported

KEY WINS

01 | We built capacity within city governments to access, share and use data more effectively in service design and delivery

Co-created a city-wide data strategy in eThekwini to facilitate their effective use of data in decision making

Many cities' approach to data is reactive and ad-hoc, limiting their ability to effectively respond to the changing needs of residents and public officials. In eThekwini, this challenge has been compounded by governance instability and limited coordination around data use, making it difficult to plan proactively or respond to residents' needs in a consistent way. Without clear standards, inclusive practices, or the right internal capacity, data remains underused, trapped in silos and disconnected from decision-making. To overcome this, we embarked on a process of co-developing a citywide data strategy. The aim of this strategy is to help eThekwini make decisions about how to unlock value of data, and ensure the right capabilities are in place, so it can deliver its policy objectives and meet the needs of residents. This strategy acts as a guide for all levels of leadership, management and operations in the municipal government, as well as external partners, residents, and organisations. Despite broader institutional constraints, the team produced a strong foundation: a comprehensive draft strategy, roadmap, and governance guidelines - developed collaboratively through writing sessions and workshops with city officials. This process also helped strengthen internal understanding of digital governance and build momentum for future implementation. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) was intentionally embedded throughout the strategy, ensuring future data practices are inclusive, protective, and locally relevant. While the work concluded earlier than planned, it leaves the city better positioned to advance its data maturity when the timing is right.

Co-developed and helped to publicly launch a data strategy with City of Cape Town

Many cities struggle to use data effectively because systems are fragmented, roles and responsibilities are unclear and there's no shared strategy to guide how data should be collected, managed or used. This makes it difficult to respond to residents' needs, plan ahead, or deliver services efficiently. In Cape Town, Open Cities Lab supported the City in tackling these challenges by helping to establish strong governance foundations for data. This included advising on the appointment of a Chief Data Officer, restructuring the City's Data Science team and helping launch Cape Town's official data strategy in 2024. Throughout the year, OCL provided ongoing strategic support, advising on policies, shaping key governance structures and helping to define the roles of data working groups. These efforts are helping to turn Cape Town's data strategy from a document into action, laying the groundwork for a more coordinated and impactful use of data across the city. By co-developing city-specific data and digital governance strategies, standards and frameworks, we empower decision-makers with the guidance they need to make decisions effectively.

Started to connect cities to each other to scale solutions and learnings

From our ten years of working with city departments, we've seen that fragmented knowledge, isolated practices and the slow transfer of innovation across teams, departments or sectors are persistent problems for those working in urban spaces regardless of the city or country they live in. In response, we launched **MijiBora**, which means "Better Cities" in Swahili, as a platform where city leaders, grassroots innovators, tech experts, policy shapers and investors come together to co-create and amplify urban solutions. Through the platform, cities can access a growing network of peers, user-friendly digital tools and expert support to build strong data strategies and improve service delivery tailored to their own contexts. While open to any cities, initial efforts have focused on onboarding and supporting six municipalities in Kwa-Zulu Natal. A successful launch event and practical workshops laid the foundation for locally tailored data strategies, with positive feedback from 78% of participants and a call for municipalities to submit real-world use case proposals. These efforts have sparked early momentum for data journeys across the region, setting the stage for targeted support and deeper institutional change moving forward. By connecting ideas, people, and resources, MijiBora is laying the foundation for more inclusive, resilient, and data-driven African cities.

Co-created a tool to improve substation maintenance and reduce power outages in Cape Town

The Electricity Asset Management team in Cape Town faced two key challenges: they did not have enough staff or resources to inspect and maintain the city's many electrical substations, and they were not making full use of the data they had to spot which stations needed attention most. As a result, residents, especially those unable to report problems, often experienced poorer service and longer power outages. This is particularly significant given the national context of crumbling South African infrastructure that affects service delivery and that investing in infrastructure is a key mayoral priority. OCL co-designed an interactive tool, now known internally as the Spatial Data Analytical Tool, that helps the EAM unit leverage existing data to better inspect, maintain and replace electrical infrastructure. This has direct implications for improving residents' access to better quality electricity both in terms of fewer and shorter outages. A key part of the work was ensuring that the team could factor in which communities are more vulnerable or have been underserved in the past, so they could prioritise those areas. With the tool being embedded in the department and supporting everyday decisions, this work has not only helped the City make more informed strategic decisions and work more efficiently, but also deliver fairer, more inclusive services to residents.

