KIOS

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Photo: KIOS

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Finding Hope Amidst Changing Times

As the pace of change over the past year has increased, organisations have focused on crisis management: ensuring safety and keeping operations running. Despite growing needs, increased funding is not to be expected. A general “everyone-for-themselves” mindset is gaining ground in politics, pushing human rights, solidarity, and mutual support further to the margins.

Human rights work must now move beyond crisis thinking and begin to strengthen the core foundations of democracy: freedom of expression and assembly, equality, and free and fair elections. We may disagree on issues and their priorities, but the ability to express one’s views safely and to bring about change peacefully are the fundamentals on which the future must be built.

As an intermediary funding foundation, KIOS is facing these changing pressures directly. Strict monitoring requirements, combined with reduced support for administration, risk diverting resources away from human rights work itself. When passed on to the small organisations we support, more time and funding are spent on reporting rather than action. Finding a balance that ensures accountability while safeguarding meaningful work is more important than ever.

Despite the changing times, there is also hope: the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ new funding decision, which secured KIOS and other Finnish NGO’s operations for the coming years was an important prerequisite. Willingness among organisations to collaborate and openly share experiences has also increased. And, at the time of writing this, changes in leadership achieved through democratic processes in Nepal and Hungary are a new possibility to strengthen the work of local human rights defenders.

In 2025 KIOS developed the new Disability Fund, which will be active this year. Through the Fund, our grantees receive support to better include people with disabilities in their planning, decision making, and activities. Practical measures—such as accessible communication and inclusive participation practices—are essential for ensuring that human rights work truly reaches everyone.

My sincere thanks to all our grantees and beneficiaries, who have been doing amazing work defending human rights despite harsh conditions!

Photo: KIOS

“Let us encourage and support each other, and remember that even as we do serious work, we should always find moments of joy whenever we can.

Kim Remitz
Executive Director, KIOS

Photo: KIOS

What Is KIOS Foundation

KIOS is an independent, non-political, non-religious, and non-governmental foundation. We fund the work of human rights defenders in East Africa and South Asia. Together with local civil society organisations, we are building a world where human rights belong to everyone.

At the heart of our work is the realisation of the rights of marginalised and excluded groups and persons in vulnerable positions.

KIOS was founded in 1998 by 11 Finnish NGOs working for human rights, peace, and development. KIOS receives financial support for its activities from the development cooperation funds of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the European Union delegation in Kenya.

Our grantees work in Kenya, Uganda, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. We also support regional initiatives in East Africa and South Asia.

We identify new grantees through open calls for proposals and feedback from established civil society organisations and networks. Local needs and expertise are always the starting point for our funding. Our support is channelled to human rights work planned and implemented by local civil society organisations.

During our 28 years of existence, we have provided over 610 grants to CSOs in almost 60 countries. Many activists we support work at the grassroots level in local communities, but some of our grantees also play a role at the pinnacle of human rights politics, such as at the UN Human Rights Council. Our grantees gather information about severe human rights violations and bring them to the attention of the international community. They help marginalised groups to actively participate in society and defend their rights and provide legal aid to thousands of people whose rights have been violated. Some of our grantees have succeeded in changing legislation in their countries to take better account of human rights.

Together with our grantees, we work for a world where dignity and human rights are recognised for all human beings, and states are committed to ensuring them.

How We Work

We Identify: We search and identify reliable and relevant human rights organisations and movements in South Asia and East Africa.

We Fund: We provide direct financial support to human rights activist groups at local, national and regional level.

We Strengthen: We strengthen our grantees and their networks, e.g. by financing their capacity-building, networking and improving their safety.

We Guide and Mentor: We provide guidance and mentoring to our grantees on project planning, management and reporting.

We Communicate: We share news of our grantees' work and the human rights situation in their countries and participate in local campaigns and events.

We Advocate: We discuss human rights issues with decision-makers, officials and other relevant actors in Finland and abroad.

