



JUNE 14, 2025

ACTESA SFPSEI REPORT FROM VISIT TO SWEDEN AND FINLAND

*MEETING WITH STAKEHOLDERS, ECHO CONTRACTORS, FINANCERES
AND PRESENTATION OF AN INTEGRATED NATIONAL FINANCIAL
FRAMEWORK*

CREATED BY

EUSL AB

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Table of Contents

Formal Introduction: Defining SDEP — From Complexity to Clarity	2
Support letter from EUSL	3
Introduction letter from COMESA and ACTESA.....	4
COMESA Delegation to Sweden & Finland – SDEP Anchoring Visit.....	5
 Daily Diary Report – Day 1	5
COMESA Delegation to Sweden & Finland – SDEP Anchoring Visit	8
 Daily Diary Report – Day 2	8
FAO South Sudan & Ministry of Agriculture – Meeting Summary (Tuesday)	11
UNDP Uganda – Meeting Summary (Tuesday)	14
Engagement with Mr. Albert Yuen – DVGulford (Tuesday, Informal Briefing).....	16
Engagement with SIDA – Power Africa Team (Wednesday, Stockholm)	18
Engagement with Uppsala University – EFFORT Framework (Wednesday, Uppsala)	21
Engagement with African Development Bank (AfDB) Executive Director’s Office & Finnish MFA – Finland Mission	24
Compliance & Regulatory Governance Session with TrustFi – Helsinki.....	27
Strategic Meeting in Helsinki, for Kotka City – ECHO Factory, Port Logistics, and Labour Market Integration.....	30
ECHO Presentation – Strategic Deployment, Technology Stack and Smallholder Integration	32
Chapter 1: Purpose and Strategic Framing of This Document.....	35
Chapter 2: Positioning SDEP as an Agricultural Programme with Integrated Components	35
Call to Action: The African Development Bank’s Role Must Now Be Defined	36

Formal Introduction: Defining SDEP — From Complexity to Clarity

During the course of our joint development work, it has become evident that while the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) has generated wide institutional interest and support, it has also prompted differing interpretations as to its core identity. Some have seen SDEP as primarily a technological platform, others as a vocational education reform, a financing mechanism, or a digital infrastructure deployment model.

These interpretations are all valid in their own right, as SDEP was deliberately constructed to be cross-cutting, modular, and responsive to structural gaps in partner countries. Yet this very strength — its integrated character — has also led to ambiguity for those seeking to categorize the programme within traditional development sectors.

Throughout the recent high-level mission to Sweden, a shared conclusion emerged through dialogue between COMESA, ACTESA, development partners, academic institutions, and implementation bodies: SDEP is, first and foremost, an agricultural development programme — with technology, financing tools, vocational training, and compliance instruments embedded as enabling mechanisms. The programme exists to directly strengthen agricultural production, distribution, trade, and resilience across COMESA member states, in full alignment with regional policy mandates and food security objectives.

The five underlying programme pillars reinforce this orientation — from the development of soil and intra-african trade, combined with collaborations with farmer cooperatives and local value chains to smart energy and water access, to post-harvest management and traceability mechanisms. All elements are structured to address the structural and operational constraints currently limiting agricultural scalability in the region.

At the same time, the European Social Label (EUSL) continues to approach SDEP from a holistic, systems-level perspective. While agriculture is now defined as the programme's principal axis, it is the synergy between disciplines — education, compliance, technology, sustainability, and inclusion — that enables lasting transformation. The complexity of development challenges demands equally integrated solutions. In this respect, EUSL's model of "Charity as a Business" remains a central philosophical and operational lens through which implementation is structured.

This clarified programme identity strengthens both communication and strategic engagement. It ensures that institutions such as the African Development Bank, and other regional and global partners, can now approach SDEP as a regionally endorsed agricultural programme — equipped with the necessary cross-sectoral tools to deliver measurable results.

