

ROOTED NEWS LETTER

Ideas & impact from the African Continent

A space where governance meets humanity—where stories of purpose, discipline and leadership reminds us that systems change begins with how we focus our attention each day.

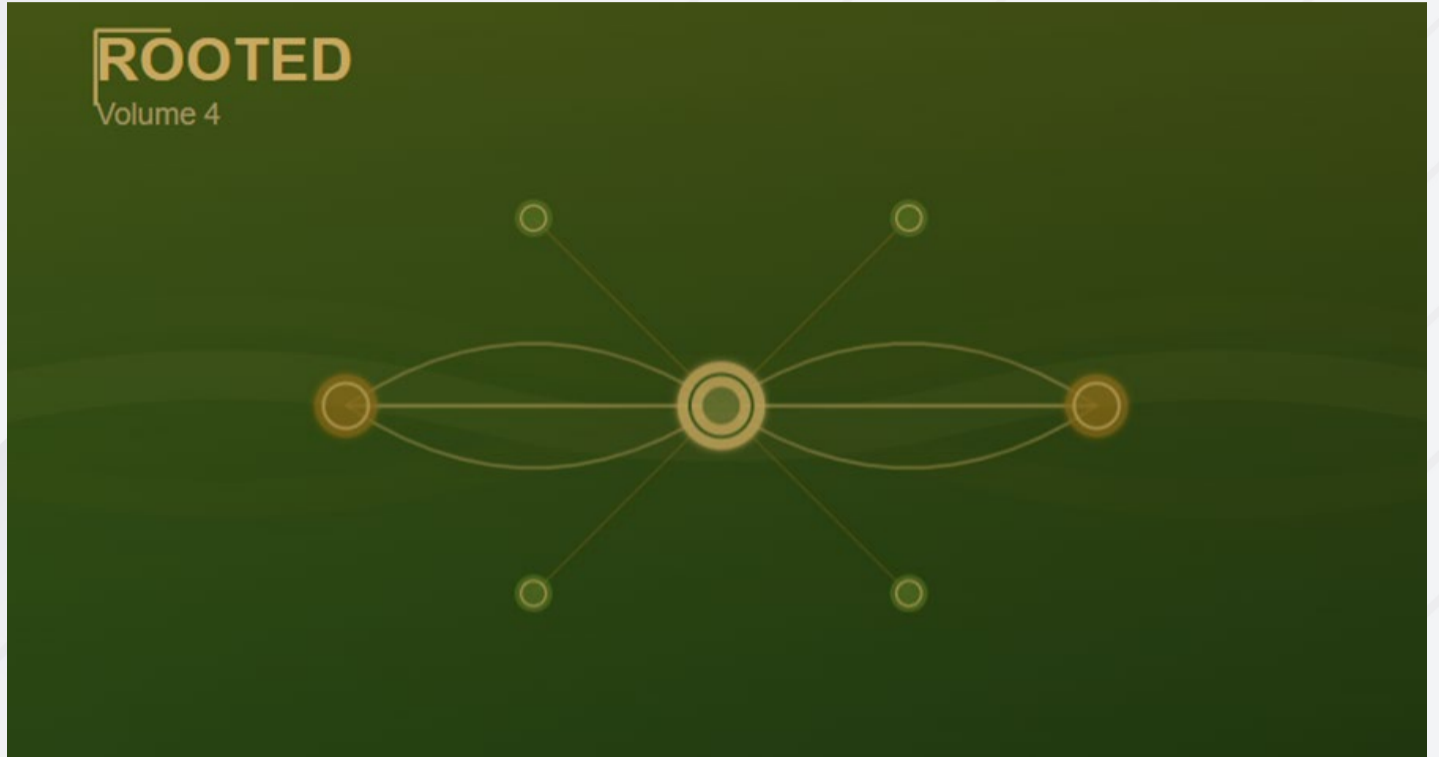
JANUARY 2026

vol.4

- Governance
- Sustainability
- Inclusion
- African-led

HOW THIS PLAYS OUT ACROSS THE ISSUE

- pg 1 RELATIONAL GOVERNANCE
- pg 2 SIX THEMES IN RELATIONAL GOVERNANCE
- pg 3 - 6 THE BROKEN CLIMATE CONTRACT
- pg 7 SPOTLIGHT
- pg 8 WHATS ON OUR RADAR
- pg 9 CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS



RELATIONAL GOVERNANCE

Trust, Networks, and The Social Architecture of Leadership

EDITOR'S NOTE: Governing the Space Between Us

Leadership is often framed as an individual act—the vision of one person, the authority of one office. Yet across Africa's past and present, leadership has always lived elsewhere: in the relationships between people, and the invisible threads that bind communities, institutions, and nations.

