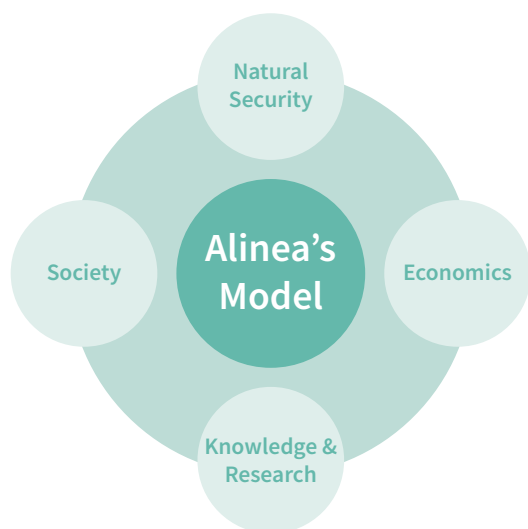


# Alinea: A Systems-Based Approach to Transforming Conservation

## Introduction

Africa's natural wealth is under siege. From wildlife trafficking to environmental crime, the continent faces escalating threats that not only endanger biodiversity but also destabilise communities and undermine long-term economic development. In this context, conventional conservation models often siloed, fragmented, and externally driven, fall short.

Alinea offers a bold alternative to these models: a systems-based, landscape-level approach that tackles conservation not in isolation, but as part of a broader web of interlinked priorities, which include security, governance, livelihoods, and ecological resilience. Through our model that connects funders with locally rooted organisations, Alinea is building a future where conservation is not only effective but also equitable, community-led, and economically sustainable.



## The Problem: Fragmented Solutions to Interconnected Challenges

Conservation in Africa is a deeply interconnected challenge that touches on governance, security, justice, inequality, and economic exclusion. Organised criminal networks exploit institutional gaps, weak enforcement, and governance vacuums, while poverty and marginalisation continue to drive unsustainable resource use. In this context, environmental degradation becomes both a symptom and a driver of broader systemic dysfunction.

**Social challenges are not like ordinary problems, the ones we are trained to solve in school... Social challenges are inextricably linked to historical contexts and the natural environments in which they manifest, meaning that we cannot address these challenges in isolation.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Rayner, C., & Bonnici, F. (2021). The Systems Work of Social Change: How to Harness Connection, Context, and Power to Cultivate Deep and Enduring Change.

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Despite being closest to these challenges, grassroots organisations and local institutions remain under-resourced, undervalued, and disconnected from the broader systems in which they operate. As Rayner and Bonnici observe, “the people most immersed in the context of a social problem are often the least empowered to solve it.” These actors hold deep contextual knowledge and community legitimacy, yet are routinely excluded from decision-making and funding structures that shape conservation.

This has resulted in fragmented interventions, well-intentioned but isolated, failing to shift underlying systems. Conservation continues to be treated as a technical problem to be solved through predefined outputs and deliverables, rather than a dynamic, adaptive issue requiring long-term engagement and co-created solutions.

To achieve lasting impact, conservation must be reframed as part of a wider system of human development. This means recognising the feedback loops between ecological health, social equity, local agency, and institutional strength. The focus must shift from preserving landscapes in isolation to investing in the people, networks, and capabilities that will sustain them across generations.

Alinea begins with this premise: that transformative conservation is only possible when solutions are designed by, with, and for the communities most affected, and when the system itself is restructured to support their leadership, not bypass it.

## The Alinea Model: Systems Thinking in Action

Alinea addresses these challenges through a **systems-based model** that prioritises:

### 1 Collaboration over isolation

Alinea works across more than 11 countries, supporting grassroots NGOs, enforcement agencies, and government-linked entities to co-develop landscape-wide strategies rooted in shared goals and mutual accountability.

### 2 Contextual, not copy-paste solutions

Every intervention is grounded in local realities and designed by those closest to the problem. Solutions are adaptive, not imported, ensuring legitimacy, sustainability, and uptake.

### 3 Capacity over dependency

Beyond financial support, Alinea offers legal, governance, and technical assistance. We aim to strengthen institutions so they can endure, evolve, and lead.

### 4 Financial innovation

Through differentiated funding mechanisms, the Roots Fund, Collective Fund, and Systems Catalyst Fund, Alinea supports organisations at various stages of maturity and strategic readiness. This approach reduces donor risk while unlocking new channels, including nature-based finance and blended investment.

“The thinking that got us here will not get us to where we want to go.”



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## Delivering Impact Across Landscapes

Alinea's platform has helped catalyse change across multiple African regions by strengthening systems, not just supporting projects. Notable areas of progress include:

- **Systems Disruption:** Enabled cross-border coordination between government and civil society actors to disrupt regional wildlife trafficking networks, shifting enforcement from isolated operations to strategic, intelligence-led collaboration.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** Supported improvements in legal frameworks and prosecution outcomes through tailored training, legal support, and justice sector engagement, enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of environmental governance.
- **Community Resilience:** Partnered with organisations working directly with communities to reduce human-wildlife conflict and build adaptive responses that improve local security and ecological stewardship.
- **Technology Integration:** Facilitated adoption of shared conservation technologies such as EarthRanger and SMART, coupled with training and peer exchange, to improve landscape-level monitoring, data use, and informed decision-making.

The impact of this model is not in isolated interventions, but in the **ecosystems of trust, resilience, and leadership** that now span some of Africa's most vulnerable and critical landscapes.



## Looking Forward: A Scalable, Sustainable Future

As the scale of environmental crime continues to grow, Alinea is positioning itself to meet the moment. Priorities for 2025 and beyond include:

- Scaling grassroots leadership through expanded financial and technical support.
- Driving policy change to improve governance and legal frameworks for environmental protection.
- Unlocking new conservation finance through nature-based investments and public-private partnerships.
- Growing our partner network, platform meetings, and regional alliances to amplify shared learning and collective impact.

Our learning so far has made it clear that systems change does not emerge from isolated programmes or technical success; it grows when donors, implementers, and communities commit to shared principles that sustain transformation across the long term. This requires a fundamental shift in how we operate, support, and evaluate success:

Fund long-term, flexible work, not just fixed outputs.

- Value collaboration and coordination, not just innovation or scale.
- Invest in institutions, networks, and people, not only projects.
- Measure changes in systems behaviour – not just isolated outcomes.

These insights are already informing how Alinea evolves its platform and partner model: enabling others to lead, reducing fragmentation, and helping to align diverse actors around a shared systems vision.

### Redefining Conservation Through Systems Change

Alinea is redefining what it means to work at the intersection of conservation, community well-being, and systems change. Its approach is not about scaling a single organisation; it's about enabling many to succeed together.

Alinea is not simply a funder or implementer; it is a platform for systems change. By strengthening and connecting institutions, aligning fragmented efforts, and enabling leadership at every level, we can help make conservation effective, enduring, and deeply rooted in local legitimacy.

**For more information or to become a partner in this mission, contact: [admin@alinea.network](mailto:admin@alinea.network).**

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