Support letter from EUSL

To:

The African Development Bank (AfDB)
[Address]

Subject: Support for the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) and Associated Initiatives

Dear Members of the African Development Bank,

On behalf of the European Social Label (EUSL), it is our privilege to present the attached detailed report covering the recent delegation visit involving representatives from COMESA, EUSL, and key partners, including the participation of our financial advisor and investor, Mr. Albert Yuen.

This report documents the comprehensive discussions and engagements held in Sweden and Finland between June 9th and 12th, aimed at advancing the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP). The programme stands at a critical juncture, and our collective efforts seek to expedite its progression into the Advanced Procurement Process (APP), thereby solidifying its anchoring within both the African and European contexts.

Notably, the delegation underscored the strategic integration of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), as well as the innovative frameworks of EFFORT and the ECHO Factory and related vocational training initiative. These elements collectively enhance SDEP's capacity to deliver impactful, sustainable outcomes in agricultural development, skills training, and energy infrastructure.

We emphasize the broad support expressed by key stakeholders met during this visit, including representatives from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, AfDB Executive Directors Office in Sweden, SIDA, Uppsala University, FAO, UNDP, and the AfDB Executive Directors' Office in Finland and private bankers. The report further details alignment with the proposed five-party cooperation agreement that was upgraded to an eight-party cooperation agreement, reflecting an inclusive approach with COMESA, EUSL, AfDB, SIDA, EAC, private financiers, UNDP, and FAO.

In light of these developments, we respectfully urge the African Development Bank to advance SDEP within its internal processes. Accelerating the programme into the APP phase is essential to unlocking its full potential as a transformative vehicle for regional food security, economic empowerment, and social equity.

We remain committed to close collaboration with AfDB and all partners to ensure transparency, compliance, and impactful delivery.

Please find attached all relevant documentation organized chronologically by meeting day and subject matter, facilitating ease of reference.

We look forward to your continued support and are at your disposal for any further information or clarification required.

Yours sincerely,
Daniel Bermå
Founder and President
European Social Label (EUSL)
daniel.berma@eusl.eu

Introduction letter from COMESA and ACTESA

To:

The African Development Bank (AfDB)
[Address]

Subject: Joint Support for the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) and Implementation of INFF and EFFORT Frameworks

Dear Members of the African Development Bank,

We, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), write to you with full support from our strategic partners — the European Social Label (EUSL), DVGuildford, the AfDB Executive Directors Office Finland, UNDP, FAO, Uppsala University, and the EFFORT initiative — regarding the advancement of the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP).

Following a series of high-level meetings held between June 9th and 12th in Sweden and Finland, involving representatives from our respective organizations, there is a clear consensus on the critical importance of SDEP as a transformative programme. It is designed to address key challenges in food security, vocational training, and sustainable energy infrastructure across the region.

The discussions also confirmed the broad endorsement of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) and the EFFORT project framework as essential components to underpin the implementation and monitoring of SDEP and its associated initiatives. Together, these frameworks provide a robust and transparent pathway for investment and measurable impact, in line with regional development priorities.

Importantly, the cooperation extends beyond COMESA membership, welcoming South Sudan via its linkage through the East African Community (EAC) and CEHA programme. This inclusive approach underscores the regional significance and potential reach of SDEP.

We hereby respectfully urge the African Development Bank to facilitate the progression of SDEP into the Advanced Procurement Process (APP) stage. Accelerated support from AfDB is vital to unlock the full benefits of the programme for the member states and beyond.

The attached report details the outcomes of our meetings, supported by relevant documentation arranged by date and topic for your convenience.

We remain committed to ongoing collaboration and transparency to ensure the success of SDEP and the sustainable development objectives it embodies.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]


[Title]


Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

On behalf of the joint supporting partners:

European Social Label (EUSL), DVGuildford, AfDB Executive Directors Office Finland, UNDP, FAO, Uppsala University and EFFORT.