Volume 4 of Rooted explores this space—the space between us—and argues that governance is not only about policy or structure. It is about relationships: how trust is built, how accountability is shared, how cooperation survives difference, and how what is broken is repaired.

This volume marks a turning point in our six-part series.

- Volumes 1–3 focused on the inner landscape of leadership.
 - Volumes 5–6 will examine institutions and systems.
- Volume 4 is the bridge—the shift from “Who must I become?” to “How do we govern the relationships that sustain us?”

Across these pages, we examine relational governance in practice, from trust as infrastructure, to Ubuntu as design logic, to legitimacy as lived experience. Together, they remind us of a simple truth: systems do not fail first because of missing resources, but because relationships break down.

If governance lives in the space between us, then leadership is never solitary. It is enacted—in trust, in repair, and in relationship.

SPOTLIGHT ON IMPACT

KHANGWA FARMING

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Katlego Majola
FOUNDER: KM NALA ADVISORY

Welcome to Volume 4

THEMES

SIX THEMES IN RELATIONAL GOVERNANCE

THEME 1: TRUST AS GOVERNANCE INFRASTRUCTURE

We often treat trust as a soft attribute—helpful, but not foundational. Yet every functioning system relies on it more than any technical process:

- A contract only works if we trust the counterparty.
- A policy only works if citizens trust its legitimacy.
- A partnership only works if parties trust one another's intent.

Trust is governance infrastructure. It determines the speed of cooperation, the cost of coordination, and the durability of collective effort. Low-trust systems require more oversight, more compliance, more energy. High-trust systems move further, faster, with less friction. The question for leaders, then, is not whether to invest in trust—but how to treat it as a critical asset.

THEME 2: UBUNTU IN PRACTICE—FROM PHILOSOPHY TO DESIGN

Ubuntu is often referenced as a moral or cultural idea. But it is also a design principle. If “I am because you are,” then organisations must be built to reflect interdependence:

- Decision-making that brings affected parties into the room
- Structures that flatten hierarchy where possible
- Feedback systems that value voice, not just performance
- Accountability that looks like reciprocity, not punishment

Ubuntu becomes governance when we design institutions that recognise the social, communal, and human realities of work.

THEME 3: BEYOND EXTRACTIVE MODELS—STAKEHOLDER CAPITALISM FOR AFRICA

Much of the global economy still operates on extractive logics: short-term profit, narrow shareholder interests, and resource use without regeneration.

Africa—with its youthful population, climate exposure, land pressures, and innovation mindset—cannot afford this model.

Stakeholder capitalism becomes meaningful only when:

- Communities have a voice beyond consultation
- Benefits are distributed fairly
- Ecological limits shape economic decisions
- Investment strengthens, rather than drains, local systems

Relational governance reframes businesses not as isolated entities, but as embedded participants in social and ecological life.



THEME 4: BUILDING COALITIONS ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Coalitions are not just technical; they are emotional, cultural, and relational. Effective coalitions require:

- Shared purpose beyond individual interests
- Translation across sectors
- The psychological skill of holding difference without collapse
- The humility to learn from partners with different forms of knowledge
- Long-term commitment—not campaign-to-campaign alliances.

Coalitions fail when relationships fail. They succeed when trust is strong enough to withstand conflict, ambiguity, and iterative learning.

THEME 5: REPAIRING BROKEN SOCIAL CONTRACTS

Across many African contexts, the relationship between citizens and institutions is strained. People feel unseen, unheard, unprotected. Repairing the social contract requires:

- Honour: recognising past harm
- Restoration: demonstrating accountability
- Transparency: making governance visible
- Shared ownership: treating communities as partners, not recipients

Relational governance is not a fix; it is a practice. A continuous negotiation of mutual expectations and shared responsibilities.

