MAY 22, 2025

SDEP JOINT IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

A Strategic Architecture for Regional Collaboration and Multilateral Funding Alignment with FAO, ACTESA, and ECCAS

CREATED BY
EUSL AB
Care to Change the World

Table of Contents

Annex I — Glossary of Institutions and Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name	Description
FAO	*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*	UN specialized agency leading global efforts to eradicate hunger and promote sustainable agriculture.
UNDP	*United Nations Development Programme*	UN agency focused on poverty eradication, governance, and sustainable development, with strong field presence across Africa.
COMESA	*Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa*	Regional Economic Community (REC) of 21 African member states promoting regional integration through trade and development.
ACTESA	*Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa*	A specialized agency of COMESA mandated to improve regional agricultural trade and market access, particularly for smallholder farmers.
ECCAS	*Economic Community of Central African States*	Regional Economic Community representing Central Africa, focusing on economic cooperation, security, and integration.
EUSL	*European Social Label*	A European-founded initiative developing inclusive, sustainable economic models through the "Charity as a Business" approach, and coordinating SDEP implementation.
GSIA	*Global Social Impact Alliance*	Governance and compliance framework managing international coordination and funding structures for SDEP and related initiatives.
SDEP	*Social Development and Empowering Programme*	A continent-wide initiative providing integrated support in food security, education, infrastructure, and digital inclusion, grounded in local ownership and self-reliance.
Power Play	*Power Play Initiative*	A financial mechanism embedded in SDEP that blends public-good impact with commercially viable models to reduce dependency on aid.
Agenda 2063	*African Union's Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development*	Africa's vision for transformation over 50 years, anchored in unity, self-reliance, and shared prosperity.
Agenda 2074	*Agenda for Social Equity 2074*	A global equity framework initiated under the Global Social Equity Alliance, extending SDG-inspired action to 2074 with focus on fairness, inclusion, and long-term resilience.

Executive Summary

This background document is presented in response to the initiative taken by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to engage with the European Social Label (EUSL) regarding South Sudan's potential entry into the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP). The document outlines the strategic, financial, and institutional rationale for formalizing FAO's engagement in the SDEP framework, with particular attention to South Sudan as a first-entry case for the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

The SDEP initiative is a regional implementation programme designed to reduce structural aid dependency through coordinated delivery in food security, agricultural resilience, vocational training, infrastructure, and digital access. Albeit in an early stage, it is currently being activated in several COMESA member states, and delivered in cooperation with ACTESA, UNDP (Kampala), and other regional actors. South Sudan's inclusion is strategically significant, not only as a unique national case outside COMESA, but as an institutional bridge between COMESA, ECCAS, and the broader African integration agenda.

The document identifies a convergence of mandates between FAO, UNDP, ACTESA, and EUSL, making it both possible and prudent to propose a more formal, multilateral coordination mechanism that recognizes FAO's existing role in South Sudan while creating a replicable entry point into ECCAS through the SDEP framework. Further, it proposes a pathway to funding this cooperation using the same mechanisms applied successfully in COMESA, including bespoke financing strategies that embed FAO's mandate in both programme logic and budget architecture.

The approach is explicitly aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the extended EUSL developed Agenda for Social Equity 2074, ensuring long-term sustainability and continental legitimacy. To this end, the document culminates in an invitation to FAO to consider a formal role in the South Sudan engagement as well as a co-development opportunity with ECCAS and COMESA—laying the foundation for future expansion and replication across the Central African region.

The proposed collaboration provides a shared value opportunity for all parties involved: enabling FAO to scale its impact without overextension of resources, allowing UNDP to integrate its strategic interest in SDEP, and offering funders an aligned, regionally endorsed, and results-driven mechanism for investment.

In light of these synergies, the parties are invited to explore a Declaration of Intent or comparable non-binding agreement as a basis for coordinating next steps.

1. A Turning Point in International Aid: OECD's 2024 Report and Its Implications for South Sudan and the COMESA Region

In April 2025, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released its annual Development Co-operation Report, marking a critical turning point in global development finance. For the first time in over a decade, Official Development Assistance (ODA) to low-income and lower-middle-income countries declined in real terms, despite persistent global crises and rising humanitarian needs. This decline stands in stark contrast to earlier commitments under the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where donor countries reaffirmed their obligation to scale up assistance, not reduce it.

