



**PRESS RELEASE: EMBARGOED UNTIL 11:00AM BST ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2026**

## **THE EARTHSHOT PRIZE ANNOUNCES AIRQO AS A 2026 FINALIST**

- **Uganda's AirQo is recognised in the Clean Our Air Earthshot category for building African-designed air quality data infrastructure that helps cities and communities act on pollution.**
- **With more than 500 monitors installed across 16 African cities, AirQo gives over 30 million people access to real-time air quality information and supports governments to strengthen regulation, manage traffic and plan healthier cities.**
- **Five Winners announced at Awards Night in Mumbai on November 17, as the two-month countdown begins.**

**KAMPALA, Uganda, 18 September 2026:** AirQo is today revealed as a 2026 Finalist of The Earthshot Prize, the world's most prestigious environmental award, for closing Africa's air quality data gap with low-cost monitors, open data platforms and artificial intelligence designed to track pollution levels across African cities.

The Earthshot Prize, founded by Prince William in 2020, recognises solutions from different geographies, sectors and stages in their life cycle, dedicated to solving our planet's greatest environmental challenges. Now past the halfway point of the Earthshot decade, The Earthshot Prize in 2026 is celebrating leadership from all corners of the globe, as people turn environmental ambition into action at scale.

Nominated in the Clean Our Air Earthshot, AirQo is tackling one of Africa's most urgent yet least visible public health threats. In 2019, air pollution was the second-leading risk factor for death across the continent and contributed to an estimated 1.1 million deaths in a single year. Rapid urbanisation increases emissions from transport, industry and waste, yet many cities still lack reliable, locally relevant information showing where pollution is concentrated, when it spikes and whether measures to reduce it are working.

As a 2026 Finalist, The Earthshot Prize will work with AirQo to accelerate its expansion across African cities, strengthen the investment case for clean-air infrastructure and connect the initiative with governments, funders, technology partners and urban leaders. Support will also help AirQo grow its open-source data platform, build local technical capacity and make clean air a more visible public and political priority.

**Prince William, President and Founder of The Earthshot Prize, said:** *"Every year, our Finalists give me renewed optimism. They show us that, even as the environmental challenges remain urgent, extraordinary people around the world are already proving that progress is possible. Seeing solutions work gives us all confidence to act. When they succeed, they inspire others and accelerate change. I'm proud to welcome these 15 Finalists to the Earthshot Prize community and look forward to celebrating their stories in Mumbai this November."*

Founded at Makerere University in 2015, AirQo set out to answer an important question of how to protect people in cities from pollution they cannot see. After moving from rural Uganda to Kampala, founder Prof. Engineer Bainomugisha saw the effects of worsening urban air quality



but found that the local data needed to understand the problem was largely missing. Conventional monitoring stations were too expensive and difficult to maintain at the density African cities required, so the AirQo team began designing an alternative locally.

AirQo's monitors are built for African operating conditions, including dust, power interruptions and limited internet connectivity. Fixed monitors are complemented by mobile devices, mounted on, motorcycle taxis, locally known as boda bodas, to map pollution at street-level. Data from the network is shared through open data platforms, dashboards, mobile tools and APIs. AI and machine-learning models help calibrate sensors, check data-quality, forecast pollution, identify hotspots and guide where new monitors are most needed.

AirQo's affordable monitors complement the traditional reference-grade monitoring stations used by governments. AirQo brings the data together and helps cities understand what it means, so they can see where pollution is worst and decide where action is most needed. The information also helps researchers and communities understand local air quality so as to minimise exposure and protect health. Public tools show people when pollution levels are high, while city authorities can use the data to improve traffic management, waste services, public health measures and urban planning.

**Prof. Engineer Bainomugisha, Founder and Lead of AirQo and Professor of Computer Science at Makerere University, said:** *"Air pollution has remained invisible across too many African cities because the data needed to understand it has been scarce. AirQo was built in Africa for the realities of African cities, bringing together locally designed monitors, open data and artificial intelligence so that evidence can move from the street into public decisions. Being named an Earthshot Prize Finalist will help us scale this infrastructure, equip more African technologists and city leaders, and make reliable air quality data a public good. As a non-profit, the funding and partnerships this recognition unlocks are vital to advancing our vision of clean air for everyone."*

AirQo now operates more than 500 air quality monitors across over 16 cities. Its work spans nine African countries, including Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon, Zambia, Mozambique and South Africa, making real-time air quality information available to communities with a combined population of more than 30 million. Its evidence and technical expertise supported the development of Uganda's first national air quality regulations and has informed city-level traffic-management measures in Kampala, Uganda. Across its work, AirQo supports governments to strengthen regulation, identify pollution hotspots and plan cleaner, healthier cities without claiming that monitoring alone reduces emissions.

AirQo is helping the world reach a positive tipping point - a threshold in a system beyond which change becomes self-propelling. AirQo is showing the path to a global tipping point where widespread, publicly visible air-quality monitoring makes pollution impossible to ignore. AirQo's work is especially significant given that 500 major cities need to have proper air-quality monitoring in place by 2030, giving governments and communities the information they need to take action on pollution to advance this tipping point.

