

**RISEUP AFRICA**

WHITE PAPER

# The SUSAH Principles

*An African-Rooted Framework for Sustainable Impact, Governance, and Community Value*

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**Sankofa • Ubuntu • Sarama • Asili • Harambee**

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## Why SUSAH? Moving Beyond Western DEI & ESG

The global conversation around organizational responsibility has long been shaped by frameworks developed in and for Western contexts. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) and Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) have become the dominant languages of corporate accountability, yet for African and Afro-descendant communities, these frameworks often feel foreign, extractive, or incomplete.

DEI, as commonly practiced, emerged from the specific civil rights and affirmative action context of the United States. ESG standards were largely developed by European financial institutions and multilateral bodies to serve investor risk management. Neither was designed with Africa's cultural heritage, communal worldview, or historical experience at its center.

RiseUp Africa recognized this gap. Rather than adopting frameworks that were never built for us, we looked inward, to the wisdom already embedded in African philosophy and practice. The result

is SUSAH: a set of five living principles drawn from African and Afro-descendant traditions that guide how we operate, invest, and serve our communities.

SUSAH does not reject accountability or sustainability. It redefines them, on African terms, with African voices, for African futures.

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## What Is SUSAH?

SUSAH is an acronym representing five interconnected principles: Sankofa, Ubuntu, Sarama, Asili, and Harambee. Together, they form a holistic operating philosophy that integrates historical wisdom, human dignity, environmental responsibility, cultural rootedness, and collective action.

These are not abstract values; they are ancient practices given modern application. Each principle carries deep cultural meaning and provides concrete guidance for how RiseUp Africa engages with its portfolio companies, partner communities, investors, and the people it serves.

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## The Five SUSAH Principles

S

Sankofa

**Origin:** Akan people of Ghana & Côte d'Ivoire

**Core Meaning:** From the Twi language: 'Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi' — It is not wrong to go back for what you forgot. Symbolized by a bird flying forward while looking back, Sankofa teaches that understanding the past is essential to building the future.

**RiseUp Africa Application:** RiseUp Africa learns from the history of colonization, displacement, and resilience of African and Afro-descendant communities. We apply those lessons to investment decisions, program design, and community partnerships ensuring history informs, not haunts, our path forward.

U

Ubuntu

**Origin:** Nguni Bantu peoples of Southern Africa (Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Swati)

**Core Meaning:** 'Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu' — A person is a person through other persons. Ubuntu is the philosophy of shared humanity: I am because we are. It centers collective wellbeing, mutual respect, and interdependence over individualism.

**RiseUp Africa Application:** Every RiseUp Africa decision is evaluated through the lens of Ubuntu: Who benefits? Who is excluded? How does this strengthen the community fabric? Profit is not the sole measure of success — human dignity and collective flourishing are equally weighted.

S

Sarama

**Origin:** East African traditions (Amharic/Oromo concept of accountability and right action)

**Core Meaning:** Sarama reflects the principle of accountability, responsibility, and the disciplined pursuit of what is right and true. It speaks to diligence, integrity, and the commitment to do what one says — individually and institutionally.

**RiseUp Africa Application:** RiseUp Africa holds itself and its portfolio to the highest standards of transparency and accountability. Sarama means we do not issue commitments we cannot keep. We report honestly on our impact, acknowledge our failures, and course-correct without ego.

A

Asili

**Origin:** Swahili/Bantu tradition — widely used across East Africa

**Core Meaning:** 'Asili' means origin, essence, or the natural state of something. It is the concept that every person, community, and living system has an intrinsic nature that must be honored and nurtured. Asili calls us to work in alignment with natural rhythms and ecological truth.

**RiseUp Africa Application:** RiseUp Africa applies Asili as its environmental compass. Rather than framing sustainability purely in terms of carbon credits and compliance metrics, we ask: are we working with nature or against it? Do our investments honor the land, water, and ecosystems of the communities we serve?

H

Harambee

**Origin:** Swahili — popularized as Kenya's national motto

**Core Meaning:** 'Harambee' means pulling together, collective effort, and community self-help. It is the spirit of cooperative action — building, contributing, and achieving together what no individual could accomplish alone. It was the rallying cry of Kenya's independence movement and remains a cornerstone of communal life across East Africa.

**RiseUp Africa Application:** Harambee is how RiseUp Africa builds. We convene entrepreneurs, investors, diaspora communities, local governments, and civil society not as separate actors but as one interdependent network. Investment is not extraction — it is a collective act of building with communities, not for them.

# SUSAH vs. DEI & ESG: A Comparison of Frameworks

Dimension	Western DEI	Western ESG	SUSAH (RiseUp Africa)
Origin	United States civil rights context	European investor risk management	African & Afro-descendant philosophy
Primary Goal	Representation & equity within existing systems	Risk mitigation & disclosure for investors	Collective flourishing & cultural wholeness
Unit of Change	Individual (hire, promote, include)	Organization (report, disclose, offset)	Community (build, invest, belong)
Relationship to History	Addresses recent discrimination	Largely ahistorical	Centers ancestral knowledge (Sankofa)
Relationship to Nature	Peripheral	Carbon-centric compliance	Intrinsic — Asili honors natural essence
Governance Model	Top-down corporate policy	Investor-driven metrics	Communal accountability (Sarama + Ubuntu)
View of Profit	Compatible with profit maximization	Aligned with long-term shareholder value	Profit in service of collective purpose (Harambee)

## SUSAH in Practice: How We Live These Principles

### Investment Decisions

Every investment thesis RiseUp Africa considers is evaluated against the SUSAH framework.

We ask:

- Does this opportunity honor the communities it will affect (Ubuntu)?
- Does it work with or against the natural environment (Asili)?
- Does it build collective capacity or concentrate individual wealth (Harambee)?
- Is the leadership accountable and transparent (Sarama)?

- Does it learn from and repair historical harm (Sankofa)?

## Portfolio Governance

Our portfolio companies are supported and held to account through SUSAH-aligned governance standards. These are not tick-box compliance requirements — they are living commitments that leadership teams are supported to embed into culture, operations, and strategy. We work alongside portfolio companies, not above them.

## Community Partnerships

RiseUp Africa does not enter communities as a benefactor. We enter as a partner and learner, grounded in Ubuntu's recognition that we are constituted by our relationships. Community voice shapes how programs are designed, how resources are allocated, and how success is measured.

## Reporting & Accountability

Our impact reporting goes beyond financial returns. We report on community wellbeing indicators, environmental stewardship, cultural vitality, and stakeholder trust — measured against the SUSAH framework. When we fall short, Sarama demands we say so clearly and publicly.

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## The Goal: A New Standard for African-Led Impact

SUSAH is not a rejection of accountability. It is an expansion of what accountability means one that includes ancestors, communities, land, culture, and future generations alongside shareholders and regulators.

RiseUp Africa's long-term goal is to establish SUSAH as a recognized framework for African and Afro-descendant-led organizations globally, a credible, rigorous, and culturally grounded alternative to frameworks that were not built with us in mind.

We invite entrepreneurs, investors, community leaders, and institutions who share this vision to engage with us, not just to adopt a framework, but to join a movement of communities reclaiming the terms on which they grow, govern, and give.

***"I am because we are."***

— *Ubuntu Proverb, the heart of SUSAH*

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