According to the OECD's findings, although total ODA levels remained historically high due to inflationary effects and increased in-donor refugee costs, the share of aid directly reaching the world's poorest countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, diminished. This shift in priorities reflects a trend that can be neither ignored nor normalized. In fragile contexts such as South Sudan—where food insecurity, climate vulnerability, and protracted displacement continue to threaten lives and livelihoods—such reductions in external support cannot be absorbed without serious consequences for both national stability and regional cohesion.

The impact is further amplified within regional blocks such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), where interdependency among member states means that the weakening of one can hinder the resilience of many. For a region that remains disproportionately affected by conflict, climate change, and underinvestment in agricultural transformation, the erosion of international solidarity is not merely a financial matter but a structural threat to long-term development trajectories.

From the standpoint of institutional actors engaged in transformative partnerships—such as FAO, COMESA, and our own organizations, the findings of the OECD report serve as both a warning and a call to recalibrate. It is no longer sufficient to rely on traditional models of aid; instead, new forms of collaboration must be pursued that align with the principle of mutual accountability and shared prosperity. Against this backdrop, the relevance of FAO's mission—securing food systems, strengthening rural resilience, and advancing sustainable Agri-based economies—becomes not only reaffirmed but urgently indispensable.

In entering dialogue with FAO on a coordinated engagement in South Sudan and the COMESA region, we recognize this moment as one demanding clarity, credibility, and innovation. We do not only acknowledge the shifting aid landscape; we respond to it—by structuring partnerships that reflect both the challenges of the present and the aspirations of a sustainable future.

2. FAO's Strategic Objectives and Regional Alignment with COMESA and South Sudan

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) operates under a clear mandate to achieve food security for all and ensure that people have regular access to high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. In pursuit of this mission, FAO's Strategic Framework 2022–2031 places emphasis on the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agri-food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life—leaving no one behind.

In the African context, and particularly within the COMESA region, FAO's engagement is structured around its Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs), which operationalize global strategies into nationally aligned, impact-oriented priorities. In South Sudan, the most recent CPF highlights four priority areas:

1. **Improved agricultural production and productivity**, including climate-resilient practices and input systems.

2. **Sustainable natural resource management**, especially in relation to land, forestry, and water.

3. **Livelihood support and resilience building**, particularly for displaced and conflict-affected populations.

4. **Policy development and institutional capacity strengthening**, enabling national systems to lead inclusive recovery and development.

These objectives are not aspirational abstractions; they respond to material needs that remain unmet. FAO's work in South Sudan and across COMESA reflects an understanding that food systems are not only about food—they are about peace, social stability, environmental stewardship, and long-term sovereignty. Through its focus on data-driven decision-making, early warning systems, and partnership coordination, FAO plays a uniquely integrative role in bridging humanitarian and development efforts.

This positioning makes FAO a vital interlocutor in fragile states, and its strategic coherence with COMESA's regional agriculture and food security frameworks further strengthens its relevance in the multilateral architecture.

3. Strategic Risks to FAO's Mandate Amidst Declining Aid

The contraction in international aid, as evidenced by the April 2025 OECD report, poses direct and compounding risks to FAO's operational capacity—particularly in contexts where fragility is structural, not episodic.

a. **Disruption of Critical Programming**

The immediate risk lies in the disruption of time-sensitive interventions, such as seed distribution, locust control, or emergency food security assessments. These are not projects that can be deferred without consequence; they are the backbone of survival for millions. When funding gaps emerge, it is often the most remote, politically marginalized, or climate-affected populations who suffer first and most.

b. **Erosion of Institutional Trust and Coordination Mechanisms**

FAO's ability to act as a trusted coordinating body across humanitarian and development sectors depends on the credibility of its presence and its consistency in delivery. A weakened or erratic aid flow undermines this function, causing fragmentation in program alignment, reduced data quality, and diminished multilateral cooperation, particularly dangerous in regions where multiple crises intersect.

c. **Strategic Vulnerability to Political Instrumentalization**

In environments such as South Sudan, where state legitimacy and donor engagement are tightly interwoven, a decline in external aid risks politicizing food assistance. This not only distorts priorities but can also lead to increased local conflict over scarce resources, further destabilizing already fragile peace efforts.

d. **Reduced Leverage for Systemic Reform**

FAO's programming increasingly includes institutional development and policy support—domains where impact requires sustained engagement. When funding becomes volatile, long-term institutional transformation is sacrificed in favor of short-term survival responses. This undermines the very reforms needed to reduce aid dependency in the first place.