AirQo's next phase includes:



- **City expansion:** Reach 10 additional African cities with monitoring networks, growing from 16 cities today toward more than 50 by 2030.
- **Open infrastructure:** Launch an open-source air quality platform with a conversational AI interface, enabling city leaders to ask practical questions about pollution exposure and possible responses.
- **African technical capacity:** Expand training for the people who will build and maintain clean-air systems. AirQo has already delivered two DevCon cohorts at Makerere University, reaching more than 50 students through software and hardware tracks covering sensor assembly, diagnostics, maintenance and repair.
- **Shared action:** Continue building the Africa Clean Air Network, a community of practice that brings together 30 cities to exchange knowledge and connect policy, science and finance.

AirQo has secured US\$6 million in support to date from partners including Google.org, the World Bank and the Clean Air Fund, alongside support from the U.S. Department of State, Arm, Enable and other institutions. Earthshot Prize support would help AirQo diversify and scale funding, build partnerships with city governments and development institutions, and translate air quality evidence into sustained public investment across health, transport, urban development and energy.

The initiative is also investing in the next generation of African clean-air technology. Its Makerere University DevCon cohorts have given students practical experience using real air quality data and devices, creating a growing pool of software and hardware specialists able to develop, repair and sustain the systems their cities need.

This year's 15 Finalists were selected from The Earthshot Prize's database of nearly 7,000 nominations across 169 countries, supported by a global network of over 363 nominators, and an Expert Advisory Panel of more than 150 specialists, alongside assessment and research by The Earthshot Prize's selection team and partners.

They join a community of 75 Finalists supported since 2020, whose work has collectively avoided or captured more than 18 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e, protected or restored 58 million hectares of land and 85 million hectares of ocean and coastline, removed or avoided 465,000 tonnes of waste, saved 21 million tonnes of water and improved air quality in regions home to 600 million people.

Aligned with the five Earthshots: Protect and Restore Nature, Clean Our Air, Revive Our Oceans, Build a Waste-Free World and Fix Our Climate - the Finalists will be considered by Prince William and fellow members of The Earthshot Prize Council, with five Winners announced at the 2026 Awards Night in Mumbai, India.

The Prize Council includes Prince William; Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah; Cate Blanchett; Indra Nooyi; José Andrés; Christiana Figueres; Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim; Wanjira Mathai; Nemonte Nenquimo; Gisele Bündchen; Luisa Neubauer; Naoko Yamazaki; Ernest Gibson; and Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

To find out more about this year's Finalists, visit: <https://earthshotprize.org/>

**ENDS**



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## **Notes to Editors**

<sup>1</sup> The Earthshot Prize has collaborated with The University of Exeter's Green Futures Solutions team to create a report [INSERT FINAL TITLE AND LINK] which advances the application of Professor Tim Lenton's foundational science of positive tipping point science through its first systematic use across all five Earthshots.

## **About The Earthshot Prize:**

For more information about The Earthshot Prize, visit: [www.earthshotprize.org](http://www.earthshotprize.org)

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Founded by Prince William and incubated in The Royal Foundation in 2020 for a year before becoming an independent organisation, The Earthshot Prize is the world's most prestigious environmental award designed to identify, back and celebrate groundbreaking leadership in environmental action. Inspired by President John F. Kennedy's Moonshot, which united millions of people around the goal of reaching the moon, The Earthshot Prize is designed to mobilise a decade of action for the planet. The five challenges are: Protect and Restore Nature; Clean Our Air; Revive Our Oceans; Build a Waste-Free World; and Fix Our Climate.

The Earthshot Prize aims to turn the current pessimism surrounding environmental issues into optimism by championing inspiring leadership and helping to scale incredible cutting-edge solutions. It will discover 50 Winners over 10 years with the power to repair the planet. More than an award, The Earthshot Prize works in partnership with a Global Alliance of Partners to support the scaling of the solutions discovered and selected each year.

The Global Alliance Founding Partners are a group of leading global organisations and philanthropists, which act as strategic funding partners to the Prize, including Aga Khan Development Network, AL Philanthropies, Allen Family Philanthropies, Bezos Earth Fund, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Breakthrough Energy Foundation, Builders Vision, Coleman Family Ventures, DP World, Elaine and Eduardo Saverin Foundation, Eleven Eleven Foundation, Giving Grousbeck Fazzalari, Holch Povlsen Foundation, Rob Walton Foundation, Sandy and Paul Edgerley, Standard Chartered Bank, Stelios Philanthropic Foundation, Temasek Trust, and Uber.



Global Alliance Partners are non-profit environment and sustainable development organisations that bring expertise, global reach and serve as nominating organisations each year. For a full list of our Global Alliance Partners, visit: <https://earthshotprize.org/people-partners/global-alliance/>

Global Alliance Members are some of the world's largest and most influential companies and brands that will support The Earthshot Prize, implement ambitious changes within their businesses and accelerate the advancement of the solutions of The Earthshot Prize Finalists and Winners. They are Arup, Bloomberg L.P., British Airways, Deloitte, Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer, Hitachi, Ingka Group (IKEA), Microsoft, The Multichoice Group, Natura &Co, Safaricom, Salesforce, Unilever, Vodacom Group, and Walmart.

### **About AirQo**

AirQo is an African-led clean-air technology initiative founded at Makerere University in Uganda in 2015. It develops low-cost air quality monitors designed for African conditions and combines them with open data platforms, digital tools and contextualised AI models to provide accessible, reliable and actionable air quality information. AirQo works with governments, researchers and communities across African cities to support air quality forecasting, public awareness, policy development and healthier urban planning. For more information, visit [www.airqo.africa](http://www.airqo.africa).