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DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR UNDP

FOR SDEP, ACTESA MANDATE UPDATE AND
ACTESA POWER PLAY

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1. Introduction

The Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) is a transformative initiative designed to drive sustainable development, economic empowerment, and social equity across Africa. Developed in response to the growing need for integrated solutions in agriculture, infrastructure, digital infrastructure, education, and trade, SDEP serves as a key pillar within the broader ACTESA framework. Under the leadership of the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), the programme has been entrusted to the European Social Label (EUSL), which has been tasked with its design and implementation.

Recognizing the evolving needs of the region and the increasing emphasis on long-term development strategies, ACTESA is currently halfway through its current mandate, however EUSL has noticed the need to update its mandate extend its operational scope beyond 2030. This update ensures that ACTESA remains aligned with the African Development Bank's (AfDB) strategic priorities, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the newly established Agenda for Social Equity 2074 (Agenda 2074) by EUSL. The ACTESA Power Play initiative, a strategic funding mechanism, complements this new mandate by mobilizing long-term financial resources, with an initial \$300 billion commitment over 50 years, directly linked to the implementation of Agenda 2074.

As a leading development agency with a strong regional presence, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of these initiatives. UNDP's engagement is essential in securing policy alignment, mobilizing expertise, and providing an impartial platform for coordination. Given its global reach and extensive experience in capacity building, UNDP's involvement as a neutral partner strengthens the credibility and sustainability of SDEP, the ACTESA mandate update, and the broader Power Play initiative.

Moreover, these efforts align with key global and regional development frameworks, including:

- Agenda 2063 – The African Union's blueprint for socio-economic transformation.
- Agenda 2074 – An EUSL developed long-term framework for global social equity and an endgame agenda of other agendas.
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – UN-driven global development objectives.
- AfDB Strategies – Policies aimed at boosting infrastructure, trade, and economic resilience across Africa.

Through this formal proposal, we outline the strategic collaboration between UNDP, ACTESA, EUSL, and AfDB, defining UNDP's role in policy, governance, funding mechanisms, and international engagement. This partnership will reinforce Africa's path toward sustainable economic growth and social inclusion.

1.1 Alignment with UNDP's Strategic Priorities

The Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) and the ACTESA Power Play align closely with the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and its overarching mission to drive sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development. UNDP's global priorities emphasize structural transformation, reducing inequalities, and building resilience, all of which are central to the design and implementation of SDEP and its associated initiatives. While drawing towards an end, a new strategic plan is likely to be presented and both EUSL and ACTESA wants to commit to a long-term programme period, stretching over 50 years to make a real impact and include both vocational training for short term implementation and research for long term effects.

Key areas of alignment include:

- **Structural Transformation:** UNDP promotes green, inclusive, and digital transitions as catalysts for systemic change. SDEP's pillars—agriculture, digital infrastructure, education, and trade—directly contribute to these transformations by fostering sustainable economic growth and regional integration.
- **Leaving No One Behind:** UNDP's rights-based approach ensures that vulnerable communities benefit from development efforts. SDEP's focus on social equity, economic empowerment, and community-driven solutions supports this mission, creating opportunities for marginalized groups.
- **Building Resilience:** UNDP strengthens institutional and community capacities to prevent and respond to crises. By enhancing food security, sustainable livelihoods, and access to essential services, SDEP actively contributes to regional stability and resilience.
- **Development Financing and Digitalization:** UNDP prioritizes innovative financing models and digital solutions. The ACTESA Power Play, with its proven interest to fund a \$300 billion funding mechanism, introduces a scalable and sustainable financial structure, ensuring long-term investment in Africa's development.

Through these shared objectives, UNDP's engagement in SDEP, the ACTESA Mandate Update, and the ACTESA Power Play presents a unique opportunity to amplify impact on a regional scale. By leveraging its expertise, policy influence, and operational capabilities, UNDP can play a pivotal role in accelerating these initiatives, ensuring their alignment with Agenda 2063, Agenda 2074, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the African Development Bank's strategies.

2. Strategic Partnership with UNDP

Recognizing the strong alignment between UNDP's strategic objectives and the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP), the ACTESA Mandate Update, and the ACTESA Power Play, this partnership presents a unique opportunity to drive sustainable and transformative change across the region. UNDP's involvement will serve as both a facilitator and an implementation partner, ensuring the effective execution of key development initiatives while upholding principles of neutrality, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability.

