CHANGING MINDSETS

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AS THE PRIMARY BARRIER TO PUBLIC SECTOR PERFORMANCE REFORM

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CONFERENCE THEME

AGILE PUBLIC **ADMINISTRATION: PARTNERSHIP AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

FOR CITIZEN CENTRIC SERVICE DELIVERY

KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

OUTLINE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Globally accepted performance management reforms are not effective when organisational culture remains unchanged.

In Africa, entrenched bureaucratic cultures continue to undermine reforms. Khumalo & Marie (2024, p. 8); Abdulai & Hulme 2014.

Evidence from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria & South Africa shows that **hierarchical authority** and **procedural compliance weaken** reform outcomes.
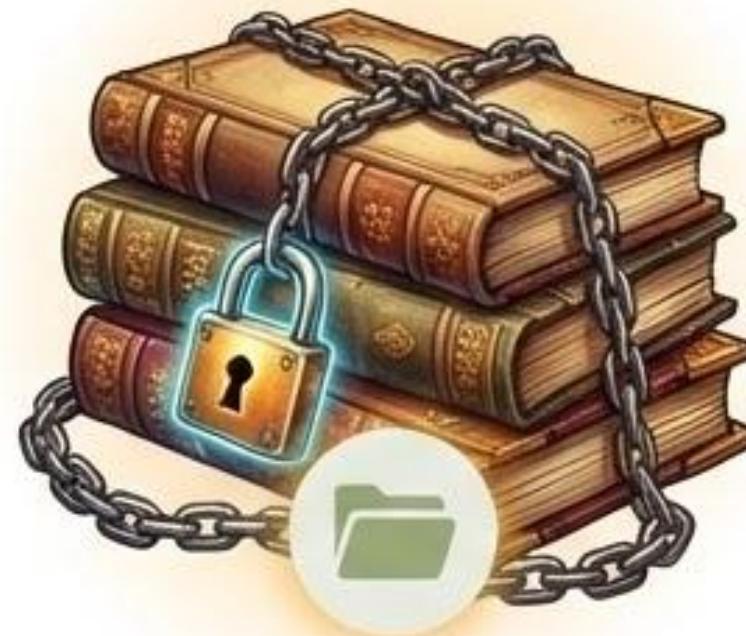
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Cameron & Quinn's (2011) Competing Values Framework.

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	IDENTIFY the key cultural mechanisms that systematically undermine reform efforts
	EXAMINE how hierarchical culture inhibits the practical implementation of new systems
	GENERATE culturally grounded recommendations for sustainable reform

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Reforms globally fail when culture remains unchanged (Grindle, 2017)
- AU Agenda 2063: mindset change foundation for institutional transformation (AU,2015)
- African reforms show procedural compliance without behavioural change: SERVICOM Nigeria, Kenya Performance Contracting