COMESA Delegation to Sweden & Finland – SDEP Anchoring Visit

 Daily Diary Report – Day 1

 **Day 1: Monday, 9 June 2025 – Stockholm, Sweden – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and AfDB Executive Directors Office**

1. Objectives of the Day

- Initiate Sweden's engagement in the anchoring of the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP).
- Present the INFF (Integrated National Financing Framework) as a COMESA-wide financing structure aligned with AfDB mechanisms.
- Discuss the structure and diplomatic legitimacy of a proposed eight-party partnership framework for SDEP, adapted from AfDB's original model.
- Establish initial recognition and potential support from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in its dual role as a national actor and part-owner of the African Development Bank (AfDB).

2. Agenda

Time	Activity	Location
14:00–15:00	Official briefing with Executive Directors Office, MFA Sweden	Teams

3. Meeting Summary: Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA)

Participants:

- Swedish Side: Anna Rääs and Pia Roed, Executive Directors Office, African Development Bank Desk
- Our Delegation: See section 9 below

Key Points Presented:

- Overview of SDEP and its alignment with AfDB's goals to triple food production and strengthen climate mitigation through infrastructure and education.
- Introduction of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) as a COMESA-wide governance tool to access and coordinate funding.
- Presentation of AfDB's initially proposed **Five-Party Agreement** (COMESA, EUSL, AfDB, SIDA, SADC).
- Our delegation's **revised proposal** of an **Eight-Party Agreement**:
 1. COMESA
 2. EUSL
 3. AfDB



4. Sida
5. EAC (replacing SADC for operational alignment)
6. UNDP (implementation partner)
7. FAO (agro-technical partner)
8. Private financiers, represented by Albert Yuen (not participating in this meeting)

Reactions & Outcomes:

- The proposal was received with genuine interest, especially the ambition to construct a multi-lateral, implementation-ready model with a measurable impact.
- Anna Rääs noted the relevance of the model and showed appreciation for the inclusive structure.
- Pia Roed expressed interest but highlighted that this was the first time she had encountered SDEP. As such, it may take additional exposure for full contextual understanding and institutional response.
- No objection to the concept of the eight-party model was raised.

Strategic Value:

- The MFA engagement formally introduced SDEP into the Swedish-African bilateral framework through Sweden's AfDB mandate.
- Despite initial unfamiliarity, the discussion established early legitimacy and opened the door to further coordination on the multilateral structure.

4. Reflections & Insights

- MFA participants were analytically receptive but requested further documentation and clarity, particularly regarding SDEP's operational mechanisms.
- The Eight-Party Model was well received and seen as a logical step to formalise collaborative impact architecture.
- Timing is crucial: early-stage conversations must be supported by concise briefing packages and follow-up invitations to deepen familiarity.

5. Alignment with SDEP & Strategic Frameworks

- The introduction of INFF is fully aligned with AfDB's expectations for accountability, multi-level coordination, and funding readiness.
- SDEP was presented in full alignment with:
 - Agenda 2063
 - Agenda 2074
 - The AfDB's new agricultural and climate financing strategy
- The Eight-Party model is designed to guarantee:
 - Political legitimacy (via COMESA, EAC)
 - Financial viability (via AfDB and Private Financiers)

- Developmental relevance (via UNDP and FAO)
- Swedish alignment (via Sida and MFA)

6. Follow-Up Required

Task	Responsible	Deadline
Send full SDEP briefing to Pia Roed and Anna Rääs	Daniel Bermå	16 June 2025
Issue invitation for follow-up technical briefing with MFA team	Daniel Bermå	Before 30 June
Include INFF White Paper in next round of correspondence	Daniel Bermå	Before 30 June

7. External Stakeholders Met

Name	Organization	Position	Email
Anna Rääs	Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs	Department Secretary, AfDB representative	anna.raas@gov.se
Pia Roed	Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs	Deputy Director, Africa Department, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden	pia.roed@gov.se


8. Attachments

9. Our Delegation

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S Sustainable Destinations	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S Sustainable Destinations	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager

COMESA Delegation to Sweden & Finland – SDEP Anchoring Visit

Daily Diary Report – Day 2

 **Day 2: Tuesday, 10 June 2025 – Stockholm, Sweden**

1. Objectives of the Day

- Strengthen internal alignment and trust between COMESA/ACTESA and EUSL, with new team members introduced.
- Confirm the shared political and operational narrative on SDEP, including both previously submitted proposals and the new INFF-based approach.
- Ensure common ownership of the Eight-Party Agreement model and its public presentation.
- Share a first strategic overview of the SDEP implementation model with focus on access to financing for local producers through European Microfinance Network (EMN).
- Secure COMESA's full internal understanding of the SDEP financing and partnership logic ahead of upcoming external meetings.