Co-developed data tools to improve water fault reporting in Cape Town

In Cape Town, water-related issues can often take a long time for the city to fix because the system relies on residents to report faults. When leaks go unnoticed or are not reported, water is wasted, system pressure is lowered and this can ultimately lead to poor service delivery. In order to solve these challenges, OCL worked closely with the city's Water and Sanitation team to create a straightforward but effective dashboard that helps reconcile discrepancies between two different databases enabling teams to identify and correct duplicate or missing assets. This has already made it easier for the Water and Sanitation teams to find and fix errors thereby improving how they work. We also started co-building tools that use pressure and flow data to spot faults in the water system early, before residents even report them. This could help reduce water loss and improve services in the long term, especially in areas that have been previously underserved. By collaboratively developing these types of data tools, we're improving the efficiency and value of data pipelines to ultimately improve residents' access to better water-related services.

Made Council decisions more transparent and actionable in eThekwini

In many South African cities, council meeting minutes, which contain key decisions affecting residents, are difficult to work with. These documents are often over 100 pages long, locked in PDF format and managed through a manual, paper-based process. This makes it hard for departments to follow up on actions, for councillors to track progress, and for residents to engage with decisions that impact their lives. The lack of coordination and accessibility has long undermined accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery.

To address this, Open Cities Lab worked with eThekwini Municipality's Council Secretariat and Information Management Unit to design and implement a user-friendly digital tool using the city's existing Microsoft SharePoint system. The tool streamlines how council resolutions are recorded, distributed and tracked, allowing departments to update and monitor actions in real time. Understanding that this is a persistent problem across many cities, this system offers a replicable model for enhancing municipal governance across the country. In the long term, this tool not only improves internal efficiency but also lays the foundation for more accountability within government once decisions are made which could have far-reaching implications for reducing corruption, mismanagement and improving local service delivery.

Unlocked City data for better decisions in Cape Town

In many South African cities, including Cape Town, valuable datasets exist, but they're often siloed, difficult to access, or not shared in usable formats. This limits the ability of city officials, researchers and the public to use data for evidence-based decision-making, policy and planning. This has tangible impacts on accountability and service design. In Cape Town, our work focused on addressing this gap. We supported the development of a prototype **Open Data Portal (ODP)** to make city data more open, user-friendly and useful for public and internal stakeholders. The platform was designed with a user-centred approach and piloted with the City's Economic Analysis and Organisational Research branches in the Policy and Strategy Department.

A key breakthrough was the strong support from senior city leadership, including the Mayor and City Manager, which helped embed the project within the City's broader data strategy. In a major step toward institutionalising the work, the Chief Data Officer adopted the ODP into his portfolio, paving the way for wider departmental adoption and long-term sustainability. This work opens up access to key datasets like never before and starts to bridge the gap in how data can be leveraged for decision-making by both officials and residents.

Supported evidence-based planning and local decision-making through simulation and spatial data

Many South African municipalities struggle to plan effectively for service delivery due to fragmented data, limited community engagement and a lack of tools to test different scenarios before making decisions. The Service Delivery Simulator (SDS) was developed to address this gap. SDS is a web-based tool that helps local governments use data more effectively in planning. It brings together demographic, socio-economic and infrastructure data from multiple sources and allows officials and community members to simulate where new services or infrastructure should be placed. This makes it easier to plan based on real needs and local input. While the tool is still in its early stages, it has been piloted with the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) and three municipalities through the National Strategic Hub. Once complete, it has the potential to support smarter service delivery, better resource allocation and more meaningful community participation. Equally, many municipalities have very low data maturities so this aligns with the national objective to be more digitally enhanced towards supporting better infrastructure delivery.

02

We started building capacity within national government to access, share and use data more effectively in service design and delivery

Co-designed MzansiXchange, a trusted, integrated data ecosystem across national government

In South Africa, inadequate digital infrastructure, low technical capacity and siloed data systems typify some of the constraints that national government entities face in delivering inclusive public services. This means that important data is often inaccessible between departments and the process of sharing such data is cumbersome, resource-intensive and exceedingly slow and often loses sight of the importance of resident-centred systems. In order to overcome these structural challenges, we have embarked on a national initiative, "MzansiXchange" to enable secure, evidence-based data sharing across national government and other entities. This project (previously known as the South African Integrated Data Lake) is led by **National Treasury** and **Stats SA** and supported by the **World Bank**. The goals of the inception phase - running over 10 months until the end of April 2025 - were for Open Cities Lab

to design the technical architecture of the system and the supporting legal and governance framework that meets this vision. By developing this best practice foundation, we're steering the roadmap in South Africa for ensuring that a robust, secure data exchange system is developed without centralising sensitive citizen data. In the upcoming pilot phase (kicking off as soon as September 2025), the roadmap will be implemented and tested in a few key use cases. Once developed, this trusted, integrated data ecosystem would play a central role in ensuring effective planning, policy, reporting, and service delivery for the public's benefit. Importantly, MzansiXchange also lays the foundation for future digital services and is a key pillar of South Africa's Digital Government Transformation Roadmap, with potential to expand to provinces, municipalities, and even across SADC countries in future.