Photo: Haki Ni Yetu

Haki Ni Yetu: Rights, Governance, and Accountability Project in Kenya

In 2025, Haki Ni Yetu delivered strong results in expanding civic space, strengthening grassroots actors, and advancing accountability and human rights across Kenya. The project awarded 12 new Rights, Governance and Accountability Grants (Large Grants) and 28 small grants under the Civic Action and Community Empowerment Grants (CACEG), broadening support to community-based

initiatives. Notably, **100% of large grant beneficiaries were led by women, youth, or marginalised groups**, reinforcing the project's commitment to inclusion. **Haki Ni Yetu reached over 5000 rights-holders and engaged with more than 600 duty-bearers** with the eight Large Grant fundings that closed in 2025.

Through two open calls under the Large Grants component, Haki Ni Yetu has provided funding to 22 human rights initiatives for Kenyan civil society organisations (CSOs) operating in 21 counties across Kenya. The project's reach has expanded to even more grassroots and community-based organisations (CBOs) that the grantees support through trainings and engage with for enhanced partnerships. One concrete example from Haki Ni Yetu grantee Environmental Rights Organizations Network (EROG) shows how the support of a nationwide network of Land and Environment Defenders strengthened environmental justice advocacy across all 47 counties.

Small Grantees achieved impactful legal and policy gains, including contributions to the national Persons with Disabilities Act (2025), the enactment of the Kirinyaga County Persons with Disability Act, and the Siaya County Widows Protection Act. These milestones demonstrate tangible progress in advancing protections for vulnerable groups.

Capacity-building efforts exceeded targets, reaching more than 600 representatives from CSOs, CBOs, community action teams, and citizen journalists across 15 counties. Trainings

Photo: EROG

improved advocacy capacity, with **75% of participants reporting a stronger ability to defend human rights**, and led to concrete civic actions including petitions, budget tracking, and community mobilisation.

Public engagement remained central, with engagement through campaigns addressing governance, gender equality, and environmental justice. These mobilised communities amplified grassroots voices through media and digital platforms and created safe spaces for dialogue with duty-bearers. Overall, 2025 saw significant growth in reach, stronger institutional capacity, and demonstrable policy and civic outcomes through Haki Ni Yetu.

→ For more information see our website
→ Animation about the impacts of the project

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Funded by the European Union

Year 2025 in Numbers

88
grants were ongoing

66
in East Africa

22
in South Asia

Some results from 29 grants that ended in 2025

55 295 PEOPLE BENEFITTED DIRECTLY FROM KIOS-FUNDED HUMAN RIGHTS WORK

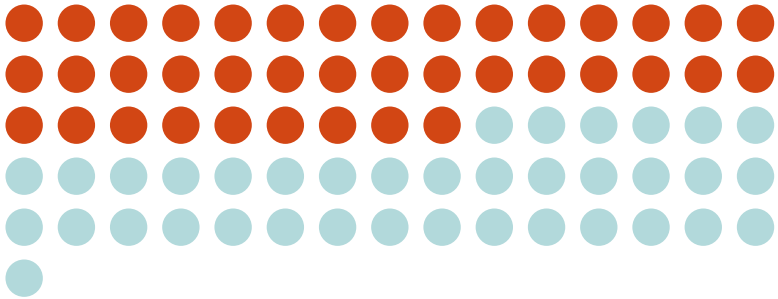
Out of people reached,
50 343 were rights-holders and
4 952 duty-bearers.

21 387
human rights defenders and rights-holders raised their awareness about human rights through grantee events and participated in awareness raising events*

12 225
people received legal aid or assistance*

1 555
public officials and political decision-makers trained on human rights issues*

*Data from MFA-funded grants that ended in 2025.

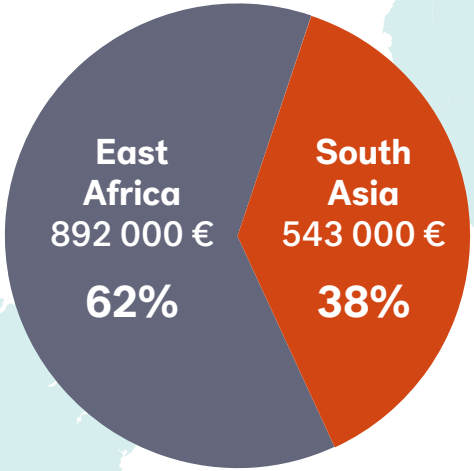


←39 Number of women-led organisations supported by KIOS

Out of 76 different grantees supported during the year 2025, 51% had women in leadership positions.

