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DESA EDUCATION & INNOVATION CENTRE

Institutional Mandate for Hosting DESA Programmes and Capacity Building

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DESA Education & Innovation Centre

Executive Summary

The DESA Education & Innovation Centre (DEIC) is hereby constituted as a semi-autonomous institutional instrument under the overarching governance of the DESA Secretariat. Its primary mandate is to serve as the continental anchor for hosting the full portfolio of fifteen DESA programmes, including the DESA AI Integration Programme (DAIP), and to institutionalize structured education, innovation, and capacity-building services across member states and regional blocs.

DEIC is designed as a strategic enabler of Africa's knowledge economy, operationalizing the normative principles of Agenda for Social Equity 2074 while reinforcing the development imperatives codified under Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, the African Development Bank's High 5 priorities, and the COMESA Digitalisation Strategy. Through its governance architecture, DEIC shall harmonize programme hosting, curriculum development, and innovation ecosystems, ensuring interoperability across COMESA, SADC, and EAC corridors.

The Centre's purpose extends beyond conventional training to encompass applied research, regulatory sandboxes, and innovation hubs, thereby creating a structural bridge between policy intent and operational implementation. By institutionalizing universal design principles and embedding accessibility standards, DEIC guarantees equitable participation for all stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, and positions itself as a sovereign, ethical, and scalable solution for Africa's digital future.

Legal Mandate and Institutional Purpose

The DESA Education & Innovation Centre (DEIC) is hereby established under the authority of the DESA Charter and the Institutional Governance Manual, with legal personality to operate as a semi-autonomous unit within the DESA framework. DEIC shall maintain direct accountability to the DESA Central Secretariat and operate under fiduciary and compliance standards aligned with continental and regional safeguard regimes, including AfDB policies and COMESA interoperability protocols.

The institutional purpose of DEIC is threefold:

1. **Programme Hosting and Governance**
   DEIC shall serve as the custodial entity for the DESA programme portfolio, comprising fifteen thematic programmes, each designed to advance digitalisation, education, and social agency objectives. This includes the mandatory integration of DAIP as a structural component across all hosted programmes.

2. **Structured Education and Capacity Building**
   DEIC shall institutionalize vocational and academic curricula across universities, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, and civil-service training systems. These curricula shall embed applied competencies in artificial intelligence, digital governance, and inclusive innovation, ensuring alignment with Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2074 benchmarks.

3. **Innovation and Research Facilitation**
   DEIC shall establish innovation hubs, accelerators, and regulatory sandboxes to enable the controlled testing of emerging technologies, including civic tech and AI applications. These

facilities shall operate under binding ethical and accessibility standards, fostering responsible innovation and market activation.

In formal terms, DEIC's mandate is to harmonize education and innovation ecosystems across Africa, institutionalize compliance with universal design principles, and operationalize blended finance models through the DESA Development Fund and affiliated instruments. Its governance structure shall incorporate a Board, Secretariat, and Programme Units, with regional nodes ensuring scalability and interoperability.

Strategic Objectives

The DESA Education & Innovation Centre (DEIC) is mandated to pursue a set of strategic objectives that collectively advance its institutional purpose and reinforce its alignment with continental and regional development agendas. These objectives are binding and shall be codified under the DEIC Operating Manual and the DESA Institutional Governance Framework.

a) **Hosting and Governance of DESA Programme Portfolio**
DEIC shall serve as the custodial entity for the fifteen DESA programmes, ensuring their structured integration within a unified governance architecture. This includes the mandatory incorporation of the DESA AI Integration Programme (DAIP) and the harmonization of programme-specific operating manuals, compliance templates, and monitoring instruments.

b) **Capacity Building for Governments, Academia, and Private Sector**
DEIC shall institutionalize comprehensive capacity-building frameworks targeting public administrations, academic institutions, and private enterprises. These frameworks shall embed vocational and academic curricula, tiered certification pathways, and applied learning environments, thereby creating a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals equipped to operationalize digitalisation and innovation agendas.

c) **Regional Harmonisation and Replication**
DEIC shall function as a continental harmonization platform, ensuring interoperability of educational and innovation standards across COMESA, SADC, and EAC corridors. Regional replication shall be facilitated through the establishment of DEIC nodes and shared infrastructure models, enabling economies of scale and cross-border knowledge transfer.

d) **Investor Engagement and Blended Finance Facilitation**
DEIC shall act as a strategic interface for mobilizing blended finance instruments, leveraging the DESA Development Fund, AfDB second-lien participation, and private sector co-financing. This objective includes structuring Public-Private Partnership (PPP) frameworks for infrastructure development, innovation hubs, and training facilities, thereby ensuring financial sustainability and scalability.