03 | We empowered residents in African cities to fully participate in democratic processes by opening up access to data and information

Opened up electoral candidate data so that South African residents knew who they could vote for

In South Africa's 2024 National Elections, voters faced an overwhelming number of political parties and candidates including, for the first time, independent candidates. But the only official source of information was a set of lengthy, hard-to-navigate PDFs published by the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). This made it difficult for voters, especially first-timers and young people, to know who was running or what they stood for. To solve this, we launched our next iteration of

MyCandidate South Africa: a user-friendly data tool that made candidate and party information accessible and easy to understand. Complemented by a robust voter education campaign disseminated through the platform, national TV, radio and print media, MyCandidate demystified the newly introduced three-ballot system, reaching a broad audience. Appearances included **Hectic Nine-9** which is a TV programme specifically tailored to youth with over 3 million viewers as well as SAfm radio station with over half a million listeners. With over 14000 users on the platform and voter education resources being accessed thousands of times, this initiative helped to empower thousands of South Africans to make informed choices at the polls.

04 | We equipped civic actors with the data, tools and support to hold power to account

Co-created a dataset and analysis tool to understand the state of healthcare infrastructure in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, government agencies have not comprehensively surveyed the state of healthcare infrastructure in years leaving decision-makers, journalists and civil society without the data needed to assess or improve service delivery. This lack of up-to-date, reliable information makes it nearly impossible to allocate resources effectively or hold institutions accountable. It has had **catastrophic consequences for residents**, particularly in underserved rural areas, who cannot access the healthcare services they need. In response, we launched the **Frontline Investigative Programme** with our local partner, **Orodata Science**. This initiative leveraged mobile tools and trained local citizens including community journalists to collect vital information on healthcare capacity, infrastructure and workforce from over 350 Primary Health Centres (PHCs) across the country. The data was used to create **CheckMyPHC**, a publicly accessible tool launched in June 2024 that offers an unprecedented view of Nigeria's primary healthcare landscape.

The importance of this data was underscored by the Kwara State Commissioner of Health, who noted its value in improving existing databases and guiding resource decisions,

> "It's a good thing Kwara state is mapped for the next phase of the PHC project, we look forward to the data from the project as a form of control to check and update existing databases for PHC as well as make informed decisions for the administration of resources."

Alongside the tool, we trained 18 journalists to turn data into powerful stories, equipping them to highlight systemic issues and advocate for better healthcare policies. Many of these have sparked national conversations and policy attention. One of them, Shereefdeen Ahmad, won the **Alfred Opubor Next-Gen Award** for his powerful **2-part series on neglected clinics in Sokoto**. This work marks a groundbreaking step towards demanding accountability as communities, media and officials now have a shared evidence base to advocate for and drive improvements in frontline healthcare.

Co-created a dataset and analysis tool to drive policy change around femicide in Kenya.

Tackling gender-based violence and femicide starts with understanding the scale of the problem. Until 2024, there was no official data in Kenya on how many women were killed or the circumstances around their deaths. Government data was limited and hard to access. Femicide cases weren't recorded separately from other homicides, making it impossible to know how serious the issue was.

With no detailed data available from authorities, **Odipo Dev**, in partnership with the Open Cities Lab and **Africa Uncensored** through **Africa Data Hub**, turned to news reports to uncover and document the true scale of femicide in Kenya as reflected through news media. The result was the **Silencing Women / Femicide Database**, the first-ever comprehensive record of femicide cases in the country. By scraping and verifying data from reputable news sources, we helped our local partners build a resource that allowed journalists to expose patterns of gender-based violence, policymakers to push for reforms and human rights organisations to mobilise action. The database was cited over 127 times in the press and gained over 13,000 views across multiple platforms. The impact was tangible: international outlets such as **The New York Times** and **Al Jazeera** amplified the findings, and local protests saw demonstrators holding placards with our statistics. This unprecedented visibility contributed to policy discussions and justice interventions aimed at tackling femicide. In one instance, a Kenyan judge even cited our statistics in her **court judgements**. This was the first time the country had a clearer picture of just how widespread the issue is and offered vital evidence to inform action and raise public awareness. This speaks to the power of data-driven advocacy. Looking ahead, we are in the process of developing an AI tool to scale such projects by easing data collection and analysis to power more groundbreaking investigations that drive social change across Africa.