In conclusion, the decline in development assistance threatens not only FAO's individual programs but also its systemic role in building resilient and sovereign food systems. If this trend continues unaddressed, the cost will not merely be operational—it will be generational, deepening cycles of fragility that global actors have long pledged to break.

4. Strategic Entry Through SDEP: Integrating FAO, UNDP, and Regional Mechanisms via South Sudan

In May 2025, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), acting upon a request from the Government of South Sudan, formally reached out to the European Social Label (EUSL) to explore participation in the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP). This invitation represents not only a programmatic entry point for FAO into a scalable, results-driven initiative but also a unique strategic convergence: a nexus of UN agency cooperation, regional bloc integration, and actionable delivery on the ground.

SDEP was designed as a public–private implementation platform tailored to fragile and under-capacitated contexts. It operates through modular country-level engagements within a unified framework—bridging food security, infrastructure, vocational skills, digitalization, and social equity through multi-sector coordination. Developed and governed by EUSL and AfDB, in alignment with COMESA policy priorities and AU Agenda 2063, SDEP is being processed across several COMESA member states and has garnered increasing support, including from regional institutions such as ACTESA and organizations such as SIDA and UNDP.

4.1 FAO's Operational Entry Through South Sudan

South Sudan is the first ECCAS-affiliated country to formally engage in SDEP—a fact of considerable strategic significance. This provides FAO with a well-defined, government-backed mechanism through which it may operationalize and scale its priorities under the Country Programming Framework (CPF). Critically, FAO's thematic strengths—agriculture, food systems, climate resilience, and natural resource management—are already reflected in SDEP's Pillars 1 and 3, providing a foundation for alignment rather than duplication.

By entering through South Sudan's SDEP participation, FAO gains more than a project; it acquires **a** replicable model for fragile-state engagement that is results-oriented, policy-linked, and embedded in a governance framework capable of handling complex stakeholder constellations. Moreover, this entry comes at the direct request of a member state—a bottom-up initiation that enhances legitimacy and political alignment.

4.2 Institutional Opportunity: Integrating ECCAS and COMESA Through SDEP

South Sudan's membership in ECCAS and application to COMESA creates an exceptional opportunity to bridge institutional divides that have historically fragmented regional development initiatives. Whereas COMESA has been the geographic anchor of SDEP to date, South Sudan's participation permits the first structured inclusion of an ECCAS country into this regional effort.

This dual affiliation has significant implications. It allows for joint planning, knowledge transfer, and scalable programming between COMESA and ECCAS, enabling SDEP to evolve into a Pan-African delivery mechanism rather than a sub-regional one. Furthermore, it provides FAO and other multilateral actors with a rare chance to operationalize cross-regional programming within the African Union's broader framework—advancing integration without undermining the principle of subsidiarity.

4.3 Bridging UNDP and FAO in Practice

In parallel to FAO's outreach, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kampala, Uganda has expressed its intent to collaborate formally with EUSL and ACTESA on the rollout of SDEP in the COMESA countries. UNDP's mandate to support institutional capacity-building, governance, and

inclusive development complements FAO's technical and agricultural expertise. Yet, despite the natural synergies, joint delivery frameworks between the two agencies remain underdeveloped in practice.

SDEP offers a neutral, structured space in which FAO and UNDP can engage cooperatively on country-level interventions, while aligning with regional bodies (ACTESA, COMESA Secretariat) and member state authorities. The use of a shared monitoring tool—FlexSus, co-developed with Linköping University and Denmark Technical University—enables transparent reporting, localized risk identification, and multi-agency accountability. This provides the technical scaffolding required for coordinated action and funding compliance, including for instruments under the African Development Bank's emerging climate finance mechanism.

By bridging FAO and UNDP engagement through a jointly supported platform, SDEP allows for:

- **Avoidance of mandate overlap** through modular programme components.