KIOS Grant Funding in 2025

KIOS Grant Funding in total: 1 435 000 €*



35% of the funds disbursed to East Africa come from the Haki Ni Yetu project, funded by the EU Delegation to Kenya.

KIOS Strategy Main Themes in Ongoing Grants in 2025

- Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality **37**
- Democratic Rights and the Rule of Law **30**
- Responsible Business, Environment and Human Rights **18**

*Includes 2025 instalments disbursed in 2026 and disbursements made through Haki Ni Yetu consortium partners.

SDG Goals of All Ongoing KIOS grants in 2025

Photo: UN / Mark Garten

51%	43%	39%	14%	6%	2%	2%	1%	1%

Grants in 2025 contributed most strongly to Sustainable Development Goals related to peace, justice and strong institutions (51%), reduced inequalities (43%), and gender equality (39%). This reflects the long-term focus of KIOS on democratic rights and the rule of law, non-discrimination, and inclusion.

Themes of All Grants in 2025

In 2025, KIOS-funded organisations in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Kenya worked across a wide range of human rights issues, from gender equality and LGBTIQA+ rights to the rule of law, accountability, environmental justice and the rights of people in vulnerable positions.

Examples of Our Grantees' Work:

Defending Human Rights

Photo: KIOS

With support from Finland's development cooperation

From Local Action to Global Impact: Advancing Responsible Business and Human Rights

Photo: BIRUDO

Under the theme of **Responsible Business, Environment and Human Rights**, KIOS and its grantees continued important work in East Africa and South Asia. Supported initiatives focused on advancing corporate accountability, defending land and environmental rights, and strengthening the role of civil society.

In Nepal, LAHURNIP expanded its long-term work on business and human rights, **supporting affected communities in holding corporations accountable.** Their efforts gained international recognition when LAHURNIP received a prestigious Business and Human Rights Award, highlighting the impact of sustained, community-driven advocacy.

In Uganda, KIOS grantees such as UCCA, **contributed to public dialogue and awareness-raising on human rights and civic space.** Their work was also featured in a Hanken student project podcast, amplifying civil society perspectives and bringing grassroots experiences from partner regions to new international audiences.

Community-led advocacy, including cases such as the Paten clans' struggle for land rights, demonstrated how **persistent engagement can lead from protests to tangible progress** in securing rights and accountability.

KIOS support has also extended to international forums and knowledge exchange. Participation in the UN Business and Human Rights Forum in Geneva and the TED Rule of Law Clinics on Land Rights enabled grantees and KIOS staff to contribute to global discussions, share experiences, and strengthen networks around responsible business practices and human rights.

Photo: UCCA 2025

Empowering Communities to Demand Corporate Responsibility

Uganda

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

UCCA strengthened community and civil society engagement with international financial institutions to promote stronger human rights accountability in development finance.

- Joseph Byomuhangyi, Project Coordinator

The Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability **(UCCA) is a civil society network advancing business and human rights in Uganda. With KIOS support, UCCA strengthened its members' capacity to engage with international financial institutions (IFIs) and accountability mechanisms. This work responds to a context where development projects can create human rights risks, while affected communities often face barriers in accessing remedy.**

During the grant period, UCCA supported coordinated advocacy and knowledge-sharing among its members working on development finance. **They also developed a community guidebook on IFIs and access to remedy and shared it through community dialogues**. UCCA and its members actively engaged IFI representatives, redress mechanisms, and national duty-bearers to promote stronger safeguards and accountability.

In 2025, **UCCA strengthened and sustained regional corporate accountability platforms** in the Tooro–Rwenzori, Bunyoro, and West Nile regions of Uganda, creating important spaces for dialogue among CSOs, communities, local governments, and businesses on Business and Human Rights issues.

These engagements **deepened awareness and advocacy on decent work, child labour, environmental harms, and casualisation of labour**, while promoting responsible business conduct and corporate accountability in underserved regions. The platforms also enhanced grassroots participation, collaboration, and collective action in advancing community rights and accountability.

