



Rift Valley Institute

MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK

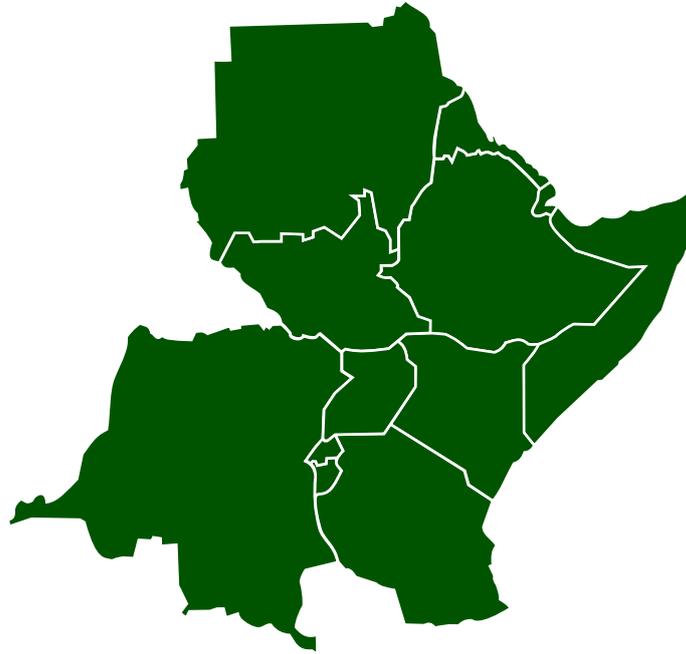
2025 Year in Review

Letter from the Executive Director

January 2026

OVERVIEW

Highlights from the Institute's work



In 2026 we will be **celebrating 25 years** since the founding of the Rift Valley Institute. This is a significant milestone. We congratulate John Ryle, Jok Madut Jok and Philip Winter for their inspired decision to found the Institute, and thank the staff, trustees, the Institute's Fellows and donors who have supported its work during the past 25 years.

Across the region, conflict, climate shocks and reduced international assistance have continued to shape the operating environment. RVI's work has focused on research, capacity building and convening public dialogue on critical issues affecting the region.

This report highlights key work of the Institute during the past year.

25
YEARS

ANNIVERSARY

Rift Valley Institute (2001–2026) — a milestone marking 25 years of supporting local knowledge production, education and public dialogue across eastern and central Africa.

2025 AT A GLANCE

44
Publications

17
Public events

24
Fellows engaged

Key dynamics shaping the region



For the peoples of the countries in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Sudans where RVI is operational, 2025 was another turbulent period. The tragic war in Sudan caused more deaths, displacement and destruction, with reports of mass atrocities at the fall of El Fasher. Violence also spread in South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia—all exacerbated by external interests. Poor rainfall in several countries underlined again the realities of climate change for communities across the region. Against this background, international assistance for the most vulnerable populations was dismantled.

RVI has sought to respond to these developments through its research and educational work and public convenings on critical issues affecting the region. This has included influential research for policy makers, providing public voice for mutual aid organizations and scholars from the region, and investing in the future through the training of early career researchers. It has involved collaborating with **24 different RVI fellows** and in partnership with **42 nongovernmental and government organizations**.

Work across countries and themes



RVI Executive director Mark Bradbury speaks at the launch of the Ethiopia Conflict Sensitivity Hub

ETHIOPIA

We expanded the work of the [Peace Research Facility](#), producing regular insights on national developments and in-depth studies, and supporting the Ethiopian Women Researchers Network. We also supported the establishment of the Ethiopia Conflict Sensitivity Hub and published its first report on the evolving aid landscape.

SOMALIA

We continued to support the [Somali Dialogue Platform](#) to enhance the political settlement through evidence-based dialogue on critical governance issues, creating opportunities for partners and citizens to shape policy and action.

SOUTH SUDAN

Our long-term support to the National Archives continued and we undertook new studies, including on fisheries. Despite a decline in funding, we remain committed to our work with South Sudanese researchers and partners.

SUDAN

We increased engagement in Sudan, collaborating with Sudanese scholars to organize conferences on higher education and peace. We undertook political economy research on markets and supported [work](#) with Sudanese mutual aid organizations.

RESEARCH

Publications and knowledge production



During 2025, the Institute maintained a prolific output of [publications](#) of original research, with 44 publications of different types on a range of relevant issues in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan and South Sudan.

This included a synthesis of six years of research on [the borderlands](#) of the Horn of Africa, East Africa, Sudan and South Sudan for the Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends programme (XCEPT).

We increased the number of publications by African researchers, including by early career researchers trained and mentored under the [Research Communities of Practice project](#), the [South Sudan Women's Research Network](#), and by the [Ethiopian Women Researchers Network](#).

IN NUMBERS

44

Publications

6

Years of XCEPT synthesis

3

ECR networks supported

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Courses and early career research training

2025 was a challenging year for the Institute’s education and training work due to tighter organizational budgets. Still, we were able to organize the fifteenth annual Horn of Africa course and continue our wider [education and training programme](#).

We continued to invest in early career researchers, collaborating on an academic writing workshop for PhD students with the British Institute in Eastern Africa, and with SOAS on a workshop for researchers from Tigray.



Participants and faculty during the 2025 Annual Horn of Africa Course.



Early career researchers at the SOAS writing workshop.



Ethiopian women researchers at a training workshop.



Convenings, forums and public access



We continued to promote public access to information and engagement with critical issues affecting the countries where we work through the Rift Valley Forum in Nairobi, the Peace Research Facility in Ethiopia, and on borderlands through the [XCEPT programme](#).

In 2025, we organized **17 events** under the auspices of the Rift Valley Forum, including a series on drylands and pastoralism in Africa, several events on Sudan and a popular event to mark the passing of the Kenyan author [Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o](#). We also organized conferences on cross-border research, and on social protection in Sudan.

GOVERNANCE

Board updates

In December, Margie Buchanan-Smith stepped down from the Board of Trustees after completing two terms and having served as Chair of the Board for the past two years. We are hugely grateful to her for her support and help to strengthen the governance of the Institute during her tenure.

We are also very grateful to Leben Moro, whose term on the board also ended in December but who has agreed to stay on until we elect a successor. Leben's support and advice for RVI's South Sudan programme have been extremely valuable.

We were pleased to welcome four new Board Members in 2025. **Paul Murphy** joined in June and was elected the Chair of the Board in December. Paul brings many years experience of working in Sudan, South Sudan, the Horn of Africa and East Africa. He is the former Executive Director of Saferworld. Also joining the Board in December were **Laura Hammond**, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange at SOAS University of London; **Munzoul Assal**, Senior Researcher, Chr Michelsen Institute, and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Bergen; and **Terrence Lyons**, Professor of Conflict Resolution at The Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University. All are experts on countries where RVI works and have previously taught on or led RVI's annual field courses.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Commitment to local knowledge

We anticipate the year ahead will continue to be turbulent and challenging for the peoples and communities of eastern and central Africa as they are buffeted by both global and regional dynamics. At the Rift Valley Institute, we remain committed to supporting local knowledge production focused on the social, political and economic changes in the countries where we work, and for the benefits of the people of those countries.

We appreciate your continued support in this endeavour.

Mark Bradbury
Executive Director





Rift Valley Institute

MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK



We are an independent, non-profit organization working in eastern and central Africa to bring local knowledge to bear on social, political and economic development.

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