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Co-created a dataset and investigative story to spark national conversations around sanitation facilities in South Africa


In South Africa, many clinic toilets are in poor condition, often broken, unhygienic, or lacking basic supplies. To understand the scale of the issue and through the Africa Data Hub, our local partner **OpenUp** teamed up with Health-e News and trained three community journalists to investigate sanitation in primary health centres. They visited 31 clinics across the Free State, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal, and spoke to over 300 patients. The findings, published as **"Toilets of Despair"** on World Toilet Day 2024, revealed that many facilities were inaccessible, poorly maintained, and lacked essential sanitation items highlighting an overlooked but critical barrier to healthcare dignity.

Trained and mentored journalists to demystify and use data in their storytelling

Many journalists enter the profession to tell powerful human stories, not to work with spreadsheets. Data can often feel intimidating, overly technical or simply out of reach. Yet it holds immense potential to uncover hidden truths, expose injustice and add depth to reporting. That's why we supported our partner, OpenUp, to launch the Africa Data Hub Helpdesk. This initiative offers more than simple training to journalists: it offers mentorship, hands-on support and practical tools to help them build confidence in using data in their storytelling. This approach meets journalists where they are on the data skills spectrum. Whether it's breaking down complex datasets, guiding investigative angles or providing visualisations, the aim of this initiative is to demystify the process and make data feel less daunting. From one-on-one mentoring to collaborative story development, journalists are supported to transform data from a barrier into a powerful storytelling tool. This has far-reaching repercussions not only for building long-term capacity for these civic storytellers, but also for building public momentum and drawing the attention of policy-makers to critical social issues including mismanagement, corruption and poor service delivery. For example, the ADH Helpdesk played a pivotal role in the production of high-impact investigative pieces such as **"The ANC, the megachurch and the mystery of the R200-million money flows"**.

These types of stories typify how data access and capacity can move the needle in being able to pinpoint discrepancies, link different entities, demand accountability and shift public discourse.
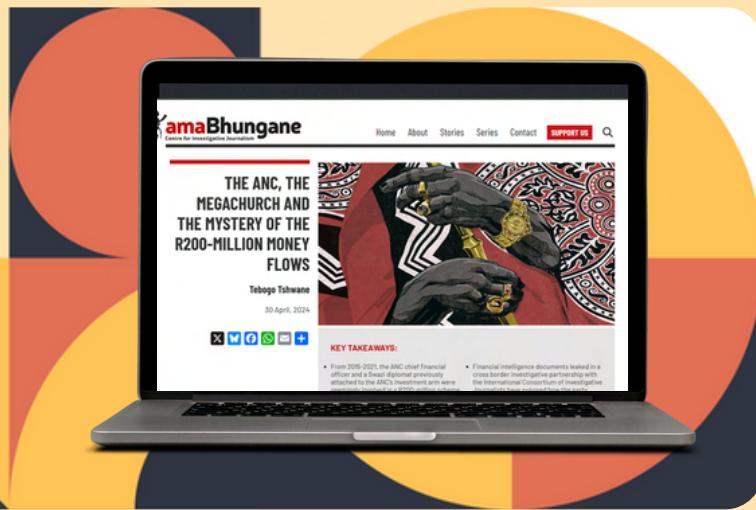
Co-created dashboards that allowed media watchdog partners to analyse media data in the lead up to South Africa's elections

In the lead up to elections, it's important to not only spotlight political parties and candidates but also analyse who controls the spotlight. Media coverage plays a powerful role in shaping public perception, yet there is often little visibility into how fairly and accurately different groups and issues are being reported. To address this in the lead up to the 2024 South African National Elections, we teamed up with **Media Monitoring Africa (MMA)** to enhance Dexter, a machine-learning tool we built that scans and analyses news content. From the data extracted, MMA created **several reports**.