2.1 UNDP's Role as a Facilitator and Implementation Partner

UNDP's extensive experience in policy advisory, capacity building, and multi-stakeholder coordination makes it a critical partner in delivering the objectives of SDEP and ACTESA Power Play. Through this partnership, UNDP will:

- **Support Policy and Institutional Strengthening:** Provide expertise in governance frameworks, institutional reforms, and regional policy integration.
- **Facilitate High-Level Engagements:** Play a key role in convening discussions between governments, development finance institutions (DFIs), and the private sector to mobilize support.
- **Coordinate with AfDB on Financing Mechanisms:** Assist in the development of regional bonds and financing instruments to de-risk investment and ensure financial sustainability.
- **Provide Technical and Strategic Advisory Services:** Offer guidance on implementation strategies, impact measurement, and adaptive approaches for scaling initiatives.

- **Represent ACTESA in Regional Engagements:** Support ACTESA in engagements with COMESA's member states, reinforcing its role as a key driver of economic and social development. Additionally, UNDP will formally recognize EUSL as the organization leading the execution of SDEP, ACTESA Power Play, and related funding mechanisms.

2.2 Ensuring Efficiency and Accountability in Execution

A fundamental requirement for the success of SDEP and ACTESA Power Play is the ability to maintain momentum, efficiency, and discipline in execution. Given the urgency and scale of the initiative, all partners—including ACTESA, EUSL, and UNDP—must ensure that implementation is results-driven and not hindered by delays.

- **Clear Performance Expectations:** All stakeholders must adhere to strict timelines and deliverables, ensuring that projects do not fall into inefficiencies.
- **Structured Reporting to UNDP:** To maintain transparency and accountability, ACTESA and EUSL will provide regular, structured reports to UNDP, detailing progress, milestones achieved, and challenges encountered. This will serve as a tangible commitment to ensuring efficiency, tracking impact, and making necessary adjustments in real time.
- **Enforcement of Timely Execution:** With UNDP playing an oversight role, project timelines will be actively monitored, and any inefficiencies will be addressed through structured interventions. This ensures that SDEP and ACTESA Power Play deliver measurable outcomes within the agreed timeframes.

2.3 Benefits of UNDP's Engagement for Regional Stability and Sustainable Development

By formally integrating UNDP into SDEP and ACTESA Power Play, the initiative gains:

- **Enhanced Credibility and Neutrality:** UNDP's status as an internationally recognized development actor ensures that the initiatives remain politically neutral and focused on long-term impact.
- **Access to a Global Network:** UNDP's connections with multilateral organizations, donor agencies, and regional blocs facilitate cross-border collaboration and funding opportunities.
- **Capacity Building for Local Institutions:** Strengthening governance structures, workforce capabilities, and project execution frameworks ensures the sustainability of development interventions.
- **Stronger Alignment with Global Frameworks:** Ensuring that all efforts under SDEP and ACTESA Power Play adhere to international best practices and global development agendas, including Agenda 2063, Agenda 2074, SDGs, and AfDB High 5's pillars and strategies.

With a structured partnership in place, UNDP's contributions will not only accelerate the implementation of SDEP and ACTESA Power Play but also create a more resilient and self-sufficient development ecosystem for the region.

3. Scope of Collaboration

Building on the strong alignment between UNDP's objectives and the transformative potential of SDEP, the ACTESA Mandate Update, and ACTESA Power Play, this proposal outlines key areas of collaboration

where UNDP's expertise, strategic influence, and global networks will significantly enhance regional development efforts.

3.1 Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP)

As a flagship initiative under ACTESA, SDEP is designed to strengthen regional resilience, accelerate socio-economic progress, and drive sustainable empowerment across multiple sectors. UNDP's engagement in SDEP will focus on:

- Policy Alignment & Technical Advisory Support – Ensuring that SDEP integrates seamlessly into existing global, regional, and national development frameworks, aligning with Agenda 2063, Agenda 2074, SDGs, and AfDB strategies.
- Regional Capacity-Building & Institutional Strengthening – Facilitating knowledge transfer, training programs, and governance support to strengthen institutional frameworks within participating countries.
- Data-Driven Research & Knowledge-Sharing – Leveraging UNDP's expertise in research, monitoring & evaluation, and data-driven decision-making to ensure that interventions are based on real-time insights and best practices.