- **Improved donor alignment** and pooled financing mechanisms.

- **Unified delivery chains** coordinated at regional and national levels.

- **Streamlined reporting** using shared indicators and monitoring systems.

- **Integrated resilience strategies**, linking food systems, social protection, and climate response.

This architecture not only improves efficiency; it insulates fieldwork from political fragmentation, strengthens local ownership, and enhances the strategic impact of UN interventions in fragile contexts.

4.4 Strategic Implications
The convergence of FAO, UNDP, COMESA, ECCAS, and South Sudan within SDEP is not coincidental—it reflects a structural gap in the current international aid system that this model seeks to address. As OECD data signals a systemic decline in aid predictability, new frameworks must be adopted that are simultaneously agile, politically anchored, and outcome-based.

SDEP provides a platform through which UN agencies can share the delivery burden, while respecting their distinct competencies. It allows regional bodies to reclaim ownership of the development process, and it empowers member states to articulate and fulfil their national priorities through aligned support.

In this configuration, FAO's entry through South Sudan is not simply timely—it is strategic. It allows for proof of concept in one of the world's most challenging environments, with the possibility of scalable replication across the broader ECCAS and COMESA regions.

5. Strategic Convergence with Agenda 2063 and Agenda for Social Equity 2074

Any initiative seeking to scale impact across African regions must not only deliver tangible results but also demonstrate coherence with the political and developmental visions that shape the continent's future. In this context, the integration of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) into the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) constitutes a meaningful operationalization of both Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the Agenda for Social Equity 2074—an independent but complementary global initiative rooted in equity, dignity, and sustainability.

5.1 Alignment with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want

Agenda 2063 articulates Africa's collective aspiration to transform itself into a united, prosperous, and peaceful continent, driven by its own citizens. Its seven aspirations, along with 20 specific goals, serve as a blueprint for economic transformation, human development, and institutional reform.

SDEP is built to directly address **four of the seven Aspirations**:

- **Aspiration 1**: A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
  SDEP's integration of agriculture, vocational training, and local industry development aligns directly with the ambition for self-reliant economies and food sovereignty.

- **Aspiration 3**: An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law.
  SDEP's governance model, under EUSL oversight, ensures multi-stakeholder transparency, anchored in lawful partnership agreements and local ownership.

- **Aspiration 6**: An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people.
  With youth skills training, inclusion of women, and community-driven implementation, SDEP decentralizes development agency and embeds sustainability at the grassroots level.

- **Aspiration 7**: Africa as a strong, united, and influential global player and partner.
  By linking regional mechanisms (COMESA, ECCAS), UN agencies (FAO, UNDP), and international funding instruments (AfDB, EIB), SDEP exemplifies the type of integrated partnership Africa seeks to lead.

FAO's participation reinforces Agenda 2063 not as a rhetorical ideal, but as a living mandate—one that is manifested through structured, accountable, and scalable interventions tailored to national realities.

5.2 Agenda for Social Equity 2074: A Global Framework Rooted in Justice
Developed by EUS, Agenda 2074 is a 50-year vision for structural equity, designed to operate alongside the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but with an explicit emphasis on resource redistribution, systemic dignity, and participatory development. It is comprised of 17 Social Global Goals that mirror, extend, and deepen the commitments made under the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

FAO's engagement in SDEP intersects with multiple Social Global Goals, notably:

- **Goal 1: Dignity in Basic Needs** – ensuring that access to food, water, energy, and housing is universally guaranteed.
  FAO's core mission in food security is both amplified and safeguarded within SDEP's wider infrastructure-focused interventions.

- **Goal 7: Inclusive and Equitable Urban Development** – empowering communities to co-govern development processes.
  SDEP's zone-based model, where implementation is localized to district and community clusters, enables FAO's technical support to be context-responsive rather than template-based.

- **Goal 12: Fostering Social Cohesion and Inclusivity** – harmonizing climate response with sustainable economic activity.
  Through its involvement in SDEP, FAO contributes to climate-smart agriculture, natural resource management, and land rehabilitation—particularly vital in ecologically vulnerable states such as South Sudan.