analysing the performance of several South African newsrooms. We also co-created two interactive dashboards to make that data accessible to the public. These dashboards peeled back the curtain on the election coverage, revealing how much airtime different parties received, how gender was represented and which voices were amplified or ignored. By making this data public, we gave citizens and civil society the tools to call out bias and demand better from journalists. In an election season flooded with noise, this work helped put the spotlight back where it belongs on truth and accountability.
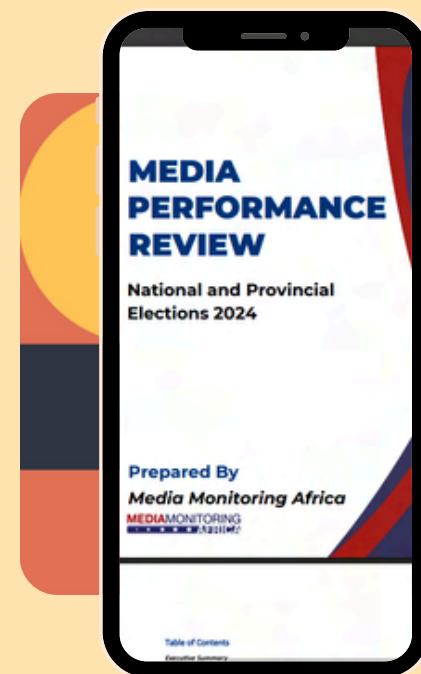
HOW WE'RE DOING IT: Operational Updates

Instituted a co-leadership model

Inspired by conversations at Luminate's 2024 convening, **OCL adopted a co-leadership model** where the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Strategy Officer (CSO) lead the organisation as equal partners, ensuring strategic and operational balance. This shift replaces the traditional single-CEO structure. The CEO (Megan Wadge) focuses on internal coordination, operational efficiency, and delivery, while the CSO (Richard Gevers) drives advocacy, partnerships and long-term strategy. This role has allowed for distinct yet complementary roles, harnessing the unique strengths and competencies of the two leaders.

Undertook a strategic recruitment drive

Aligning with our 2030 scale strategy, 2024/25 saw several new people join the team in key positions.

Benjine Gerber joined as a Senior UX/UI Designer (Rustenberg, March 2024)

Stephanie Kabi joined as a Senior UX/UI Design Contractor (Nairobi, March 2024)

Lerato Honde joined as our Communicators Coordinator (Lilongwe, June 2024)

Kyle Manganyi joined as a Senior Software Developer (Johannesburg, August 2024)

Tashlyn Moodley joined as our Administration Lead (Durban, August 2024)

Emily-Rose Steyn joined as a Product Manager (Johannesburg, August 2024)

Letlhogonolo Ranta joined as an Operations Coordinator (Pretoria, September 2024)

Implemented a graduate programme

Since our founding, Open Cities Lab has wanted to run a programme offering graduates hands-on experience, skill development and industry exposure to support the next generation of workers in this space. This year this vision came to life where after an extensive search and interview process, we welcomed three wonderful and highly engaged candidates who each have a deep interest in social impact and the role that data and technology can play in effecting change in urban environments. In December 2024, Nondumiso Sihlangu joined our data team, Keotshepile Maje joined our developer team and Kaylin Harrison joined our product management team. We're thrilled to have them on board!

Said goodbye to our CTO

In April 2024, our esteemed Chief Technology Officer and head of data science, Matthew Adendorff, emigrated with his family to the USA. As one of the founding members of Open Data Durban, his contributions have been instrumental in shaping the trajectory of our organisation. His innovative leadership played a pivotal role in the evolution of Open Cities Lab from start-up to its current growth phase, leaving an indelible mark on our journey thus far. He will continue to sit on the board of OCL as a key strategic advisor.

Implemented progressive policies to support our team

This year saw us build on the foundations laid in 2023/2024 where we introduced a range of new policies, and support systems that enabled us to elevate our organisation and enhance support for our team. Specifically we institutionalised our four-day workweek in September 2024 after a successful 6-month experiment. The policy seeks to deepen the concept that OCL employees are owners of their own timetables, priorities, productivity and deliverables. Currently, the whole team has the opportunity to take Fridays off if all self-identified outputs have been delivered. Feedback from the team has been unmistakable in their support:

Paul Figueira (he/him) Feb 19th, 2024 at 12:38 PM
Good day Team
1. CCT W&S notes consolidation, ADH sprint review, Design team ops - future planning
2. Structural planning chat with Matt, Tweaks to CCT W&S notes, Responsible tech flow
3. Nil
4. Presentish - a few nights in a row of bad sleep
5. Had my first real smartwork Friday last week, it was great 😍

🎉 2

1 reply

Aliasgher Feb 19th, 2024 at 12:59 PM
The smart work is a game changer. I am doing personal development like I haven't done before 🙈

🙌 1
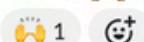
Likewise, our efforts to promote inclusive spaces by introducing menstrual leave to our team have been taken up eagerly. Our menstruating team members have the option to take a day off every month, no questions asked. In the next year, we look forward to finding new ways of living out our organisational values of inclusion and safety for the benefit of our team.