Institutional Architecture

The governance architecture of DEIC is designed to ensure institutional legitimacy, operational accountability, and compliance with ethical and regulatory standards. It establishes a multi-tiered structure that integrates oversight, implementation, and innovation functions within the broader DESA governance system.

a) **Governing Board**
DEIC shall be governed by a Board constituted under the authority of the DESA Secretariat. The Board shall comprise representatives from continental bodies (African Union Commission), regional organizations (COMESA Secretariat), development finance institutions (AfDB), academia, and strategic private sector partners. The Board shall convene quarterly to approve policy instruments, validate compliance reports, and adjudicate strategic decisions.

b) **DEIC Secretariat**
The Secretariat shall serve as the executive arm of DEIC, responsible for day-to-day administration, programme hosting, curriculum development, and innovation facilitation. It shall maintain direct accountability to the Governing Board and operate under fiduciary and compliance standards codified in the DESA Institutional Governance Manual.

c) **Programme Units**
Each DESA programme hosted within DEIC shall be organized under a dedicated Programme Unit, operating pursuant to its respective charter and compliance framework. Programme Units shall report to the DEIC Secretariat and maintain operational linkages with national DESA entities for localization and implementation.

d) **Regional Nodes and Digital Platform Integration**
To ensure scalability and interoperability, DEIC shall establish regional nodes in strategic locations across COMESA, SADC, and EAC member states. These nodes shall function as shared service hubs for training, innovation, and technical support. A unified digital platform shall integrate all nodes, enabling real-time collaboration, credential verification, and monitoring through DESA's MRV dashboards.

Programme Hosting Framework

The DESA Education & Innovation Centre (DEIC) shall operate as the primary institutional custodian for hosting the full portfolio of fifteen DESA programmes, including the mandatory DESA AI Integration Programme (DAIP). This hosting function is governed by the DEIC Operating Manual and codified under the DESA Institutional Governance Framework, ensuring legal sufficiency, operational coherence, and compliance with continental and regional standards.

a) **Structural Integration of Programmes**
Each DESA programme shall be housed within a dedicated Programme Unit under DEIC, operating pursuant to its respective charter and compliance instruments. Programme Units shall maintain functional linkages with national DESA entities for localization and implementation, while adhering to harmonized standards for governance, ethics, and accessibility.

b) **Operating Manuals and Compliance Templates**
DEIC shall develop and enforce standardized operating manuals for all hosted programmes, incorporating provisions on fiduciary management, ethical AI governance, data protection, and universal design principles. Compliance templates shall be issued to Programme Units and national DESA entities, ensuring uniformity in reporting, monitoring, and verification.

c) **Integration with MRV Dashboards and DTIF Financing**
Programme hosting shall be digitally integrated through DESA's Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) dashboards, enabling real-time performance tracking and public disclosure of key indicators. Financing for programme operations shall be facilitated through the DESA Development Fund and the Digital Transformation Investment Facility (DTIF), with blended finance instruments structured under DEIC's fiduciary oversight.

d) **Harmonization and Interoperability**
All hosted programmes shall conform to interoperability standards validated by COMESA, SADC, and EAC, ensuring seamless cross-border collaboration and regional replication. DEIC shall maintain a unified digital platform for credential verification, programme documentation, and stakeholder engagement.

Learning and Certification Model

DEIC shall institutionalize a structured learning and certification framework designed to advance vocational and academic competencies in digital governance, artificial intelligence, and inclusive innovation. This framework shall be codified under the DEIC Curriculum Charter and accredited by regional bodies to guarantee portability and institutional legitimacy.

a) **DAIP Academy Tracks and TVET Integration**
The DESA AI Integration Programme (DAIP) shall serve as the foundational pillar of DEIC's learning architecture, offering tiered certification tracks—Foundational, Applied, and Advanced—aligned with vocational and academic standards. These tracks shall be integrated into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems and university curricula, ensuring continuity and scalability.

b) **Certification Pathways for Civil Servants, Educators, and Entrepreneurs**
DEIC shall establish formal certification pathways tailored to the needs of public administrators, academic faculty, and private sector actors. Certification shall be contingent upon successful completion of theoretical modules and applied projects within DEIC's Implementation Labs, ensuring measurable competencies and compliance with ethical and accessibility standards.

c) **Digital Literacy and AI Governance Modules**
The learning framework shall embed mandatory modules on digital literacy, ethical AI governance, and risk mitigation, institutionalizing universal design principles and accessibility obligations. These modules shall incorporate assistive technologies for persons with dyslexia, dyscalculia, and mobility impairments, thereby promoting equitable participation.

d) **Accreditation and Credential Verification**
All certifications issued under DEIC shall be recorded in the DESA Unified Credential Registry, accessible through a secure verification portal. Accreditation of training institutions shall be contingent upon compliance with DEIC standards and successful completion of periodic audits conducted by the DEIC Secretariat.