- **Goal 17: Ethical Use of Technology for Social Benefit** – recalibrating global cooperation to ensure fairness in funding, knowledge transfer, and decision-making.
  The inclusion of FAO and UNDP into an African-governed program such as SDEP inverts traditional aid hierarchies, allowing global agencies to serve African goals—not the reverse.

Agenda 2074 is not a parallel or alternative policy space—it is an amplifier of the same truths recognized in Agenda 2063: that equity must be structural, partnerships must be mutual, and development must be co-owned by the people it serves. FAO's participation is therefore not only welcome but necessary in the context of a world increasingly defined by fragmentation and inequity.

5.3 Implications for Long-Term Programming

The convergence of these agendas within the operational framework of SDEP generates long-term dividends:

- It provides predictability in planning, as the goals and values of SDEP will remain consistent over a 50-year horizon.

- It anchors FAO's involvement not just in short-term technical assistance, but in structural transformation rooted in African regional and global frameworks.

- It creates a platform for shared monitoring and accountability, where FAO, UNDP, COMESA, ECCAS, and national partners report against common goals.

- It ensures that development is not projectized, but institutionalized—delivering systemic change across sectors and borders.

In short, SDEP offers FAO and other agencies not just an entry point into South Sudan, but a seat at the table of Africa's long-term strategic future.

6. From Aid to Structural Investment: SDEP as a Sustainable Financing Model

The Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) is conceived not as a grant-dependent intervention but as a structured investment vehicle that redefines how development is financed, implemented, and governed. Unlike conventional aid frameworks—which are often fragmented, donor-driven, and time-limited—SDEP is designed to function as a self-generating, regionally anchored ecosystem where public, private, and philanthropic resources converge in pursuit of long-term, measurable impact.

6.1 Replacing Fragmented Aid with Programmatic Ecosystems

The decline in aid to emerging markets—acknowledged by the OECD and reflected in shrinking donor portfolios—necessitates a systemic shift. Temporary project grants and sectoral donations cannot sustain complex national development trajectories, especially in fragile and post-conflict contexts such as South Sudan.

SDEP offers a programmatic alternative:

- It does not depend on annual budget cycles but is structured as a multi-decade framework with built-in financing logic.

- It consolidates multiple value chains—agriculture, vocational training, energy, digital infrastructure—into one investment-ready platform.

- It is tenant-based, meaning each country and subregion owns its own SDEP configuration, allowing for tailored funding strategies aligned with local governance, needs, and absorptive capacity.

FAO's engagement in this model therefore transitions from a donor-beneficiary role to that of a strategic investor, technical authority, and implementation partner—positioned to both receive and allocate resources through SDEP's structured architecture.

6.2 The Case of ACTESA and Lessons for South Sudan
Within COMESA, the implementation of SDEP has been anchored through ACTESA as a regional coordinating body. Funding streams have been aligned to support ACTESA and the UNDP country offices involved, leveraging both international financial institutions and emerging green and social finance instruments. This structure creates predictable financing for both administrative costs and field-level implementation.

However, as South Sudan is not a COMESA member, its participation necessitates a distinct operational and funding track. This is not a complication, but an opportunity.

- A South Sudan-specific funding mechanism can be established, designed exclusively to meet the political, logistical, and financial realities of the country.

- This track allows us to incorporate UNFAO-specific funding lines, in parallel with a UNDP component, modeled after but not limited by the ACTESA structure.

- It also allows for the integration of ECCAS as a regional development actor. Should UNFAO facilitate or support this engagement, the resulting structure could mirror ACTESA's role in COMESA, providing ECCAS with a co-governance role in regional SDEP coordination.

6.3 Strategic Role of UNFAO in Structuring New Regional Funding
UNFAO's positioning within this funding architecture can be threefold:

1. Facilitator: By leveraging its relationship with ECCAS and its credibility in South Sudan, FAO can help initiate a structured dialogue that leads to ECCAS's inclusion into the SDEP framework.

2. Co-Architect: Together with EUSL and UNDP, FAO can help design the budgetary structure for the South Sudan SDEP, including delineation of technical assistance, procurement lines, logistics, and capacity-building needs.

3. Fund Administrator: FAO can co-administer budgetary lines under its domain, particularly in areas related to food systems, land use, and climate-resilient agriculture.

