



FINAL

**TERMS OF REFERENCE (ToRs) FOR THE IDEA TECHNICAL WORKING
GROUP (TWG) FOR THE INCLUSIVE DIGITALISATION IN EASTERN AND
SOUTHERN AFRICA (IDEA) PROJECT**

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Project Overview

Inclusive Digitalization in Eastern & Southern Africa (IDEA) is a regional Multiphase Programmatic Approach (MPA) for Eastern and Southern Africa (AFE) with financial and technical support from the World Bank. The program focuses on three key 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.

The MPA sets out an ambitious agenda towards achieving universal digital access in AFE through a programmatic approach comprising key pillars and 'menu of options.' The initial Phase-1 countries of the IDEA Programme include Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Malawi, while Zambia has joined the programme under its second phase.

1.2 Scope of Activities for COMESA

The Project Development Objective (PDO) for the COMESA operation is to enhance enabling environment for increasing access to and inclusive usage of the Internet and digitally enabled services in Eastern and Southern Africa. This operation will monitor progress toward the overall Program Development Objective (PDO) indicators.

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:

- a) **Regional TA and training:** developing regionally harmonized regulatory and policy frameworks, guidelines and standards to promote digital access and usage and promote private sector mobilization for digital infrastructure development and digitally enabled services, applying inclusive and climate smart approaches. It will finance technical and legal consultancy, training and capacity building, including
 - i) The preparation of a regional Digital Inclusion Action Plan and associated draft regulations and policies covering areas such as digital safeguards, digital literacy, digital financial services etc.;
 - ii) TA to enhance the implementation of a regional roaming framework and the development of a regional model to enhance spectrum management; (iii) the development of policy and regulatory guidelines as well as standards to enable and promote the safe use of AI and other emerging technologies, including for climate adaptation and mitigation;
 - iii) Legal and TA to enable the cross-border flow of data to support cross-border e-commerce; and
 - iv) The development of policy, regulatory frameworks and guidelines at the regional level to enable and promote private capital mobilization for digital infrastructure with recommendations for possible financing facilities and instruments to expand digital access at the regional level, which can be capitalized in future phases of the Program, and where feasible, leveraging applicable financing schemes under ASCENT.

b) Planning platform and models

- i) Supporting integrated infrastructure planning to cover digital infrastructure and demand for internet connectivity through TA and the development of geospatial mapping tools; and
- ii) Support the development of least cost option to extend Internet access to cross-border areas and priority public entities, such as schools and health clinics, with energy access and climate implications in mind, which can be implemented in subsequent phases at the country or regional level.

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. Activities under this component include:

a) Toolkits

- i) The development of practical tools to support Member States and other countries participating in the IDEA MPA in project preparation and implementation readiness, including the development of templates, draft terms of reference and project management tools for procurement, financial management, budgeting, environmental and social risk and impact management, grievance redress mechanism; and
- ii) Establishment of a regional monitoring and evaluation (M&E) platform, leveraging innovative data collection and evidence generation at the regional level.

b) Capacity building, knowledge sharing, training for participating countries and COMESA Member States covering:

- i) TA to inform the implementation of digital safeguards and the upcoming COMESA's e-commerce framework; and
- ii) procurement, financial management, E&S management, quality assurance, data collection and analysis, M&E. It will also support wide knowledge sharing and awareness raising about the Program with communication and results stories, leveraging the 50 million Women African Speak platform under COMESA, to ensure the gender inclusion, and the COMESA Business Council, to support private sector engagement.

Component 3: Regional Project Coordination and Management: This component will set up the IDEA's regional Program Coordination Unit (PCU) to:

- i) Coordinate with participating countries;
- ii) Validate and report on the Program's results framework; and
- iii) Oversee the implementation of the regional grant to COMESA, including fiduciary.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND ORGANIZATION SET UP

The activities under the IDEA program will be planned for and implemented through successive Annual Work Plans and Budgets (AWPBs) prepared by COMESA IDEA PCU in collaboration with the Bank. The AWPBs will contain an implementation plan, a clear indication of the activities being implemented by the COMESA PCU and with participating Member

States. COMESA IDEA PCU shall implement the activities as per the arrangements stipulated in the Grant Agreement.

To guarantee ownership, adequate coordination and management of the programme activities by the key stakeholders, the programme governance structure is composed of the following:

- a) Project Steering Committee: The PSC oversees project oversight, guidance and monitoring of implementation. The PSC is also responsible for development of synergies and complementarities with other actions to ensure attainment of the project objectives.
- b) Project Technical Working (TWG): The TWG will also be set up, responsible for management and monitoring of programme activities and coordination of administrative, financial and human resources at technical level to ensure smooth programme implementation. The TWG will provide information and advice to the PSC
- c) Project Coordinating Unit (PCU): The PCU is responsible for the day-to-day management of the programme activities. Long term and short-term staff shall be recruited to assist in the programme implementation management.