- African states show dominant patterns of hierarchical control, risk aversion and weak accountability undermining reforms like RBM and service charters: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa (Gasela 2022)
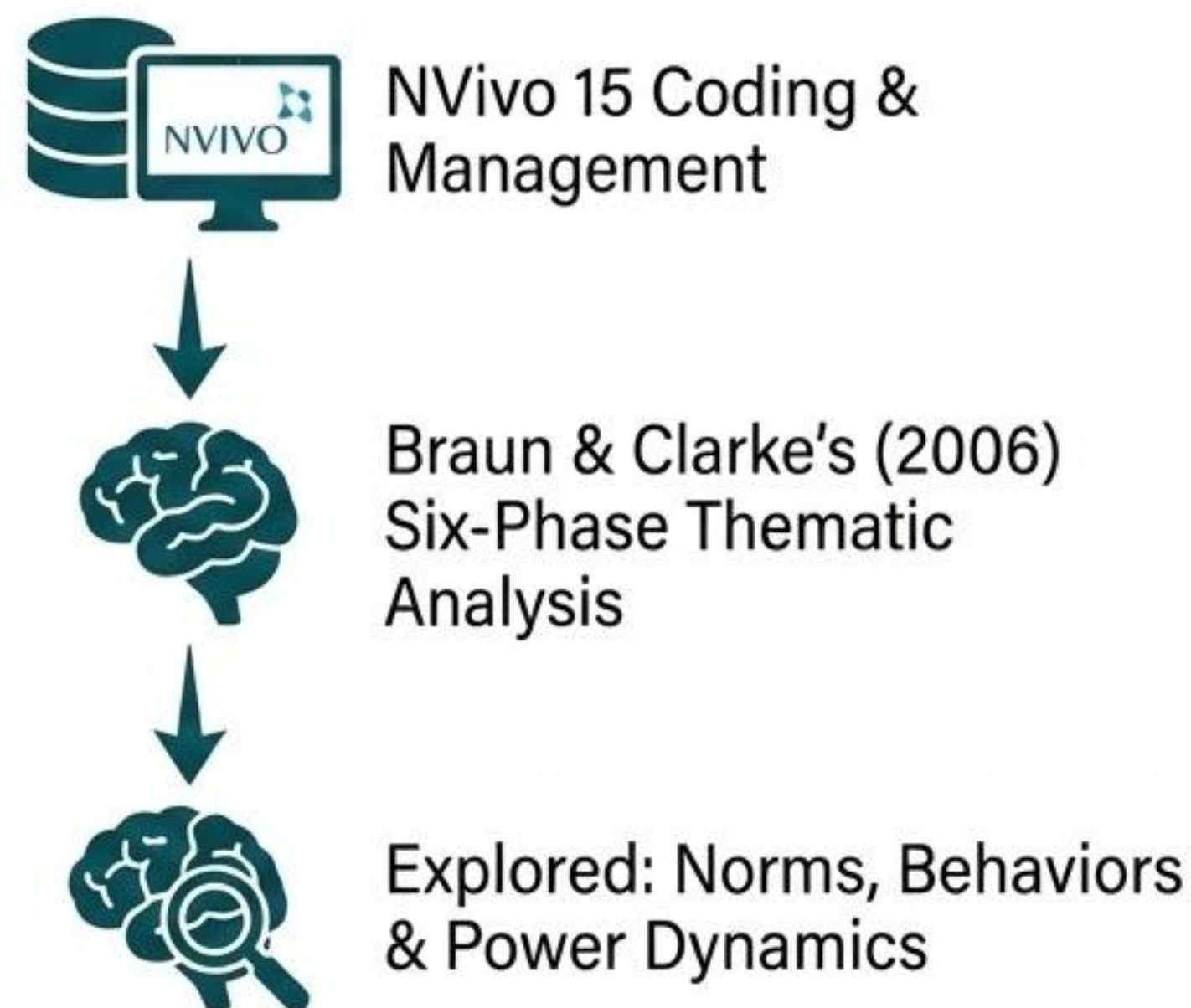- Gap: No study on Eswatini's cultural barriers
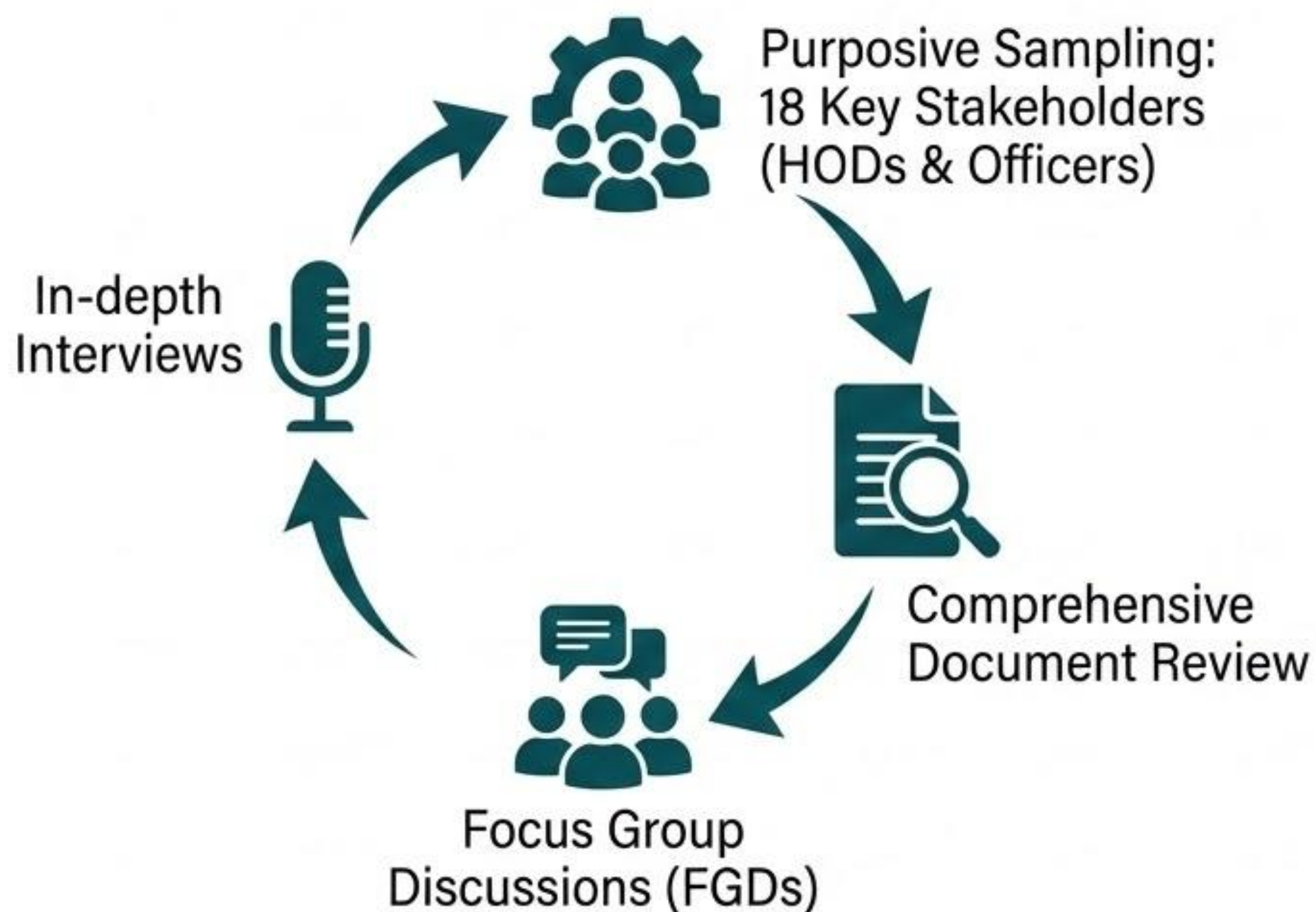
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Five key cultural barriers and a cross-cutting insight

