



Inclusive Digitalization in Eastern and Southern Africa Project

(IDEA)

Environmental and Social Quarterly Progress Report

July – September 2025

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASCENT:	Accelerating Sustainable & Clean Energy Access Transformation
COMESA:	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
ESF:	Environmental and Social Framework
ESCP:	Environmental and Social Commitment Plan
ESHS:	Environment, Social, Health and Safety
E&S:	Environment and Social
ESS:	Environmental and Social Safeguards
GRM:	Grievance Redress Mechanism
IDA:	International Development Association
IDEA	Inclusive Digitalization in Eastern and Southern Africa
LMP:	Labor Management Plan
KPIs:	Key Performance Indicators
MPA:	Multiphase Programmatic Approach
PIU:	Project Implementation Unit
PSC :	Project Steering Committee (IDEA)
SEP:	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
SEA/SH:	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
WB:	World Bank

1.0 SUMMARY

Inclusive Digitalization in Eastern & Southern Africa (IDEA) is a regional Multiphase Programmatic Approach (MPA) for Eastern and Southern Africa (AFE), funded by the World Bank. It includes three focus areas of : (i) building the foundations for affordable and quality broadband connectivity, data hosting capability, enabling access to digital technology and digital services including (ii) interoperable and safe data platforms and trusted online transactions at national and regional level; (iii) advancing high-impact digitally-enabled applications in priority sectors (with an initial focus on social protection and financial services), digital skills and competencies to increase productive digital usage and enhance economic and social activities. It will be implemented through country-specific programs and regional platforms. Each participating country will sign a separate agreement with the World Bank and will have its own funds for the program's implementation. The regional platforms are implemented by COMESA and the World Bank. This quarterly report captures progress on the implementation of environmental and social safeguards activities carried out by COMESA under the regional platforms for the period April – June 2025.

1.1 Basic Project Data

Table 1 gives a summary of the basic data for the Project and financing sources.

Table 1: Basic Data for the Project

Project Title	Inclusive Digitalization in Eastern and Southern Africa Project using the Multiphase Programmatic Approach (P502532)
Executing Agency	COMESA
Financing Sources	IBRD/ International Development Association (IDA)
Expected completion Date	31 October 2032

COMESA will implement a \$ 10 million regional platform consisting of five components indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Financial Architecture - COMESA IDEA Platform

Component (ID)	Cost (USD)
Regional Harmonization and Planning Platform.	5 470 000.00
Regional Knowledge and Capacity Building	1 400 000.00
Regional Project Coordination Management	3 120 000.00
Total	10 000 000.00

1.2 Project E&S Category and Information Disclosure

The overall project E&S category was rated as **moderate**. The Environmental and Social (E&S) documents prepared and disclosed on the COMESA IDEA project website are the Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP) and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP)

1.3 Status on ESCP Implementation

Table 3 summarizes progress on activities implemented during the reporting period in accordance with the 2025 work plan.

Table 3: Implementation of E&S activities in Annual Work Plan

Project Component	Activity	Status (Pending initiation, in progress, finalized)	Comments (% of achievement for activity)
	Stakeholder Engagement	Review and updating of the stakeholder engagement plan	85%
		Development of communication strategy completed. Ready for implementation	100%
	Development of IDEA Website and Digital Communication	Concept Note and template developed Work in progress with assistance of COMESA IT Division.	60%

1.4 Applicable WB Operational Safeguards Standards

Table 4 shows the ESS operational standards triggered under the Project.

Table 4: ESS standards triggered by the COMESA-IDEA Programme

Operational Standard #	Safeguard Details	Applicable to IDEA	
		Triggered (Yes/No)	Justification
ESS 1	Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts	Yes	COMESA is obligated to assess, manage and monitor environmental and social risks and impacts associated with its activities to achieve environmental and social outcomes consistent with the WB ESF
ESS 2	Labor and Working Conditions	Yes	COMESA recruited direct workers under the PIU and others are expected to be engaged as contracted workers to provide consultancy services under the Project. COMESA is expected to implement the LMP in a

Operational Standard #	Safeguard Details	Applicable to IDEA	
		Triggered (Yes/No)	Justification
			manner consistent with the WB ESF
ESS 10	Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure	Yes	COMESA activities under the IDEA programme can impact different stakeholder groups and individuals. A Stakeholder Engagement Plan must be implemented to comply with the requirements of the WB ESF.

1.5 Main E&S KPIs of the Project

Table 5 gives a summary of the main reporting points in line with the E&S Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) of the Project.