2. Agenda

Time	Activity	Location
08:00–10:30	Internal alignment session: EUSL & COMESA/ACTESA	Scandic Victoria Towers

3. Meeting Summary: Internal EUSL–COMESA Alignment

Participants:

- Full internal delegation, see Section 9.

Key Messages Delivered:

- **Introductions** were made between the EUSL team (Andres Järbrink, Tomas Willers for ECHO) and COMESA team members, marking the first in-person engagement.
- **Clarification of Roles:** EUSL emphasised that this is not a supplier–customer relationship; instead, we are equal partners in SDEP's architecture and implementation. This clarification was appreciated by the COMESA side.
- **Financial Architecture:**
 - Recap of previously submitted proposals, valued at a total of \$374 million USD, was presented.
 - Introduction and explanation of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) model, tailored for COMESA-wide implementation, as a transparent and credible mechanism to access AfDB and similar funding.

- **Eight-Party Agreement:**

- COMESA confirmed agreement with the revised Eight-Party structure.
- It was mutually agreed that this model shall now be treated as our common narrative externally: politically unified, operationally practical, and funding-ready – regardless if we go the INFF route or the already established route with the proposals.

- **United Front:**

- All attendees affirmed that toward external actors — including banks, donors, and multilateral institutions — EUSL and COMESA will present a single, aligned front with SDEP as a jointly owned programme under COMESA's strategic mandate.

4. Implementation & Financing Insights

- EUSL shared a preview of the early implementation strategy focusing on production and export readiness.
- Key mechanism introduced: Bridge Financing Facility through European Microfinance Network (EMN).
 - EMN may offer loans on flexible terms to producer organisations (such as TAHA in Tanzania or EHPEA in Ethiopia).
 - These umbrella organisations would then provide last-mile access to smallholder farmers through tools, machinery, or working capital.
 - The mechanism relies on a “buyer assurance” logic – where financing is only triggered once there is a contracted buyer for the crop or product (often referred to as forward contract-backed financing, or “purchase-guaranteed microcredit”).
- Financing structure:
 - Loans from EMN are proposed to be guaranteed by SIDA and AfDB, though these guarantees are not yet secured as of Tuesday.
 - Discussions are ongoing and will continue in upcoming meetings with SIDA.

5. Reflections & Insights

- COMESA representatives welcomed the clarity of roles and the equal partnership model.
- The INFF explanation increased confidence in EUSL's strategic framework.
- There is clear internal cohesion between EUSL and COMESA as of this meeting, creating a solid foundation for engaging banks, ministries, and donors with one voice.
- A mandate update is required for the following ACTESA Power Play and related funding via DVGuilford

6. Alignment with SDEP & Strategic Frameworks



- Today's discussions reaffirmed SDEP's grounding in:
 - COMESA ACTESA Strategy 2021–2031

- Agenda 2074
- AfDB's agricultural acceleration plans
- The EMN mechanism aligns with SDEP's principle of empowerment through financing and market access readiness.
- The Eight-Party Agreement now functions as a joint diplomatic tool for advocacy, funding mobilisation, and stakeholder onboarding.

7. Follow-Up Required

Task	Responsible	Deadline
Prepare implementation memo on EMN mechanism, including schematic flow	Apollo Owuor	16 June 2025

8. Attachments

-  Brief: Concept Note EMN Mechanism
-  Onepager EMN
- ACTESA – EMN Collaboration draft with EMN onepager

9. Our Delegation

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S Sustainable Destinations	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S Sustainable Destinations	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager

FAO South Sudan & Ministry of Agriculture – Meeting Summary (Tuesday)

1. Objective of the Day

To jointly present SDEP as a harmonised effort between COMESA/ACTESA and EUSL, introduce South Sudan into the programme structure, and confirm FAO South Sudan's formal support for the COMESA-wide INFF. A secondary but politically significant objective was to acknowledge the formal interest from the royal leadership of South Sudan to be associated with the programme.