Innovation and Research

The DESA Education & Innovation Centre (DEIC) shall institutionalize innovation and research as a structural function, ensuring that technological advancement and policy evolution are harmonized within a controlled, ethical, and inclusive framework. This mandate is codified under the DEIC

Innovation Charter and aligned with the normative principles of Agenda 2063, AfDB High 5 priorities, and COMESA's digitalisation strategy.

a) **Establishment of Innovation Hubs and Accelerators**

DEIC shall create a network of innovation hubs strategically located within regional nodes to serve as incubators for emerging technologies, civic tech applications, and AI-driven solutions. These hubs shall operate under binding compliance standards, incorporating universal design principles and accessibility audits to guarantee equitable participation. Accelerators shall be instituted to support start-ups and SMEs in deploying scalable solutions aligned with DESA programme objectives.

b) **Partnerships with Universities and Technology Firms**

DEIC shall formalize partnerships with leading universities, research institutions, and technology firms to foster collaborative research and knowledge transfer. These partnerships shall be governed by Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and Operating Circulars, ensuring intellectual property rights, ethical compliance, and alignment with regional development priorities.

c) **Regulatory Sandboxes for Civic Tech and AI Applications**

To enable controlled experimentation and risk mitigation, DEIC shall establish regulatory sandboxes for testing AI applications and civic technologies within predefined legal and ethical boundaries. These sandboxes shall operate under the supervision of the DEIC Secretariat and be subject to periodic audits by the Governing Board, ensuring adherence to data governance protocols and accessibility standards.

d) **Knowledge Repository and Dissemination**

DEIC shall maintain a centralized knowledge repository for research outputs, best practices, and policy briefs, accessible through its unified digital platform. Annual publications shall document innovation trends, compliance benchmarks, and lessons learned, reinforcing DEIC's role as a continental thought leader in digital governance and inclusive innovation.

Financing and Sustainability

The financial architecture of DEIC is designed to ensure adequacy of resources, predictability of funding flows, and long-term sustainability beyond the initial implementation horizon. This framework is codified under the DEIC Financial Governance Manual and harmonized with DESA's fiduciary standards and AfDB safeguard policies.

a) **Integration with DTIF and DESA Development Fund**

DEIC shall secure primary financing through the DESA Development Fund and the Digital Transformation Investment Facility (DTIF), with allocations earmarked for programme hosting, infrastructure development, and capacity-building initiatives. These instruments shall operate under strict fiduciary controls and be subject to independent audits.

b) **Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Frameworks**

To leverage private sector expertise and resources, DEIC shall structure PPP frameworks for the development of innovation hubs, training facilities, and digital platforms. These frameworks

shall incorporate risk-sharing mechanisms, performance-based financing, and compliance obligations aligned with continental and regional safeguard regimes.

c) Long-Term Sustainability through Service Contracts and Membership Models

DEIC shall institutionalize cost-recovery mechanisms through service contracts for advanced certification tiers, research partnerships, and technical support services. A membership model shall be introduced for universities, private enterprises, and government agencies, granting access to DEIC's knowledge repository, innovation hubs, and credential verification systems.

d) Financial Risk Mitigation and Audit Protocols

To safeguard against funding shortfalls and operational disruptions, DEIC shall maintain contingency reserves within the DESA Development Fund and adopt hedging instruments for currency risk where applicable. All financial transactions shall be subject to quarterly audits and public disclosure through DESA's Monitoring and Evaluation dashboard.

Regional Integration

The DESA Education & Innovation Centre (DEIC) shall function as a continental harmonization platform, ensuring that educational and innovation ecosystems are interoperable across regional economic communities (RECs) and aligned with continental development frameworks. This mandate is codified under the DEIC Regional Integration Protocol and harmonized with COMESA, SADC, and EAC standards.

a) Harmonisation with Regional Standards

DEIC shall adopt and enforce interoperability standards validated by COMESA, SADC, and EAC, ensuring that curricula, certification frameworks, and innovation protocols are mutually recognized across member states. This harmonisation shall extend to data governance instruments, accessibility benchmarks, and ethical AI compliance, thereby creating a unified digital ecosystem for Africa.

b) Shared Infrastructure and Knowledge Platforms

To optimize resource utilization and promote cross-border collaboration, DEIC shall establish shared infrastructure models, including regional hubs for training, innovation, and technical support. A unified knowledge platform shall be deployed to facilitate real-time collaboration, credential verification, and dissemination of best practices across all participating jurisdictions.

c) Annual DESA Education Forum

DEIC shall convene an Annual DESA Education Forum as a statutory event, bringing together governments, academia, private sector actors, and development partners to review progress, exchange knowledge, and validate strategic priorities. The Forum shall serve as a continental mechanism for policy dialogue, capacity-building, and innovation scaling, reinforcing DEIC's role as the anchor for Africa's knowledge economy.

Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification

DEIC shall institutionalize a robust Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) framework to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous performance improvement. This framework shall operate under the unified DESA Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system and be codified in the DEIC Compliance Manual.

a) **KPI Families and Performance Metrics**
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) shall be structured across five dimensions:

- **Programme Adoption**: Number of DESA programmes hosted and operational within DEIC.

- **Training Completion**: Number of certified individuals across foundational, applied, and advanced tiers.

- **Innovation Outputs**: Number of research projects, prototypes, and regulatory sandbox trials completed.

- **Accessibility Compliance**: Rate of adherence to universal design principles and deployment of assistive technologies.

- **Strategic Impact**: Contribution to Agenda 2063 indicators, AfDB High 5 priorities, and COMESA digitalisation objectives.

b) **Public Dashboards and Independent Audits**
All performance data shall be disclosed through DEIC's public MRV dashboard, integrated with DESA's unified MEL system. Independent audits shall be conducted annually to validate compliance with fiduciary, ethical, and accessibility standards, ensuring institutional integrity and stakeholder confidence.

c) **Annual Strategic Reviews and Regional Scorecards**
DEIC shall publish an Annual Strategic Review and Regional Scorecard, documenting progress against KPIs, lessons learned, and corrective actions. These reports shall be disseminated to member states, development partners, and regional bodies, reinforcing DEIC's commitment to transparency and evidence-based governance.

Stakeholder Engagement

The DESA Education & Innovation Centre (DEIC) shall institutionalize a structured stakeholder engagement framework to ensure inclusive participation, transparency, and alignment with continental and regional development priorities. This framework is codified under the DEIC Stakeholder Engagement Protocol and harmonized with the DESA Institutional Governance Manual.

a) **Governments and Public Institutions**
DEIC shall engage national governments through formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and Operating Circulars, ensuring alignment with national development plans and regulatory frameworks. Ministries of Education, ICT, Finance, and Planning shall constitute primary interlocutors for policy integration, curriculum adoption, and resource mobilization.

b) **Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) and Donors**
Strategic partnerships shall be established with DFIs, including the African Development Bank (AfDB), and bilateral donors to secure concessional financing, technical assistance, and policy harmonization. Engagement shall be governed by binding agreements incorporating fiduciary safeguards and performance-based financing mechanisms.

c) **Academia and Research Institutions**

Universities and technical vocational education and training (TVET) institutions shall be integrated into DEIC's capacity-building architecture through accreditation agreements and curriculum co-development protocols. Academic partnerships shall prioritize research collaboration, faculty enablement, and knowledge dissemination.

d) **Private Sector and Civil Society**

DEIC shall formalize engagement with private enterprises, technology firms, and civil society organizations through structured participation models, including membership frameworks and innovation consortia. These partnerships shall facilitate market activation, inclusive innovation, and social accountability.

e) **Communication and Advocacy Strategy**

DEIC shall implement a comprehensive communication and advocacy strategy to promote awareness, stakeholder buy-in, and public trust. This strategy shall include periodic policy briefs, media engagements, and participation in continental forums, reinforcing DEIC's role as a thought leader in digital governance and inclusive education.

Closing Statement

The DESA Education & Innovation Centre (DEIC) is hereby affirmed as the institutional anchor for Africa's knowledge economy, operationalizing the normative principles of Agenda for Social Equity 2074 while reinforcing the strategic imperatives of Agenda 2063, AfDB High 5 priorities, and COMESA's digitalisation agenda. Through its governance architecture, programme hosting framework, and innovation ecosystems, DEIC establishes a sovereign, ethical, and scalable solution for Africa's digital future.

By institutionalizing structured education, applied research, and inclusive innovation, DEIC transforms policy intent into measurable outcomes, enabling governments to govern with evidence, universities to teach with inclusion, and businesses to compete with intelligence. Its financing and sustainability model ensures long-term viability, while its regional integration protocols guarantee interoperability and harmonization across COMESA, SADC, and EAC corridors.

In formal terms, DEIC is not an episodic initiative but a permanent institutional function embedded within the DESA governance system. Its adoption constitutes a strategic commitment to Africa's decade of accelerated implementation, positioning partner states and regions at the forefront of a digitally empowered, innovation-driven development trajectory.