THEME 6: THE SOCIAL LICENSE TO OPERATE—AN AFRICAN VIEW

In Africa, legitimacy is never only legal. It is social, ethical, cultural, and contextual. A mining company may have a permit but no legitimacy. A community health initiative may lack paperwork but enjoy full authority. The “social license to operate” is governed by:

- Respect for land, identity, and local knowledge
- Fair distribution of value
- Behaviour during moments of crisis
- The quality of relationships cultivated over time

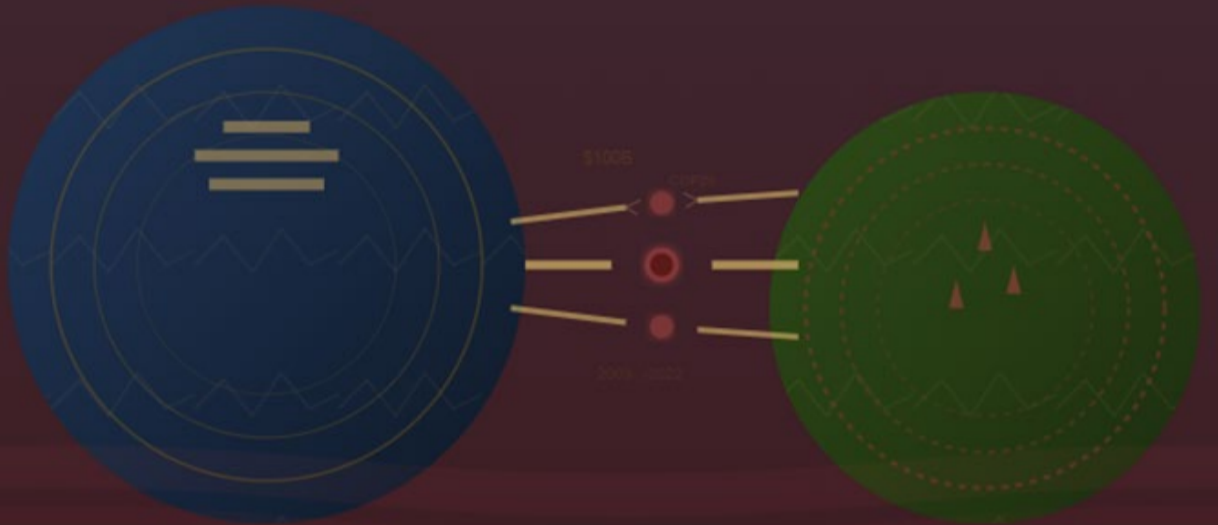
It is not granted once. It is earned daily.



THE BROKEN CLIMATE CONTRACT

THE BROKEN CLIMATE CONTRACT

Why Trust Matters More Than Finance



"I am because you are"

Climate governance will succeed or fail not on money or technology, but on whether we build relationships strong enough to endure decades of shocks.

Why Trust Matters More Than Finance A Case Study in Relational Governance at Global Scale



2025 saw some of the costliest climate disasters on record, with extreme weather events like the California wildfires, Hurricane Mellisa and flooding in South Asia. The gap between "pledges" and "action" remains a major hurdle for the upcoming COP31 negotiations.

Climate vulnerability has exposed something more fundamental than infrastructure gaps or funding shortfalls: a breakdown in trust between those who caused the climate crisis and those paying its steepest price.

Climate finance has not failed for lack of capital, tools, or pilot solutions. It has failed because it is governed by a relational model that prioritises donor discretion over mutual accountability. As climate impacts accelerate, the central challenge is not mobilising money once, but sustaining cooperation over decades amid rising risk, domestic political pressure, and geopolitical fragmentation.

That sustainability depends on trust. And trust depends on whether climate finance is governed as discretionary aid, transactional self-interest, or shared obligation rooted in asymmetric responsibility.

The Real Constraint: How Support Arrives, Not Whether It Exists

For climate-vulnerable nations, the constraint isn't capital availability—it's the terms of engagement. Under the current model, loans deepen sovereign debt rather than relieving vulnerability. Aid disburses slowly while households exhaust savings and businesses close. Financing conditions reduce policy sovereignty. Help arrives on donor timelines, not disaster timelines.

Even on strictly pragmatic grounds, these trust deficits reduce both resource flow and impact. The recovery trap persists not because solutions don't exist, but because the relationship between creditors and vulnerable nations remains extractive rather than reciprocal.



THE BROKEN CLIMATE CONTRACT

How the Charity Frame Erases Accountability

“Adaptation finance.” “Climate aid.” “Donor support.” This vocabulary positions major emitters as benevolent helpers. It erases causation: centuries of emissions by wealthy nations created the crisis. It erases obligation: vulnerable nations are owed compensation for harm caused, not gratitude for assistance given.

When climate action is framed as charity, power asymmetry becomes structural. Vulnerable nations must ask, becoming supplicants. Major emitters decide whether to give, acting as gatekeepers.