Despite challenges related to complex advocacy processes, UCCA strengthened collaboration among its members and improved coordination. UCCA will build on these results by expanding community awareness and strengthening engagement with financial institutions.

From Civic Action to Systemic Change: Strengthening Democratic Rights and the Rule of Law

Photo: LAHURNIP

Under **Democratic Rights and the Rule of Law**, KIOS supported initiatives that strengthened accountability, expanded civic space, and improved access to justice, with a focus on youth participation, indigenous rights, freedom from torture, and gender-responsive governance.

In Nepal, YAN **amplified youth participation and public debate** following the Gen Z protests, helping bring youth perspectives into national and international discussions and media narratives. YAN also played a visible role in a KIOS-organised media event for Finnish audiences, strengthening cross-border understanding of civic movements.

At the same time, LAHURNIP achieved important legal victories for Indigenous Peoples, **advancing recognition of rights**, strengthening legal protections, and setting precedents through strategic litigation and sustained advocacy efforts.

In Kenya, IMLU delivered **concrete advances in accountability for torture and ill-treatment**. By documenting violations, supporting survivors, and pursuing cases through the justice system, IMLU contributed to **stronger enforcement of the rule of law**, increased pressure to address impunity, and growing public awareness of human rights violations and accountability mechanisms.

In Sri Lanka, WPASL produced strong, measurable results under the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. These included convening a South Asian WPS Round Table, launching a regional online WPS course, and organising a Women's Parliament, **creating space for women's leadership, dialogue, and policy influence.**

Overall, we have seen increased visibility, concrete legal progress, and stronger participation of marginalised groups, contributing to more inclusive, accountable, and rights-based democratic systems and long-term structural change.

Photo: IMLU, 2025

Improving Access to Justice and Survivor Support

Kenya

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

“The growing demand for prevention, survivor support, and accountability highlights the continued relevance of IMLU’s work.

– Wangechi Kahuria,
IMLU Executive Director

The Independent Medico-Legal Unit **(IMLU) is a Kenyan governance, health, and human rights organisation founded in 1993 to prevent and respond to torture and related violations. With KIOS support, IMLU has improved access to justice, strengthened accountability for police violence, and provided rehabilitation for survivors. All this despite a context of increasing political tensions and civic unrest, where excessive use of force, enforced disappearances, and unlawful detentions have raised serious human rights concerns.**

In 2025, IMLU combined legal, medical, and advocacy approaches to address torture and related violations. The organisation **trained 269 police officers** in Nyeri and Kirinyaga on survivor-centred responses to sexual and gender-based violence, building on earlier trainings and promoting more trauma-informed policing practices. IMLU also **strengthened institutional accountability by facilitating dialogue between oversight bodies and civil society members.**

The work led to concrete changes at multiple levels. Nationally, IMLU supported a task force that developed tools for investigating and prosecuting torture, including standard operating procedures and legal guidance. Locally, community policing initiatives helped build trust, reduce corruption, and strengthen reporting of violations. **During the grant 957 survivors received psychosocial support.** Survivors benefited directly also from medical care and forensic documentation.

Amid a highly challenging political environment, IMLU continued to expand its partnerships and influence, working closely with oversight bodies, law enforcement institutions, and civil society actors.

Looking ahead, IMLU plans to further deepen its impact by scaling up survivor-centred services, supporting the implementation of accountability tools, and widening engagement with both state and community actors to advance rights-based policing and justice.

From Exclusion to Equal Rights: Strengthening Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality

Photo: EQUITE 2025

Promoting equality and tackling discrimination remained central to KIOS work, with supported initiatives advancing inclusive education, challenging caste- and gender-based inequalities, and strengthening LGBTIQA+ rights and intersectional advocacy.

In **Nepal**, SUS highlighted caste-based discrimination, supported marginalised communities in claiming their rights and continued their work in offering safe houses for Dalit queers. YAN also contributed to the **amendment of the National Youth Policy in 2025**, ensuring stronger inclusion of youth perspectives. FEDO strengthened the position of **Dalit women** by supporting grassroots organising, leadership development, and advocacy processes that increased their participation in decision-making and brought their priorities into local and national discussions on equality.