This model also opens the possibility for pooled funding mechanisms, where AfDB climate funding, UNDP development finance, and FAO programmatic contributions are consolidated into a single operating budget under the SDEP umbrella. Such an arrangement ensures coherence, transparency, and measurable impact.

6.4 Power Play and Complementary Financing Tools
The Power Play initiative, an organic scale up from SDEP, acts as a capital-raising platform for projects that align with equity-based development principles. Power Play allows for:

- **Convertible instruments**, where donor funding can evolve into investment-grade assets.

- **Impact-linked bonds**, with results-based triggers tied to SDEP indicators.

- **Blended finance architecture**, reducing risk and increasing leverage across public-private partnerships.

SDEP in South Sudan, with FAO as a principal partner, is a strong candidate for early Power Play capitalization. By designing the South Sudan track with Power Play compatibility from inception, we ensure long-term sustainability even in the absence of traditional aid.

6.5 Toward a Unique ECCAS Budget Track
Should FAO's engagement help establish ECCAS as a co-implementer or regional partner, a separate budget line for the ECCAS region could be created, distinct from COMESA. This would allow:

- Funding to be tailored to ECCAS institutional mandates and member priorities.

- Inclusion of other ECCAS states progressively into SDEP via replication of the South Sudan model.

- A joint FAO-ECCAS implementation matrix, empowering FAO as a consistent operational partner across two African economic communities.

This is not merely a scaling plan—it is a coherent financial governance proposal, with distinct budgets, regional logic, and development accountability.

7. Climate Mitigation and Investment Synergies: Aligning SDEP with AfDB's Strategic Financing Instruments

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has outlined an ambitious trajectory to triple food production on the continent while simultaneously embedding climate resilience and low-emission practices across agriculture, logistics, transport, and value chains. This dual objective—growth with mitigation—mirrors the internal logic of the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP), which was designed from inception to operate at the intersection of climate, food systems, and structural development.

FAO's deep expertise in climate-resilient agriculture and land-use systems positions it as a core implementation partner for both the mitigation and adaptation dimensions of this emerging AfDB framework.

7.1 SDEP as a Delivery Mechanism for AfDB's Climate Objectives
SDEP is built with a multi-level governance structure that accommodates both national implementation and regional oversight. This structure allows for high-resolution monitoring and reporting of impact through its integrated data platform (FlexSus), making it immediately compatible with AfDB's results-based financing requirements.

The programme meets AfDB climate financing priorities in five keyways:

1. **Triple Food Production Objective**: SDEP embeds a full-scale value chain model—from seed to market—which supports productivity increases without ecological degradation.

2. **Climate Smart Infrastructure**: Through its energy and logistics modules, SDEP deploys clean energy solutions for rural development, storage, and mobility—critical components in reducing sector emissions.

3. **Digital Agri-Intelligence**: With FAO's potential leadership, SDEP can integrate advanced climate modelling and early warning systems into agricultural planning at the zone and country level.

4. **Land Tenure Security**: SDEP addresses land access as a prerequisite to climate adaptation, ensuring communities have the legal foundation to engage in long-term stewardship and investment.

5. **Local Ownership**: Through its tenant-zone model, local stakeholders co-own the development process, satisfying the AfDB's emphasis on scalable, locally governed solutions.

7.2 Operationalizing a Climate Mitigation Plan for South Sudan

The current opportunity with South Sudan allows for first-time integration of a full-spectrum climate mitigation framework within a SDEP deployment, anchored by FAO as a lead technical partner.

A formal Climate Mitigation Plan (CMP) would be embedded into the South Sudan SDEP proposal, structured around:

- **Agroecological Zoning**: Developed with FAO to map natural resource capacity and risks.

- **Emission Baseline & Targeting**: Establishing a GHG emissions profile for agricultural and energy sectors, with annual reduction targets.

- **Climate-Smart Crop Rotation & Forestry Models**: Ensuring land regeneration and carbon absorption capacity.

- **Water Management Systems**: Developed jointly with FAO to reduce climate vulnerability in irrigation and catchment areas.

- **Monitoring & Verification**: Delivered via the FlexSus platform, certified for AfDB reporting and open to FAO technical validation.

This CMP would then activate eligibility for AfDB's upcoming climate financing instruments, while simultaneously positioning FAO as a co-lead in program design, delivery, and performance auditing.