Conditions get attached. Progress is measured by generosity, not whether harm was repaired. The \$100 billion climate finance pledge—made in 2009, reached only in 2022—taught a hard lesson: promises from major emitters are aspirational, not binding.

Yes, real-world climate finance is increasingly blended—combining grants, concessional loans, and technical support. The Loss and Damage Fund represents movement. But when tradeoffs arise, discretion still prevails over obligation. Whose priorities prevail? Whose controls timelines? Whose accountability structures govern outcomes? The dominant logic still defaults to donor discretion rather than obligation.

The issue is not the financial instruments themselves, but the governing logic behind them.

Three Logics of Climate Finance

Climate finance operates—and evolves—through three distinct frames, each with different relational foundations and structural limits.

Charity: Discretionary Benevolence

Core logic: Those with resources may help those in need.

This frame offers political palatability and short-term mobilisation. But funds remain voluntary, slow, and reversible.

Recipients remain supplicants. Power asymmetry persists. Every unmet pledge erodes trust further.

Charity can initiate action—but it cannot sustain cooperation at scale.

Self-Interest: Transactional Stability

Core logic: Supporting vulnerable countries reduces spillover risks—migration, instability, economic shocks.

This frame appeals to security concerns and domestic voters. It scales funding further than charity by avoiding reparations language and aligning climate finance with national interest. But assistance remains contingent on perceived benefit. Commitment weakens when threats feel distant. Vulnerable nations remain means to donor ends, not partners. Self-interest expands funding—but still lacks durability when interests diverge.



Accountability: Shared Obligation

Core logic: Those who disproportionately caused harm and hold greater capacity have a responsibility to repair it.

This frame transforms climate finance from episodic assistance into durable infrastructure. Finance becomes predictable and rules-based. Institutions are co-governed. Accountability is defined jointly, not imposed. Grant-heavy and shock-responsive instruments become the norm.

Politically, this is harder upfront—it requires narrative shift and power-sharing. But it builds long-term trust, reduces transaction costs over time, enables faster coordination, and stabilises cooperation amid shocks.

Only accountability creates systems capable of scaling over decades.

These frames are not mutually exclusive in instruments—grants, loans, technical assistance, and blended finance can exist under any frame. What differs is not financial sophistication, but relational intent. What changes is who sets terms, how risk is allocated, and what counts as success.

What the Accountability Frame Actually Means

This is not a call for litigation. It is not about calculating precise historical liability back to 1850 or creating courtroom proceedings before resources flow. It is about shifting the normative and structural logic that governs how finance is designed, delivered, and measured.

Under an accountability framework:

- Support would be owed based on asymmetric causation and capacity, not optional
- Policy conditionality would be inappropriate—you cannot attach reform mandates to making amends
- Success would be measured by adequacy and impact, not donor generosity
- Accountability would be mutual and co-designed, not imposed downward
- Oversight would shift from policy compliance to outcome performance

This shift doesn't require agreement on exact historical baselines. It requires political acknowledgment of imbalance and governance



THE BROKEN CLIMATE CONTRACT



structures that reflect it—something international law already recognises through principles like “common but differentiated responsibilities.”

Graduated responsibility matters here. Not all major emitters bear identical obligations. Emitters at times complicate any binary debtor/creditor framing—but complexity doesn’t invalidate accountability.

It demands multi-tier responsibility that separates historical causation from current capacity. Some countries owe more because they emitted more over longer periods. Others contribute based on present emissions and economic strength. The framework adjusts; the principle holds.

What Trust-Based Solutions Look Like

Where climate responses have worked, they share a common feature: they change the relationship.

Grant-based loss and damage financing avoids deepening debt while enabling rapid recovery. Grants acknowledge responsibility rather than framing recovery as generosity. When governance structures include vulnerable countries in decision-making, disbursement accelerates.

Debt-for-climate swaps work when designed through partnership rather than creditor dominance. When paired with nationally determined resilience investments—without externally imposed conditions—countries gain fiscal space while retaining sovereignty.

Pre-arranged disaster finance, such as automatic liquidity triggered by climate shocks, eliminates

the need to plead after catastrophe. Funds flow immediately based on pre-agreed rules.

The relationship shifts from discretionary aid to predictable obligation.

Locally governed adaptation funds demonstrate that when vulnerable nations control priorities, investments become more effective. Community-led projects succeed because those living with risk designed them. These examples are small-scale, yes.

But when pilots repeatedly show that speed improves with pre-arranged finance, outcomes improve with local governance, and debt relief increases resilience, the barrier to scaling is not technical feasibility—it is political willingness to change control structures.