Table 5: E&S KPI reporting points

S/N	Main E&S KPI Reporting Points	Status
1	E&S Staffing	The E & S IDEA staffing comprises three experts. Two of the experts are from the COMESA ASCENT PIU responsible for implementing the ESCP of the Project. These include the Environmental Specialist, Social Safeguards Specialist and the third one is the Stakeholder Engagement & Communication Expert from the IDEA project.
2	Contractor Staffing	No contractor(s) were recruited under the Project. Hence, no contractor E&S implementation reports were generated
3	E&S Reporting	Third quarterly report
4	Capacity Building/ Sensitization Activities	IDEA PCU staff attended the ASCENT Week with the major aim of learning the best practices and getting experience of undertaking such an event for the proposed IDEA Day next year. In this respect, IDEA staff members were involved the logistics of the ASCENT Week.
5	Physical missions on E&S related activities	No physical missions were undertaken during the reporting period
6	Grievances/Complaints	Zero (0) complaints were received
7	Incidents and Accidents	Zero (0) incidents or accidents were reported
8	Cumulative expenditure on ESCP implementation as Percentage of the total annual budget	Zero Cumulative expenditure
9	Overall E&S Performance	E&S performance of the project is satisfactory

1.6 Changes to the E&S risks during the reporting period

No new risks or impacts were recorded. Hence, the project retained the “Moderate” E&S risk category. The project will continue to monitor environmental and social risks, which include health and safety, gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH), working conditions, etc.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 About IDEA

The overall objective of the IDEA project is to Increase access to, and inclusive use of the internet and digitally enabled services in Eastern and Southern Africa.

The use of the Multiphase Programmatic Approach (MPA) MPA allows IDEA to ‘Go Big’, pooling financing of US\$2.48 billion across multiple recipients and achieving impact at scale toward regional digital development and universal digital access in Eastern and Southern Africa region by 2030. The MPA will bring together 15+ countries, RECs, development partners, multilateral financial institutions (MFIs), IFC, and MIGA under one program, which is expected to accelerate the achievement of universal digital access and usage, including increasing the number of people with new or enhanced Internet access by 180 million and the number of people using digitally enabled services by a 100 million in a long-term engagement estimated at eight years.

The use of the MPA enables IDEA to help participating countries to ‘Go Fast’ through a customizable menu of options strengthening incremental local capacity. The MPA will offer a ‘menu of options’ of investments, technical assistance results indicators for countries to select from, based on their needs and priorities. It will offer opportunities to simplify and standardize interventions that support key regional priorities, such as private sector engagement, climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, and other interventions that support gender parity and inclusion; and to access regional financing facilities to accelerate scaling interventions. Using phases will allow countries to join when they are ready, and help learning between peers and build in incremental capacity in participating countries. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) will be conducted using real-time, short-term and longer-term methodologies

The MPA will follow a strategic sequencing, beginning by targeting countries that have less than 50 percent 4G coverage, followed by those that are needed for regional expansion and countries where existing operations can be scaled toward accelerating universal digital access. The duration of the entire IDEA MPA is expected to take place over an estimated period of eight years, as countries will be expected to join in three batches (FY24–26). Each operation is expected to last up to six years based on the duration of the new generation of digital projects, which cover more than one pillar proposed under the MPA. The operation under the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) is expected to last over the entire Program duration to ensure Program-level monitoring up to completion.

2.2 IDEA First Phase Operation

The first phase of the MPA will include four operations for COMESA, DRC, Angola, and Malawi. The rationale for starting the IDEA MPA with COMESA is to ensure that an appropriate Regional Economic Community (REC) can lead regional coordination of IDEA and create key foundations and a mechanism for learning for regional implementation.

2.3 Project Objective of the COMESA Component

The overall objective of the COMESA operation is to enhance the enabling environment for expanding inclusive internet access and usage across the region.

2.3.1 COMESA Operation Components

Component 1: Regional Harmonization and Planning Platform: This component aims to enhance the enabling environment for regional digital market development and integration and create a platform to inform and mobilize investments for regional digital infrastructure. Activities under this component include:

Component 2: Regional Knowledge and Capacity Building: This component aims to support holistic knowledge transfer throughout the program cycle, to build capacity and support institutional strengthening for participating countries in a sustainable manner and to increase the efficiency and impact of the program activities by leveraging regional synergies between countries.

Component 3: Regional Project Coordination and Management: This component will set up the IDEA's regional Program Coordination Unit (PCU) at COMESA. Ensures efficient and coordinated implementation of the IDEA Program at the regional level.

2.4 Components with E&S Implications

Project components under the COMESA-IDEA programme which have the potential to generate environmental and social risks are the Regional Harmonization and Planning Platform (Component 1) and the Regional Knowledge and Capacity Building (Component 2).