Hierarchical Authority

Centralized decision-making, limited staff autonomy.

Risk Aversion

Blame culture discourages innovation and experimentation.

Ritualism

Reforms treated as symbolic exercises with minimal behavioral change.

Disengagement

Exclusion from reform design has reduced ownership and commitment.

Fragmentation

Silo mentality has weakened cross-departmental reform alignment.

Cross-Cutting Insight

Translanguaging used as cultural agency and resistance.

DISCUSSIONS

Hierarchical Authority & Reform Ritualism

- Reforms remain embedded within centralised authority structures.
- These structures contradict decentralised participatory governance models.
- Hierarchical authority acts as a "regulative pillar" (Scott, 2014), establishing conditions for other barriers.
- Where hierarchical authority and risk aversion combine, reform ritualism emerges.
- Reforms function as symbolic exercises (Isomorphic mimicry).
- Example: Nigeria's Servicom service charters operate as compliance mechanisms with minimal behavioral change (BPSR, 2024).

DISCUSSIONS (Cont.)

Risk Aversion & Elite-Driven Reforms

- Risk aversion appears not as simple resistance to change but as an adaptive response to structures that stifle deviation.
- Supports Cameron and Quinn's (2011) argument that hierarchy cultures obstruct adhocracy traits required for reform.
- Across African contexts, reforms operate as elite-driven initiatives that marginalise frontline actors.
- Reforms are typically introduced as top-down directives.
- In Eswatini, findings highlight a lack of formal mechanisms for consultation or follow-up.
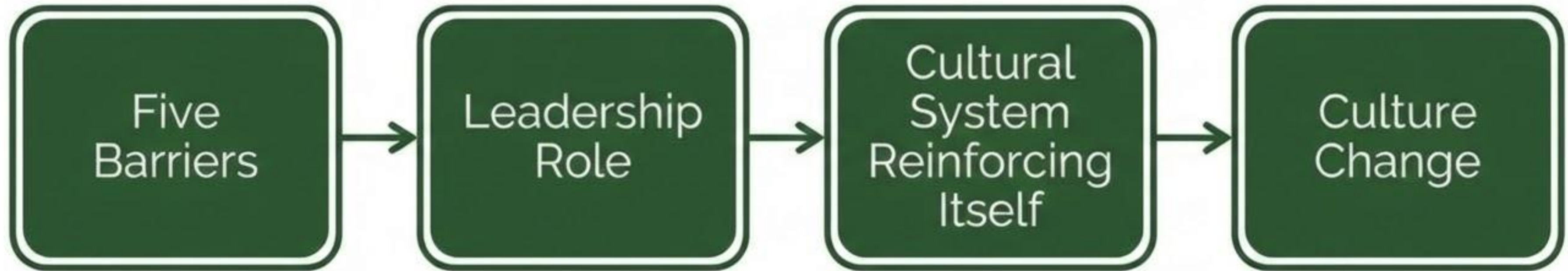
DISCUSSIONS

- Document analysis reveals reforms in Eswatini and Nigeria are presented as centrally driven projects with minimal space for staff engagement or bottom-up participation.

- In Eswatini, officer testimonies revealed that hierarchical exclusion fosters disengagement.

- Reforms are systematically undermined by departmental silos and weak inter-agency collaboration, despite rhetorical commitments to integration.