That willingness is a governance choice, not a budgetary one. The pattern is clear: solutions scale when relationships change.

The Agency Question

Vulnerable nations are not passive recipients awaiting rescue. They are already adapting—often successfully—within deeply constrained systems.

They have built resilient coalitions like the Alliance of Small Island States, negotiated favorable terms in multilateral forums, and developed domestic climate strategies despite limited external support.

But agency exercised under constraint is still agency within asymmetry, not partnership. The very need



THE BROKEN CLIMATE CONTRACT

for constant negotiation, coalition-building, and strategic positioning is evidence of structural imbalance. Acknowledging this agency doesn't negate broken trust—it reveals how much vulnerable nations accomplish despite it.

Why Accountability Is Pragmatic, Not Idealistic

Some argue we lack time for relationship repair—that imperfect action now beats perfect justice delayed. But this misreads both the constraint and the timeline.

From a fiscal perspective, predictable finance reduces emergency spending and crisis bailouts. Pre-arranged instruments lower overall cost of capital. Grant-heavy finance prevents debt spirals that later require write-offs. Accountability reduces long-term fiscal exposure for both donors and recipients.

From a governance perspective, accountability doesn't eliminate oversight—it relocates it. Monitoring shifts from policy compliance to outcome performance. Failure risk is shared, reducing perverse incentives. Trust-based governance can increase, not decrease, effectiveness and transparency.

From a speed perspective, relationship repair is not sequential—it is structural. Predictable, rules-based systems can be implemented faster than ad hoc negotiations. Trust accelerates response speed.

In practice, this means expanding automatic, grant-based, shock-responsive instruments governed jointly with vulnerable countries—while reducing reliance on discretionary, conditional financing that delays response and erodes trust.

The past fifteen years demonstrate that "imperfect action now" under broken relationships has not delivered sufficient outcomes. Without trust, funds arrive late, projects stall, cooperation fractures.

The real timing risk is continuing with systems that look pragmatic but systematically underperform because they ignore relational foundations. We don't have time not to repair trust.

The Ubuntu Principle

More than one billion people live in climate-vulnerable developing economies.

What happens when the next major cyclone strikes?

When drought-driven migration destabilises regions? When sea-level rise displaces entire populations?

The same relationship model will determine outcomes everywhere.

If major emitters maintain a charity-based frame, trust will collapse at scale. Negotiations will stall, cooperation will erode, and climate governance will fragment when collective action is most needed.

But if emitters shift toward accountability, cooperative solutions become possible. Predictable finance, shared governance, and mutual responsibility create conditions for



coordinated adaptation and global stability.

This logic echoes Ubuntu: I am because you are. It recognises what other governance structures often deny—our fates are interconnected. Wealthy nations' prosperity was built on carbon emissions that now endanger others.

This is not charity. It is recognition of interdependence and the obligations born from it.

Repairing the Contract

Climate governance will succeed or fail not on whether we mobilise enough money or deploy the right technology, but on whether we build relationships strong enough to endure worsening shocks, rising costs, and domestic pressure over decades.

Charity can mobilise money.

Self-interest can expand it. Only accountability can sustain it.

The question is not whether vulnerable nations can adapt. They already are—at great cost, with remarkable agency, within deeply asymmetric systems.

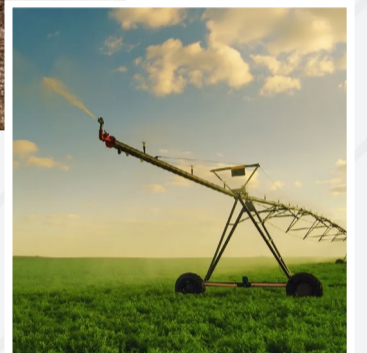
The real question is whether powerful nations will honor the relationship globalisation promised and climate change now demands.

Climate finance must scale through pragmatic, politically viable mechanisms. But if those mechanisms remain rooted in charity logic rather than accountability, they will continue to underdeliver.

Trust is not a soft value competing with pragmatism—it is the infrastructure climate governance cannot function without. Accountability does not eliminate politics—but it makes cooperation less fragile when politics inevitably shift. Until the broken climate contract is repaired, solutions will remain technically sound and politically impossible.



SPOTLIGHT



KHANGWA FARMING

When Knowledge Flows, Food Systems Flourish
Bloemhof, North West Province

Roleo Khangwa Farming grows tomatoes, carrots, beetroot, and spinach. But its real harvest is something else entirely: a model of agriculture where strengthening others strengthens the whole system.