> "Menstrual leave has honestly been life-changing for me. That time of the month is really tough, and before this policy, I often had to just push through even when I was in excruciating pain and struggling to focus. It wasn't just about discomfort. It genuinely affected my ability to work and perform at the same level as my male colleagues. In the past, I had to use sick leave on the worst days, but having dedicated menstrual leave now means I can take care of myself when I really need to without feeling guilty. I truly appreciate OCL for introducing this. It has made such a difference."
>
> **Lerato Mosehle**

> "Menstrual leave has been such a valuable addition to our workplace. When I get my period, it hits me hard. I experience intense cramps and a significant drop in mood, making it really difficult to concentrate and be productive. Having the option to take a dedicated day off, without using sick leave, allows me to rest and recover so that I can return to work feeling better. I also really appreciate the openness around it at OCL. Being able to post about menstrual leave on our internal channel helps to normalise the reality of periods, creating a culture of acceptance rather than silence or stigma. It's great to be part of a workplace that acknowledges and supports its employees in such a thoughtful way."
>
> **Ella Alcock**

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

For the fiscal year ending February 2025, Open Cities Lab continued to strengthen its role as a trusted partner for transformative, data-driven change in African cities, securing R25.9 million in grant and project income. This funding reflects the confidence that our funders and partners have in our ability to deliver high-impact, scalable interventions that advance our mission.

From this income, R5.04 million was re-granted to our network of partners, ensuring that local expertise and on-the-ground knowledge remain central to our work. A further R21.94 million was invested directly into delivering our projects - from empowering residents with accessible electoral information, to enabling national-level digital infrastructure initiatives like MzansiXchange. These deliberate investments in delivery underscore our commitment to achieving tangible impact across our four impact pillars.

After accounting for project delivery costs, we reported a gross deficit of R1.1 million. This was driven primarily by our strategic decision to invest into product R&D, build new platforms, and accelerate delivery ahead of anticipated future funding cycles. Operating expenses of R6.7 million reflect the scaling of our team and systems to support this growth. Encouragingly, we generated R1.11 million in interest income, strengthening our capacity to fund mission-critical travel, engagement, and innovation.

The year closed with a net deficit of R6.69 million and year-end equity of R8.85 million (down from R15.54 million in 2023). While this represents a draw-down on reserves, it was a conscious investment in organisational capacity and programme delivery, positioning OCL for the ambitious trajectory set out in our 2030 Scale Strategy. Our balance sheet remains healthy, with strong equity levels and working capital to fund operations into the next financial year.

The audit for the fiscal year ending February 2025 began slightly behind schedule in June and is currently underway, with completion expected soon. This audit will provide a thorough examination of our financial practices, ensuring transparency and continued accountability to all stakeholders.

Looking forward, we are refining our costing models, strengthening financial sustainability measures, and diversifying income sources to reduce reliance on single-stream funding. These measures, coupled with the foundation laid in 2024/25, will allow us to convert our expanded operational capacity into greater efficiency, impact, and reach in the years ahead.

LOOKING FORWARD

In the year ahead, Open Cities Lab (OCL) will deepen its commitment to inclusive, data-driven governance through the launch of MyCouncillor, a platform designed to enhance councillor accountability and support citizen engagement beyond elections. Working with partners like Rivonia Circle, SALGA, PARI, and Turn.io, we will scale both MyCandidate and MyCouncillor to strengthen local democracy in South Africa. Our Africa Data Hub will continue to support journalists with data access, storytelling tools, and innovative content formats, while expanding its partnerships and training across the continent.

We will also build on the momentum of MijiBora, developing it into a central hub for city-focused resources, Communities of Practice, and technical support. As part of our growing work on Digital Public Infrastructure, we will advance MzansiXchange as a pilot for responsible, federated data exchange, integrating GESI principles and contributing to broader AfricaStack efforts. Alongside this, we will continue working closely with municipalities to co-create data strategies, embed tools in city systems, and share learnings across our network to amplify impact.

We look forward to tackling these complex challenges with our partners and city collaborators across Africa, continuing to build systems that are locally grounded, inclusive, and capable of driving lasting change.

PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

Partners

Funders