2.5 Progress on key Project activities

The COMESA-IDEA Platform was launched from 07- 09 April 2025 in Lusaka, Zambia. The following highlights some progress on project implementation:

- ~~a.~~
- ~~b.~~a. Recruitment of Project Staff is underway. During the period under review, offer letters and contracts were given to the successful applicants for the following posts : – M & E Expert, Project Coordinator, Digital Infrastructure Planning Expert, Digital Policy and Regulatory Expert.
- ~~c.~~b. Evaluations of Expression of Interest for policy and regulatory framework for artificial intelligence (AI) and Digital Inclusion (DI) strategy were completed during the period under review..
- ~~d.~~c. The Concept Note to develop and set up the IDEA website was developed. The website is the process of being developed with assistance from the COMESA IT Division. A Template was developed to capture information to be input in the website. During the period under review content development started and is now work in progress.
- ~~e.~~d. The Draft IDEA Project Communication Strategy with E& S issues is being developed and is likely to be approved by the Bank in the next quarter.

- f.e. Review and update of the Stakeholder engagement Plan with E& S issues is underway and is work in progress. This is likely to be approved in the next quarter
- g.f. Review ToRs for the Least Cost Option, and the IDEA Technical Working Group for compliance in relation to E & S issues. This was done with technical advice from E & S experts from the ASCENT Project.

3.0 COMPLIANCE WITH THE FINANCING AGREEMENT

3.1 Status of compliance with the ESCP

Table 6 provides the status of compliance with the ESCP.

Table 6: Compliance with the ESCP

Instrument or Covenant	Compliance Type	Requirements or Conditions of Covenant	Status of compliance
Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP)	Regular Reporting	Prepare and submit to the Bank quarterly monitoring reports on the environmental, social, health and safety (ESHS) performance of the Project, including but not limited to the implementation of the ESCP	Compliant: This report is the second E&S performance report submitted to the Bank. The PCU will ensure that the quarterly reports are consistently submitted to the Bank within agreed timeframes
ESCP	Incidents and Accidents	Notify the Association no later than 48 hours after learning of the incident or accident and no later than 24 hours after any severe incident/fatal accident, including SEA/SH incidents	Compliant: No incidents or accidents were reported during the reporting period
ESCP	Consulting Firms Monthly Reports	Submit the contractor monthly reports to the Bank upon request and as annexes to the reports to be submitted under action A above.	Compliant: No contractor was recruited during the reporting period
ESCP	Organisational Structure	Recruit and maintain an environmental expert with OHS expertise, a social expert, and a stakeholder engagement/communication expert and train/sensitize them on the World Bank's ESF/ESSs requirements Maintain project implementation.	Compliant: There was no change in the organizational structure. The COMESA IDEA PIU recruited the Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Expert. The Environmental Specialist and Social Safeguards Specialist are from ASCENT PIU.

Instrument or Covenant	Compliance Type	Requirements or Conditions of Covenant	Status of compliance
			These experts constitute the E&S team
ESCP	Organisational Structure	Ensure that the consultancy, studies capacity building, training, and any other technical assistance activities under the Project are carried out in accordance with terms of reference that are consistent with the ESSs	In progress: E &S team will ensure activities are carried out in TORs that are consistent with ESS
ESCP	Environmental and Social Instruments	Prepare, disclose, adopt, and implement the ESCP, SEP and LMP in a form and substance acceptable to the Bank	Compliant: ESCP, SEP are disclosed on the COMESA website, and are being implemented
ESCP	Technical Assistance	Ensure that the consultancy, studies (including feasibility studies, if applicable), capacity building, training, and any other technical assistance activities under the Project are carried out in accordance with terms of reference acceptable to the Bank, that are consistent with the ESSs	In Progress: PIU will review outputs of technical studies including feasibility study reports were applicable
ESCP	Labor Management Procedures	Adopt and implement the Labor Management Procedures (LMP) for the Project,	In Progress: Aspects of the LMP will be incorporated in consultancy procurement ToRs and contracts with consultants
ESCP	Grievance Redress Mechanism	Establish and operationalise the Grievance Redress Mechanism prior to engaging Project workers and thereafter maintain it	Partially Compliant: The COMESA ASCENT and IDEA PCUs are updating the project GRM to ensure it is sensitive to the SEA/SH. In addition, the

Instrument or Covenant	Compliance Type	Requirements or Conditions of Covenant	Status of compliance
		throughout Project implementation.	workplace GRM will be developed
ESCP	Stakeholder Engagement	Implement the IDEA Stakeholder Engagement Plan	Compliant: IDEA Stakeholder Engagement Activities are being implemented
ESCP	Training and Capacity Support	Undertaking training of project workers in line with the provisions of the ESF	Compliant: no training done this quarter.