3.2 ACTESA Mandate Update

To ensure ACTESA remains a dynamic and effective institution beyond 2030, a strategic mandate update is essential. UNDP will play a key role in:

- Policy Guidance & Legal Framework Updates – Providing support in structuring the necessary policy updates that will allow ACTESA to expand its scope and mandate.
- Coordination with COMESA & AfDB – Acting as a neutral facilitator in high-level negotiations with COMESA member states and regional financial institutions, particularly the African Development Bank (AfDB).
- Stakeholder Engagement & Diplomatic Outreach – Utilizing UNDP's diplomatic networks to ensure broad-based consensus and support for the new ACTESA mandate.

3.3 ACTESA Power Play

As a high-impact, long-term funding initiative, ACTESA Power Play requires strategic oversight, financial structuring, and global stakeholder engagement. UNDP's role will be instrumental in:

- Strategic Planning & Execution – Providing technical expertise and high-level coordination to ensure the initiative's goals remain on track.
- Securing Global Funding Partnerships – Supporting ACTESA in engaging Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), sovereign wealth funds, and impact investors to de-risk and finance large-scale development efforts.
- Regional Coordination & Governance Support – Leveraging UNDP's regional presence to facilitate cross-border cooperation, policy harmonization, and transparent governance of Power Play projects.

4. Financial Commitments & Support Mechanisms

To formalize UNDP's involvement, a structured financial commitment from the project(s) will ensure the partnership is backed by tangible support. The following allocations are proposed:

- \$100,000/year for SDEP – To support UNDP's role in capacity-building, policy integration, and knowledge-sharing within the program. Also covering travel expenses, participation in high-level conferences.
- \$100,000 (18 months) for the ACTESA Mandate Update – Dedicated to facilitating policy updates, regional consultations, and strategic framework revisions.
- \$300,000/year for ACTESA Power Play – Covering travel expenses, participation in high-level conferences, and direct engagement with international financial partners.

These financial commitments are designed to:

- Ensure UNDP's active participation in the strategic execution of SDEP and ACTESA initiatives.
- Enable structured reporting & accountability, reinforcing transparency and efficiency in project execution.
- Provide the necessary resources for UNDP to act as a neutral convenor and trusted development partner across multiple regional and global platforms.
- Maximize long-term impact by integrating UNDP into the design, implementation, and oversight of transformative development programs.

Through this financial and strategic partnership, ACTESA, EUSL, and UNDP will establish a model for regional collaboration, ensuring SDEP and ACTESA Power Play deliver measurable, sustainable, and scalable results.

5. Bond Structuring & Risk Mitigation (with AfDB)

A robust financial structure is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of SDEP and ACTESA Power Play. As an integral partner, UNDP will collaborate with AfDB, ACTESA, and EUSL to develop financing models that attract both private and institutional investors while mitigating financial risks.

5.1 Collaboration on Bond Issuance Strategies

To support large-scale, multi-country development efforts, a dedicated bond framework will be established, in alignment with AfDB's sustainable financing mechanisms. UNDP will play a key role in:

- Structuring development bonds that align with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) investment criteria, making them attractive to global investors.
- Facilitating discussions with multilateral financial institutions to enhance the credibility and liquidity of issued bonds.
- Ensuring compliance with international financial regulations, particularly within COMESA's investment landscape.

5.2 Development of Risk-Sharing Mechanisms

Recognizing the challenges associated with regional investments, risk-sharing mechanisms will be implemented to de-risk large-scale funding efforts. These include but are not limited to:

- Blended finance models, where public capital from development finance institutions will help reduce risk for private investors.
- Sovereign-backed credit guarantees, ensuring that participating member states mitigate currency and credit risks.
- Impact-driven return mechanisms, ensuring investors see tangible economic and social returns on their contributions.

5.3 Securing Private and Institutional Investment

Engagement with pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, and development finance institutions (DFIs) will be key to mobilizing long-term capital for infrastructure, agriculture, and trade-related projects under SDEP and ACTESA Power Play. UNDP's strategic participation will:

- Enhance investor confidence through policy stability and transparent governance frameworks.
- Leverage UNDP's global partnerships to engage multinational financial entities in COMESA's investment ecosystem.
- Ensure that funding mechanisms are designed for longevity, maximizing social impact and economic returns for participating nations.