CONCLUSION

| Five Barriers | → | Leadership Role | → | Cultural System Reinforcing Itself | → | Culture Change |

For sustainable organizational reform in Eswatini, a shift in organizational culture is necessary. True transformation cannot take root until the deep-rooted barriers of hierarchy, risk aversion, and disengagement are effectively addressed.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Mandate cultural diagnostics before any new reform rollout

Institutionalize cross-departmental collaboration

Embed bottom-up participation mechanisms

Create open feedback forums to challenge top-down control

Link leadership's accountability to cultural change metrics

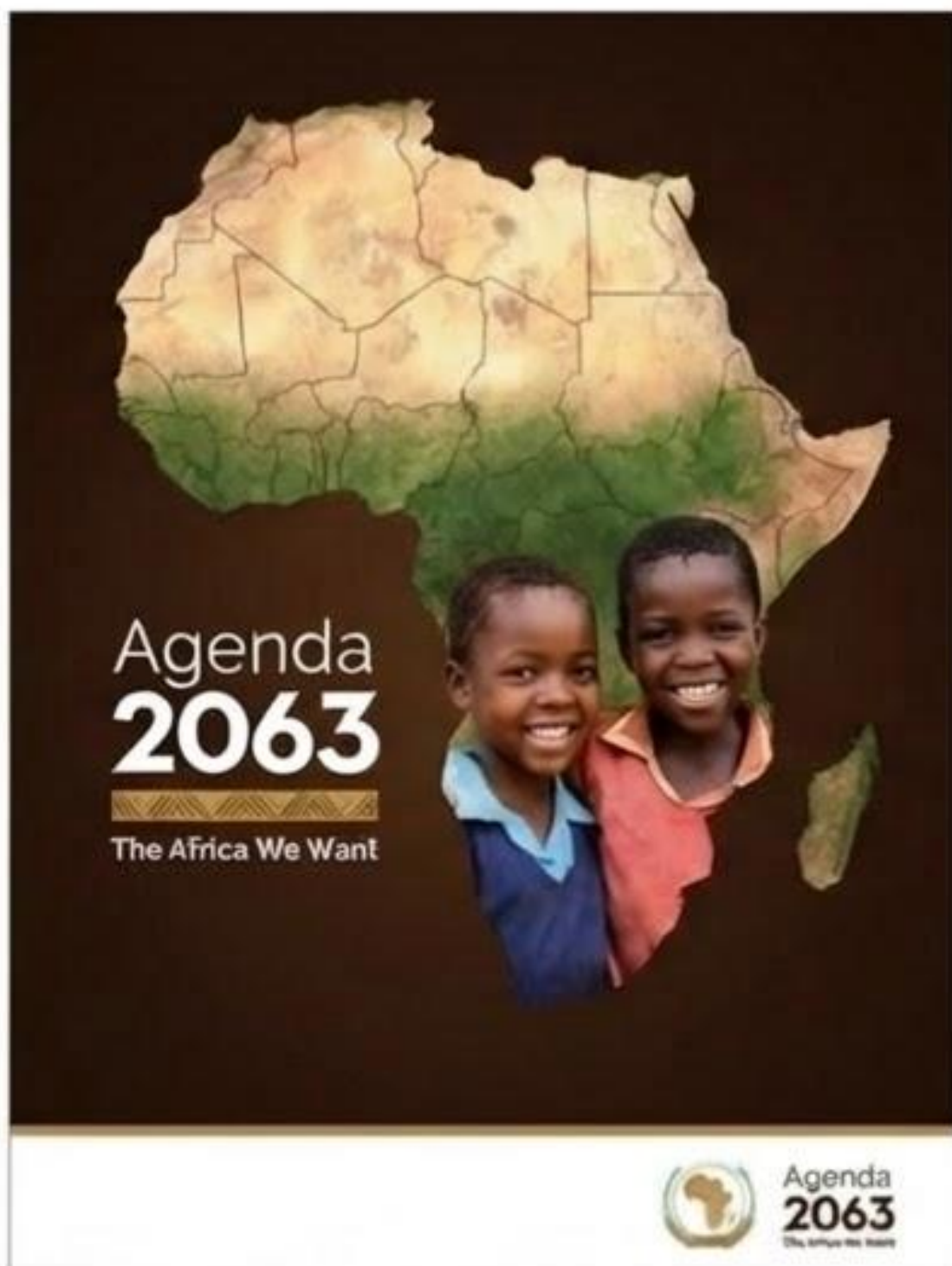Reward innovation and initiative, not just compliance

RECOMMENDATIONS

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Reforms should shift from symbolic to substantive

Introduce cultural change KPIs in PMS

Strengthen multilingual communication

Promote adaptive leadership and risk tolerance

Agenda 2063:
The Africa We Want

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THANK YOU

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