In **Kenya**, NGLHRC achieved **significant results in access to justice for LGBTIQA+ individuals**, handling 376 cases in 2025 alone. Their Legal Aid Center provided legal representation, emergency response, and direct support, strengthening protection mechanisms for a highly marginalised group.

In **Sri Lanka**, Équité strengthened **solidarity, advocacy, and visibility for LGBTIQA+ youth**, creating safer spaces and building alliances across movements. In parallel, FAITH addressed discrimination faced by female sex workers, tackling stigma and exclusion in a restrictive context and advocating for their inclusion within broader gender equality efforts.

Together, these efforts demonstrate how sustained support can translate into stronger inclusion, improved access to justice, and greater visibility and agency for marginalised communities.

Equality and Inclusion for Female Sex Workers in Nepal

Photo: FAITH

Nepal

5 GENDER EQUALITY

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Powered by the resilience of the sex worker community itself, FAITH is closing the gap between law, policy, programmes, and the people they must serve.

– Reena Lama, Executive Director

Friends Affected and Infected Together in Hand **(FAITH) is a community-based organisation in Nepal working to promote the rights of female sex workers (FSWs). With KIOS support, FAITH addressed systemic discrimination against FSWs in a context where stigma, restrictive norms, and criminalisation undermine their rights and exclude them from broader women's movements.**

During the grant period, FAITH **strengthened sex worker–led advocacy to influence laws and policies and promote accountability.** The organisation coordinated an advocacy task group of five peer-led organisations and engaged 85 duty-bearers, including parliamentarians and national commissions, through dialogues and policy outreach. A memorandum outlining key concerns was submitted to ministries, supported by legal expertise and direct meetings with decision-makers. As a result, **57 duty-bearers signed written commitments to uphold the rights of sex workers**, an unprecedented achievement in Nepal. FAITH also contributed 18 case studies to international and national human rights reporting processes like CEDAW, Universal Periodic Review, and supported local discussions on inclusive policies.

The work led to concrete changes at the local level. Municipalities showed interest in adopting non-discriminatory policies, indicating growing recognition of sex workers' rights. Dialogues and public events strengthened collaboration between FSWs and authorities, while **assessments involving 236 sex workers focused on their political participation and inclusion**.

Despite political instability affecting national legislative processes, FAITH succeeded in building new alliances, amplifying voices that are often excluded and advancing the recognition of rights violations.

Building on these achievements, FAITH will continue to promote legal and policy reforms, expand engagement with local authorities, and strengthen the leadership of sex worker–led organisations.

Snapshots from Finland:

Advocacy and Communications

Photo: Sami Sorasalmi, World Village Festival

Raising visibility of KIOS strategic themes through events

Through participation in public events and marches, KIOS sought to bring international human rights perspectives to the Finnish public and strengthen solidarity across movements. Throughout the year, KIOS organised or co-organised multiple events that were attended by over 300 people both in person and online.

In May, KIOS produced two speaking programmes at the **World Village Festival (Maailma Kylässä)**. Human rights defender **Sherine Xavier** from Sri Lankan KIOS grantee The Social Architects (TSA) was interviewed by Sri Lankan background journalist Susani Mahadura about the long road to peace after the civil war. Another programme on anti-gender movement organised together with other Finnish NGOs working on LGBTIQA+ rights, featured a **video by KIOS grantee PEMA**, highlighting LGBTIQA+ rights in East Africa.

During **Pride**, KIOS welcomed Sri Lankan human rights defender **H K Thushara Manoj from KIOS grantee Équité**. His visit included an activist meet-up and panel discussions, fostering exchange between Finnish civil society actors, politicians and international human rights defenders working on equality and non-discrimination. KIOS also participated in the Helsinki Pride Parade.

A **Nepal-focused media event** was organised together with Finnish NGOs and KIOS grantee Youth Advocacy Nepal, in the context of the Gen Z–led protests in Nepal in September 2025. The event was followed by strong media visibility in Finland, with articles published in **Uusi Juttu** and **Maailman Kuvalehti**, helping bring the perspectives of Nepali human rights defenders to Finnish audiences.