3.2 Implementation of the Grievance Redress Mechanism

The Project did not receive any grievance from the stakeholders as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7: Details of the grievances/complaints from the stakeholders

Description of issues/complaints received during the reporting period	Date of receipt (DD-MM-Yr)	Description of resolution	Status of issues/complaints
0.00	-	-	-

3.3 Implementation of the IDEA Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Table 8 shows stakeholder engagement activities undertaken during the reporting period.

Table 8: Activities in implementing the Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Activities implemented during the reporting period	Dates and venues of engagement activities	Engagement Method	Purpose of the Meeting	Categories of stakeholders involved in the engagement process
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3.4 E&S risks from unplanned and emergency situations

No risks from unplanned or emergency situations were reported

4.0 CAPACITY BUILDING & SENSITISATION ACTIVITIES

4.1 Capacity and Sensitization Activities

As part of efforts to strengthen institutional capacity and promote cross-programme learning, the IDEA team participated in the ASCENT Week, held from 22-26 September 2025. The event provided a platform for staff to engage in thematic sessions, panel discussions, and practical workshops focused on Digital Monitoring Reporting and Verification, Financing mechanisms, digital tools, Environmental and Social safeguards, Monitoring and Evaluation etc. Through this participation, the team managed to:

- i) Learn best practices for organizing similar future events.
- ii) Collaborate with ASCENT on event logistics and management.
- iii) Support ASCENT in event coordination, media management, and material distribution
- iv) Exchange knowledge on ASCENT's activities and identify resources beneficial to COMESA Member States.
- v) Gain technical insights on shared policy and regulatory issues.
- vi) Learn effective strategies for awareness, publicity, and stakeholder engagement.
- vii) Understand how to secure Member State participation in the IDEA Project.
- viii) Develop a harmonized approach for joint activities such as sensitization, publicity, and visibility.

~~The IDEA Project conducted sensitization activities during the reporting period which are described below. The need for IDEA to Attend the ASCENT Week was centred on the following:~~

- ~~ii) — To obtain lessons learnt and best practices in organizing such future events for IDEA~~
- ~~i) — ASCENT and IDEA are currently working together on the development and implementation of logistics of the ASCENT Week.~~
- ~~ii) — Assist ASCENT (Daniel) in event management, Media Management, distribution of promotional materials among others as the expected participants are over 400.~~
- ~~iii) — Get and share knowledge on the ASCENT Activities and learn how any available resources/interventions that Member States can benefit through COMESA IDEA PCU.~~
- ~~iv) — Get technical knowledge on some aspects of the issues involved and which we commonly share such as Policy and Regulatory aspects among others~~
- ~~v) — How to raise awareness, sensitization, publicity of the IDEA project to all stakeholders by learning how ASCENT Project is doing it.~~
- ~~vi) — Learn how to obtain a buy in from member states interested in the IDEA Project by learning how ASCENT Project is going around it.~~
- ~~vii) — Come with harmonized methodology in the implementation of some common activities such as sensitisation, publicity and visibility.~~
- ~~viii)i) — Assist ASCENT during the event with technical expertise~~

2. Expected Results

- ~~i) — Lessons and best practices learnt~~

- ~~ii) Harmonized methodology in the implementation of some common activities Program activities.~~
- ~~iii) Lessons learnt on how to get a buy in from key stakeholders~~
- ~~iv) Working together between ASCENT and IDEA on a project approach strengthened~~
- ~~v) Technical issues obtained~~

5.0 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

5.1 Overall Self-rating on E&S Performance

The E&S performance of the Project during the reporting period is satisfactory.

5.2 Key activities planned for the Next Quarter

Item Code	Action Item	Objectives	Timeline
01	Develop the GRM manual and an Accountability Response Framework for IDEA project	To ensure effective management of grievances and accountability.	30 December 2025
02	Finalize on the IDEA Project website.	To promote, publicize and make IDEA project visible among the key stakeholders	30 December 2025
03	Review and update the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) for IDEA	To promote effective and meaningful stakeholder engagement	30 December 2025
04	Establish and roll out the Worker Grievance GRM for the IDEA project.	To establish a formal complaint process that project staff will use when a project activity negatively impact them	30 November 2025
05	Translation, design and disclosure of GRM communication materials on the website	To ensure transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders	30 -December 2025
06	Develop the Communication and Visibility Plan for IDEA	To sharpen the communication tool of the IDEA Project	30 December 2025