Additionally, the establishment of a potential Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) for COMESA will be explored, ensuring a structured, multi-stakeholder financing approach that aligns with Agenda 2063, Agenda 2074, and the SDGs.

6. High-Level Engagement & Conferences

Strategic diplomatic engagement is a cornerstone of ACTESA's expanded mandate. UNDP's role as a convenor, facilitator, and advocate will be instrumental in ensuring sustained regional and global attention on the transformative goals of SDEP and ACTESA Power Play.

6.1 UNDP's Role in Convening Policy Dialogues

UNDP will actively support ACTESA and EUSL in facilitating high-level discussions among policymakers, financial institutions, and private-sector leaders. These dialogues will:

- Ensure policy coherence across COMESA member states.
- Strengthen multi-stakeholder engagement, ensuring that diverse voices—including governments, academia, civil society, and investors—are included.
- Accelerate decision-making processes by fostering regional consensus on trade, investment, and social development.

6.2 Participation in Key Events with AfDB, African Union, and COMESA

UNDP's participation in key regional and global events will provide:

- Strategic advocacy for funding mechanisms, ensuring alignment with AfDB's financial structuring and regional integration plans.
- Diplomatic backing for SDEP and ACTESA initiatives, elevating them within African Union (AU) and COMESA frameworks.

- A platform for showcasing impact-driven investment opportunities, engaging both institutional and private-sector investors.

6.3 Diplomatic Representation & Advocacy

To ensure the success of ACTESA's expanded mandate, UNDP's engagement in diplomatic efforts will include:

- Supporting ACTESA in high-level negotiations with COMESA member states and international funding bodies.
- Facilitating government-to-government partnerships, ensuring SDEP and ACTESA Power Play receive broad-based political support.
- Strengthening alignment with UN agencies, ensuring a cohesive global development approach.

7. Regional Compliance & Policy Frameworks

To maximize the effectiveness of SDEP, ACTESA, and its financing mechanisms, a strong regulatory foundation must be established. UNDP's advisory role will be key in shaping a harmonized policy environment across COMESA member states.

7.1 Harmonization of Regulations for Trade & Investment

By working closely with ACTESA and COMESA, UNDP will contribute to:

- Standardizing trade regulations to ease cross-border transactions and investment.
- Enhancing transparency and governance to attract foreign direct investment (FDI).
- Implementing digital solutions for trade facilitation, streamlining logistics and customs processes.

7.2 Policy Alignment with Global Standards

To align regional regulations with global best practices, UNDP will:

- Support legislative reforms that enhance compliance with international trade and investment protocols.
- Ensure alignment with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) frameworks, making ACTESA and SDEP eligible for impact investment funds.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange between COMESA, the AU, and international regulatory bodies.

7.3 UNDP's Advisory Role in Legislative Adaptations

By serving as a neutral technical advisor, UNDP will:

- Provide policy recommendations that support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
- Assist COMESA in drafting regulatory frameworks that attract sustainable investments.
- Enhance legal predictability, reducing risks for investors and ensuring long-term program viability.

8. Media & Public Relations Strategy

A strong media and public relations strategy is essential to enhance the visibility, credibility, and global reach of SDEP and ACTESA Power Play. UNDP's involvement as a strategic partner will elevate these initiatives, ensuring broad stakeholder engagement and sustained international support.

8.1 Enhancing Global Visibility of SDEP and Power Play

To position SDEP and ACTESA Power Play as leading models for regional economic transformation, a comprehensive media outreach plan will be deployed. This includes:

- Strategic storytelling through global and regional media platforms to highlight impact-driven narratives.
- Thought leadership positioning, ensuring ACTESA, UNDP, and EUSL representatives participate in key forums and media discussions.
- Targeted digital campaigns, leveraging multimedia content to engage policymakers, investors, and the public.

8.2 White Papers, Case Studies, and Public Outreach

A strong emphasis on knowledge dissemination will ensure that the achievements and methodologies of SDEP and ACTESA Power Play are well-documented and widely shared. Key initiatives include:

- Publication of white papers and case studies showcasing real-world impact and best practices.
- Hosting high-profile panel discussions and expert roundtables to drive policy dialogue.
- Public outreach programs, including webinars, op-eds, and interviews with key stakeholders.