7.3 FAO's Role in Mitigation-Linked Funding Structures

Beyond technical delivery, FAO can serve a structural role in the financial governance of SDEP's climate arm. This includes:

- **Advisory Leadership** in framing mitigation metrics and results-based finance indicators.

- **Co-management of Climate Investment Funds**, particularly those aligned with ECCAS and COMESA regional climate strategies.

- **Pipeline Developer** for regionally scalable mitigation projects eligible for AfDB climate windows, the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and private sector climate investors.

This framework gives FAO not only an execution role, but an enduring governance and co-stewardship mandate.

7.4 Creating a Regional Climate Budget for ECCAS

Should FAO's engagement lead to the formal entry of ECCAS into the SDEP framework, the climate component provides a natural budgetary bridge between regions. A dedicated ECCAS climate budget track could:

- Reflect ECCAS-specific ecological and agricultural challenges;

- Be jointly managed by FAO and a nominated ECCAS regional body;

- Incorporate replication of best practices from COMESA-SDEP deployments;

- Attract targeted investment from climate funds with ECCAS mandates.

This approach ensures that the ECCAS region is not merely added as a beneficiary, but included as a budgetary equal, with climate finance as a primary lever.

7.5 Strategic Positioning of FAO and the UN System
By aligning FAO's operational priorities with both SDEP and AfDB's climate agenda, we create a triangular bridge:

- **South Sudan** as the entry point;

- **ECCAS** as the regional expansion track;

- **AfDB** as the financial engine.

Simultaneously, with UNDP Kampala already engaged in COMESA countries, FAO and UNDP are uniquely positioned to form a joint development arm within the SDEP governance structure—ensuring unified delivery across two UN agencies without duplication, competition, or siloed programming.

This cooperative model also reinforces a key UN principle: Delivering as One.

8: A Platform for Strategic Collaboration – Aligning Institutions for Scalable Impact

In the present phase of the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP), there exists a unique and timely opportunity to elevate the programme's operational architecture into a multilateral, regionally anchored, and results-driven initiative. With the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations having expressed interest in engaging through South Sudan, and with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Kampala office already offered formal collaboration in COMESA countries alongside ACTESA, the conditions are favorable for establishing a structured platform for joint coordination.

This chapter sets out a proposal to formalize a Joint Declaration of Intent among the European Social Label (EUSL), FAO, ACTESA, and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Such a declaration would serve as a cornerstone for harmonized implementation, funding alignment, and long-term programme integrity across both COMESA and ECCAS regions, beginning with South Sudan as the first ECCAS member state to engage with SDEP.

8.1 Shared Institutional Interests
The core mandates of each institution align naturally within the structure of SDEP:

- **FAO** seeks food security, climate resilience, and sustainable rural livelihoods through systemic engagement with governments and local actors.

- **UNDP** prioritizes capacity development, institution-building, and inclusive economic growth with climate-linked funding mechanisms.

- **ACTESA**, as a specialized agency of COMESA, focuses on regional food market integration, smallholder support, and intra-regional trade.

- **ECCAS** holds complementary mandates to those of COMESA in Central Africa, with a growing emphasis on peacebuilding, resilience, and agricultural transformation.

SDEP is architected to deliver simultaneously on these fronts—providing a delivery model that allows each institution to pursue its mission, while avoiding duplication, fragmentation, or mission drift.

8.2 Value to Funders

For institutional funders such as the African Development Bank, Green Climate Fund, EU Global Gateway, and others, the presence of a unified platform represents a decisive advantage. The platform:

- Demonstrates regional coherence and REC alignment, lowering political risk.

- Provides evidence of multilateral backing, enhancing programme credibility.

- Supports customizable budget frameworks by REC, allowing for tailored financing pipelines (e.g. the COMESA/ACTESA mechanism vs. a new ECCAS/FAO mechanism).

- Enhances monitoring and evaluation coherence, enabling comparative learning and impact reporting across subregions.

This design makes SDEP highly fundable, while transitioning the development model from fragmented donor-led aid to structured, self-reinforcing investment ecosystems—particularly through Power Play and similar instruments aimed at replacing traditional aid.