Towards the end of the year, **a networking event on LGBTIQA+ rights together with other Finnish NGOs** was organised in December. During the event, **KIOS Senior Adviser Annika Gostowski** introduced KIOS work on supporting LGBTIQA+ rights.

Photo: KIOS

Campaign Work and Advocacy

KIOS contributed to several joint advocacy efforts and campaigns in 2025. In the autumn, KIOS joined **Fingo's "Toimi, koska voit" campaign**, encouraging action for civil society and human rights, and highlighting the work of LGBTIQA+ rights work by KIOS grantee Équité and their chairperson Manoj Thushara. In August, KIOS also took part in joint advocacy efforts around the government's budget framework, collecting KIOS grantees testimonies on the importance of Finnish support for human rights and democracy.

KIOS also advocated against the proposed backsliding of the corporate responsibility directive through social media campaigning and a blog by KIOS grantee Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability (UCCA) coordinator Joseph Byomuhangyi, amplifying voices from the Global South. KIOS also joined Helsinki's first-ever **Women's Day march 2025**, demonstrating solidarity with women's rights activism, and shared Fingo's petition calling to protect Gaza and demand action from Finnish decision-makers.

In November, when Cyclone Ditwah triggered a nationwide emergency in Sri Lanka, KIOS quickly channelled extra funding to trusted local grantees. ESDF supported 420 families with household items. TSA provided shelter to 57

Photos: KIOS

families, school supplies to 363 children, and school shoes to 150 students. Équité supported 200 people with groceries, ensured continued healthcare for 60 transgender people, and trained 53 participants in first aid. Behind every number was a moment of regained stability, made possible by our grantees, MFA Finland, and fundraising campaign donors.

Strengthening Dialogue and Awareness

KIOS continued to function as a bridge between Finnish audiences and human rights defenders from different regions. Through public events, campaigns, media engagement, and academic and international forums, KIOS supported dialogue on equality, non-discrimination, land rights, civic space, and corporate responsibility.

By maintaining a consistent presence across diverse spaces, from public marches and festivals to international policy forums, KIOS reinforced its role in raising awareness of human rights challenges and supporting the voices of those working to defend rights globally.

These efforts further strengthened the role of KIOS in Finland as a connector between global human rights defenders and Finnish civil society, media, and decision-makers.

Finance and Administration 2025

Improved Financial Guidelines

In 2025, KIOS effectively managed €1.65 million in funding from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) as part of its four-year €7 million Programme-based support grant, alongside a €2.86 million EU-funded Haki Ni Yetu project in Kenya, of which 13% remained undrawn by year-end. Financial relationships with related parties remained minimal and transparent, with standard compensation practices for staff and no financial compensation to board members. During the year, KIOS improved its financial guidelines regarding sanctions compliance and grantee monitoring.

Refined Due Diligence Practices

As part of refining the Due Diligence process, KIOS updated and adopted the guidelines on its complaints procedure (Grievance Policy). The updated Grievance Policy was implemented within the KIOS whistleblowing team and guided reactions to reports that came through the anonymous online whistleblowing channel that was launched the previous year. Reporting and internal procedures related to the whistleblowing channel were also improved. A strengthened grievance mechanism supports good Due Diligence by enabling early identification and mitigation of risks.

Programme Funding and Continuity Beyond 2025

Year 2025 marked the final year of the MFA-funded four-year programme. Funding was primarily allocated to four focus countries: Kenya, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Uganda. Of the total disbursements made during the year, 54% were directed to South Asia and 46% to East Africa. By the end of 2025, a total of 33 programme grants were active.

KIOS applied for and was awarded a new four-year funding agreement from MFA, ensuring the continuation of its core programme work beyond 2025. Alongside the MFA- and EU –funded operations, KIOS continued to identify and assess complementary funding opportunities to support continuity and future activities.

2025 Financial Year Breakdown*

*KIOS total expenditure in 2025, including both MFA and EU-funded activities.

I DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS

KIOS Foundation

With support from Finland's development cooperation

Funded by the European Union

Lintulahdenkatu 10
00500, Helsinki, Finland
kios@kios.fi
kios.fi

@kiosfoundation