8.3 Strengthening Credibility Through Media Partnerships

Building partnerships with global, regional, and local media outlets will be instrumental in amplifying the message. This includes:

- Engaging top-tier international media outlets (e.g., Financial Times, The Economist, BBC, and Al Jazeera) to position ACTESA and SDEP as flagship development programs.
- Collaborating with African media networks to ensure localized storytelling that resonates with regional stakeholders.
- Leveraging UNDP's global communication channels to reinforce the strategic alignment of SDEP with Agenda 2063, Agenda 2074, and the SDGs.

By implementing a cohesive and targeted media strategy, UNDP's role as a high-profile partner will further legitimize and elevate the initiatives at an international level.

9. Implementation & Governance Structure

Ensuring the efficient execution of SDEP, ACTESA Power Play, and associated funding mechanisms requires a clear and structured governance model. UNDP's involvement will provide an additional layer of credibility, accountability, and strategic oversight.

9.1 Defining Roles and Responsibilities of All Parties

A structured governance framework will clearly delineate roles to ensure effective collaboration:

- ACTESA: Lead coordinating entity within COMESA, responsible for stakeholder engagement and policy execution.
- EUSL: Technical lead for SDEP and ACTESA Power Play, providing expertise in policy development, financing, and program implementation.
- UNDP: Key facilitator, ensuring alignment with international best practices and supporting diplomatic engagements.
- AfDB, other Development Finance Institutions & Financial Partners: Provide financial structuring, risk mitigation, and funding support.

9.2 Governance Model for Decision-Making

A multi-tiered governance approach will be implemented:

- Strategic Advisory Council (comprising UNDP, ACTESA, AfDB, and EUSL) to oversee high-level decision-making.
- Technical Steering Committee to manage day-to-day operations, reporting to the Advisory Council.
- National Implementation Units within each COMESA member state, ensuring local execution and adaptation.

This structure will ensure that decision-making is agile, transparent, and results-oriented.

9.3 Reporting and Accountability Mechanisms

To uphold accountability and performance tracking, the governance structure will integrate:

- Quarterly performance reports submitted to UNDP, ACTESA, and AfDB.
- Annually performance reports submitted to all AfDB owners.
- Independent audits and impact assessments to ensure financial transparency.
- Annual stakeholder review forums to align strategies with evolving development priorities.

By ensuring robust oversight and clear accountability, this governance framework will instill confidence among investors, policymakers, and partner institutions.

10. Formalization through an MoU

This proposal is intended to be formally endorsed and ratified through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UNDP and the involved parties. The MoU will serve as an official framework, establishing the collaborative engagement between UNDP, EUSL and ACTESA for SDEP, a mandate update for ACTESA and ACTESA Power Play.

The MoU will outline the specifics of UNDP's contributions, including their commitment to the allocations for SDEP, ACTESA Mandate Update, and ACTESA Power Play, as well as their operational support, such as technical advisory, capacity-building, and regional coordination. Additionally, the MoU will formalize UNDP's diplomatic role, recognizing their contribution to policy advocacy and high-level conferences related to the initiatives. The timeline for realization of the MoU is short and should be prioritized as SDEP will start being implemented on July 1st 2025.

11. Conclusion & Next Steps

This proposal outlines the collaborative engagement between UNDP, ACTESA and EUSL, in regards of SDEP, ACTESA Mandate Update, and ACTESA Power Play initiatives. It is our belief that UNDP's involvement will significantly contribute to the success of these regional efforts, strengthening sustainable development and policy coherence across the region.

Key actions required from UNDP:

- Formal endorsement via the signature of the MoU. This will solidify UNDP's role and responsibilities as outlined in this proposal.
- Financial, operational, and diplomatic commitments will be fully recognized and outlined within the MoU.

UNDP's role as a neutral partner is vital to the success of this partnership. The commitment to financial contributions, policy guidance, and regional engagement will help to secure sustainable progress and meet the ambitious goals of these programs. Their neutrality ensures that they are positioned to provide objective and balanced support, with a focus on impactful, region-specific outcomes.