Beyond Extraction: Farming as Relationship
While many operations measure success in yield per hectare, Khangwa Farming asks a different question: What kind of food system are we building, and who does it serve?

The answer shows up in three interconnected practices:

KNOWLEDGE AS COMMONS

The farm offers affordable training courses for students, aspiring farmers, and smallholders. In a sector where information asymmetry keeps small farmers dependent, knowledge-sharing is revolutionary. Your success doesn't require my scarcity—that's Ubuntu as economic logic.

DEMOCRATISED

INFRASTRUCTURE

Equipment services—disc ploughs, harrows, rippers, potato planters—make mechanised agriculture accessible to farmers who can't afford ownership. Shared access distributes capacity rather than concentrating it. This is stakeholder capitalism: creating value by strengthening the broader ecosystem.

LOCAL VALUE CIRCULATION

Fresh, organic produce supplies nearby markets, other farmers, individual households, and supermarkets. Value stays local. Relationships stay strong. Communities stay fed.

LEGITIMACY EARNED DAILY

Khangwa Farming exemplifies what Volume 4 calls "social license to operate"—legitimacy earned not through permits, but through

relationships cultivated over time.

The farm's authority flows from:

Respect for local knowledge and context
Fair distribution of value and access
Consistent commitment beyond immediate profit
Vision that spans generations, not quarters
The Infrastructure We Actually Need
As South Africa confronts climate change, food insecurity, and rural economic decline, Khangwa Farming demonstrates what resilient food systems actually require:

Not just farms that produce—but farms that build capacity. Not just equipment that's owned—but tools that are shared.

Not just knowledge that's hoarded—but expertise that flows freely. Not just profit extracted—but value that circulates locally. This is farming as relational governance. And it's working.

KHANGWA FARMING

Portion 52 of Weltevreden Farm, Bloemhof, North West 2660

Services: Fresh organic produce • Farming training courses (from R40) • Agricultural equipment services • Crop cultivation & land preparation

Contact: +27 72 113 9897
• info@khangwafarming.com
Hours: Mon–Fri 09:00–17:00 • Sat by appointment

Mission: Promoting healthy living through quality vegetable farming.
Vision: Building a resilient and prosperous farming legacy for generations to come.

Khangwa Farming demonstrates Ubuntu as design principle (Theme 2), stakeholder capitalism in practice (Theme 3), and social license earned through relationship quality (Theme 6). Their work proves that the most resilient food systems aren't built on competitive advantage—they're built on relational strength.

SPOTLIGHT
ON IMPACT

KHANGWA FARMING



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WHAT'S ON OUR RADAR

THINK



LISTEN



ACT



As we move toward Volumes 5 and 6, we shift from relationships to systems, asking how institutions, policies, and structures embody—or undermine—the values explored here.



THINK

Relational governance begins where trust is broken—and where renewal is possible. Read Rachel Botsman's "The Changing rules of Trust in the digital age" (HBR), or explore Michael Eze's writings on Ubuntu/Botho, and ask yourself:

Where in your organisation, coalition, or community is trust currently the bottleneck? And what would become possible if trust were treated as infrastructure, not emotion?



LISTEN

The Ubuntu Lab Institute

As they unpack how African relational worldviews can reshape institutions, decision-making, and conflict resolution. As you listen, notice which relationships—internal or external—hold the greatest transformative potential in your work. (Alternative: The Flip)



ACT

- Map your governance relationships. List the five relationships that matter most to the success of your work—and identify one trust-building action for each.
- Share a resource (article, insight, or story) with someone you collaborate with.
- Revisit a strained relationship in your organisation or community. Initiate a conversation aimed at clarity, not agreement.
- Audit your "social license." If your community or stakeholders had to renew your legitimacy tomorrow, what would they say?

UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



JULY 2026

Launch:

KM Nala 2026 Governance Outlook

Register at www.kmnala.co.za



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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS



Got something to say? CALL FOR CONTRIBUTORS

At Rooted, we believe that diverse African voices are essential to reshaping systems.

We are looking for original insights from professionals, researchers and community practitioners who are:

- Insightful - Grounded in experience or research
- Action-Oriented - Focuses on what works
- Context-Rooted - Centered in African realities

**Submit your idea or article (600-800 words)
info@kmnala.co.za**

Let's build this platform together.

**FINAL NOTES +
STAY CONNECTED**



"Leadership begins when we choose to act with purpose, not just power." - KM Nala

How to connect

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