8.3 Enabling a Declaration of Intent

We therefore propose the establishment of a Joint Declaration of Intent between the participating parties—EUSL, FAO, ACTESA, and ECCAS—to formally acknowledge the opportunity at hand and define a framework for:

- Joint governance consultations (e.g. through an inter-institutional working group);

- Shared operational principles (inclusive of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2074 priorities);

- Defined pilot entry points (e.g. South Sudan for ECCAS, Uganda/Zambia for COMESA);

- Coordinated budget streams tailored per REC and country, with FAO and UNDP included as technical and/or financial partners;

- Open invitation for other partners to be engaged under a transparent multilateral umbrella.

Such a declaration would not legally bind parties, but it would anchor goodwill and shared intent within a recognizable and fundable structure. It would also provide a diplomatic and institutional framework for FAO to assist in initiating a dialogue with ECCAS—thereby accelerating the region's structured inclusion into the programme.

Rather than asking any party to overcommit or move prematurely, this collaborative architecture invites each institution to participate within its mandate, capacity, and strategic timing. It enables collective action without sacrificing autonomy and provides funders with the confidence that implementation is both locally driven and internationally supported.

In doing so, SDEP not only delivers on its development promise—it models the next generation of coordinated, post-aid development frameworks rooted in African priorities, supported by multilateral actors, and structured for sustainability.

8.4 Funding as an Integral Component of All Proposals

While development strategies often begin with policy alignment and operational design, their long-term viability invariably hinges on access to structured, predictable, and coordinated funding. In this respect, the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) has been architected with a fundamental principle: funding is not an external consideration, but an embedded component of every proposal, at every level of engagement.

This principle holds across all regional and national contexts where SDEP is implemented:

- In COMESA, the existing collaboration with ACTESA includes a sealed funding structure co-aligned with, and for, UNDP priorities and embedded into the regional budget architecture.

- For ECCAS, a mirror structure can be initiated through SDEP's entry point in South Sudan, with FAO's participation and facilitation, ensuring that the region benefits from the same operational clarity and financial predictability.

- In both cases, tailored proposals allow for flexibility by country and sector while adhering to a shared architecture of accountability, impact metrics, and climate-related outcomes—key criteria for multilateral funders and sovereign development banks alike.

This ensures that no participating country or REC is left in a state of dependency on ad hoc grant flows or politically contingent aid structures. Instead, proposals submitted under SDEP are pre-equipped with embedded budget frameworks, ready for integration with funding partners' instruments—such as FAO's Green Climate Fund pipelines, AfDB's climate-smart agriculture envelopes, or Global Gateway's infrastructure facilities.

Moreover, the Power Play model, which builds commercial sustainability into social development efforts, acts as a complementary mechanism for cost recovery, reinvestment, and transition away from external dependency over time.

In this light, it is not merely desirable—but strategically necessary—that all collaborations under this platform treat funding as inseparable from implementation. It is this integration that gives governments, RECs, and development agencies alike the assurance that SDEP is not a vision in search of resources, but a programme designed with its own sustainability built in from the outset.

9: Call to Action – Initiating the Framework for Joint Engagement

In light of the mutual alignment of interests, the readiness of institutional partners, and the structured funding logic embedded in the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP), we invite the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), South Sudan, and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to consider initiating a joint coordination process toward the formulation of a Declaration of Intent and in the end potential support for SDEP in the ECCAS member states.

The proposed next steps may include:

- **Designation of focal points** from each institution to form a preparatory working group;

- **Convening of an initial coordination meeting**, either virtually or through an existing regional platform;

- **Exchange of strategic frameworks**, including ECCAS's regional agricultural strategy, FAO's South Sudan country programme, and ACTESA's COMESA roadmap.

- **Drafting of a Declaration of Intent**, facilitated by EUSL and shared among parties for revision and endorsement.

This stepwise approach respects institutional mandates and procedural norms while providing a concrete pathway for formalized cooperation. It also signals to funding partners that coordination has moved beyond conceptual alignment into tangible institutional planning.

By proceeding in this manner, we not only anchor goodwill but demonstrate institutional seriousness, strategic foresight, and operational readiness. The result is a framework that elevates the developmental ambitions of all involved parties—while offering measurable, fundable, and sustainable outcomes across both COMESA and ECCAS regions.