3. THE TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

During the 1st PSC Meeting held on 8th April 2025 in Lusaka, Zambia, it was recommended as one of the resolutions, that a Technical Working Group be set up. The Programme TWG responsible for management and monitoring of programme activities and coordination of administrative, financial and human resources at technical level to ensure smooth programme implementation. The Technical Working Group will provide information and advice to the PSC.

3.1 Specific Functions

The specific functions of the TWG include:

- a) Contribute to understanding and resolution of technical related issues for implementation of the Programme;
- b) Act as advisory forum to provide guidance on technical matters related to the design and implementation of the various activities;
- c) Facilitate discussions to assess and review proposals and technologies, addressing technical issues relating to the implementation of the activities and providing oversight of implementation activities and readiness;
- d) Coordinate administrative, financial, and human resource issues providing updates and advice to the PSC;
- e) Provide guidance and agree on appropriate countermeasures/management actions to address specific programme related risks;
- f) Support monitoring and results validation across the Program by reviewing technical evidence;
- g) Receive program performance and results;
- h) Review and validate implementation quarterly and report to the PS yearly; and
- i) Issue a Quarterly Results Validation Note summarizing indicator performance and recommended corrective actions.

3.2 Membership/Observers

The Technical Working Group (TWG) will include:

- a) Technical level representatives from COMESA Secretariat and Programme Coordinating Unit (PCU) and member states team responsible for implementation;

- b) Technical level representatives from other agencies (based on involvement through implementation agreements with the lead partner) and non-state actors involved in the implementation of the action (where appropriate and relevant);
- c) Technical level representatives from the Bank as observers. Additional participants and other relevant stakeholders may be invited to the TWG meetings, as appropriate; and
- d) COMESA Secretariat IDEA PCU shall serve as the Secretariat of the TWG.

The following other stakeholders may be appointed as standing technical invitees:

- a) **Representatives of Identified States for IDEA project:** One representative/technical expert from identified Member and non-Member States with intention of joining the IDEA project;
- b) Representatives/technical experts of beneficiary REC Secretariats: whose members are participating in IDEA project;
- c) Association of Regional ICT Regulators: One representative from Association of Regulators of Information and Communications Services for Eastern and Southern Africa (ARICEA), One representative from the Communications Regulators Association of Southern Africa (CRASA), One Representative from East Africa Communications Organisation (EACO);
- d) Continental Bodies: One representative from the African Union (AU), African Telecommunications Union (ATU) and Pan African Postal Union (PAPU), African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) respectively;
- e) International Bodies: International Telecommunications Union (ITU); and
- f) Private Sector: One representative from Private Sector Associations from each REC one representing consumer groups and one representing Operators respectively.

The TWG shall formulate its own rules and procedures.

3.3 Chairpersonship

The TWG shall be chaired by the COMESA Secretariat in the absence of the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson will Chair the meeting. The Committee shall elect a Chairperson from among the Member/Partner States present at the meeting should both the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson be not in attendance.

3.4 Frequency of PSC of Meetings

COMESA shall convene the TWG meetings on a quarterly basis to discuss progress on implementation. However, extraordinary meetings may be convened, as and when necessary.

3.5 Quorum Requirements

For the Technical Working Group (TWG) to conduct official business, a quorum shall a simple majority of appointed members. Observers shall not be counted toward the quorum. Meetings may only proceed when the quorum is met, ensuring that deliberations and decisions reflect adequate representation of the TWG membership.

3.6 Attendance Guidelines

Appointed members may designate a proxy to attend meetings in their absence, provided this is formally communicated in advance. Consistent attendance by members is strongly encouraged to ensure continuity in deliberations, minimize delays associated with onboarding new participants thereby ensuring efficient decision-making and preserving institutional memory.

3.7 TWG Role in Evidence-Based Learning

The TWG shall contribute to the Learning Agenda of the IDEA Program by synthesizing technical insights and lessons arising from implementation challenges, regulatory harmonization efforts, pilot initiatives and digital inclusion interventions. Lessons learned shall be incorporated into subsequent Annual Workplan and Budget, revisions to technical toolkits, regional guidelines and knowledge products to support adaptive management and continuous improvement of the Program.

3.8 Funding and Participation

The Programme shall support participation of all TWG Members to the meetings. Should this not be possible, TWG Members are encouraged to finance their participation. Observers shall, in all cases fund their participation unless they are specifically invited to address a key issue or otherwise.

3.9 Tenure of Office

The TWG shall subsist for the entire duration of the Programme.

3.10 Revision of Terms of Reference

The TWG may revise its terms of references as and when necessary.