2. Location and Setting

The meeting took place on Tuesday [exact date to be filled], with both FAO South Sudan and the Ministry of Agriculture present. This was the first formal introduction of the unified EUSL–COMESA/ACTESA partnership to the South Sudanese delegation and FAO in this configuration.

3. Participants

From FAO South Sudan and Ministry of Agriculture (South Sudan)

Name	Organization	Position
Peter Abui	FAO	abui.peter@fao.org
Felix Dzvurumi	FAO	felix.dzvurumi@fao.org
Abigail Wathome	FAO	Abigail.wathome@fao.org
Bartel Con	FAO	Bartel.con@fao.org
Deng William Achiek	National Ministry of Agriculture	achiekdengwilliam@gmail.com

From EUSL/COMESA/ACTESA

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S Sustainable Destinations	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S Sustainable Destinations	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager

4. What Was Presented

- The structural and financial scope of SDEP, including its alignment with regional frameworks and Agenda 2063/2074.
- A clear presentation of the INFF mechanism as the umbrella under which regional and national investments may be made bankable.
- Explanation of CEHA's role in linking EAC countries (like South Sudan) to the COMESA-driven SDEP programme, ensuring legal, operational, and institutional inclusion.
- Confirmation that EUSL is not acting as a supplier to COMESA, but as a joint programme initiator and co-implementer, strengthening the message of shared ownership.
- Reinforcement of the Eight-Party Agreement as a governance and financing model, where FAO and South Sudan would be relevant parties.

5. What Was Agreed

- FAO South Sudan expressed full support for a COMESA-wide INFF, seeing it as a structure that could align regional ambitions with national food security goals.
- South Sudan's formal welcoming into SDEP was supported by all three sides – EUSL, COMESA/ACTESA, and FAO.
- Agreement that South Sudan's EAC membership is sufficient for participation, due to the CEHA framework underpinning SDEP.
- Acknowledgement that the King of South Sudan has requested to be formally associated with the programme. While not a policy actor per se, his symbolic inclusion was recognised as diplomatically important.

6. Critical Observations

- The meeting marked the first moment where EUSL and COMESA/ACTESA were able to present themselves as a joint force, which was well received by FAO and the Ministry.
- FAO's support of the INFF gives the mechanism added legitimacy and is expected to facilitate subsequent coordination with other UN entities.
- South Sudan showed a strong will to engage politically and operationally, which can be used strategically in positioning the programme as regionally inclusive.

7. Implications for SDEP

- The inclusion of South Sudan extends SDEP beyond COMESA without undermining its integrity, showcasing flexibility and reach.
- FAO's endorsement of the INFF strengthens the programme's alignment with international best practices and may support alignment with global climate and food systems funding streams.
- The political dimension added by the King of South Sudan's request for inclusion can be leveraged to increase national ownership and visibility.



8. Next Steps

Action	Responsible	Deadline
Circulate SDEP and INFF briefing materials to FAO and Ministry of Agriculture	Daniel Bermå	16th of June
Receive formal support from FAO on SDEP, South Sudan and INFF	Peter Abui	18th of June

9. Supporting Documents & Attachments

- Formal Support letter from FAO

UNDP Uganda – Meeting Summary (Tuesday)

1. Objective of the Day

To present the SDEP programme and its underlying INFF structure to UNDP Uganda, seek formal alignment with its regional development agenda, and explore opportunities for technical or financial collaboration, including UNDP's potential role within the Eight-Party Agreement.

2. Location and Setting

This meeting was scheduled as a virtual session on Tuesday 10th, with Mr. Thangavel Palanivel representing UNDP. Due to connectivity issues, Mr. Palanivel was unable to attend the live meeting. However, a support letter was received shortly thereafter, affirming UNDP Uganda's interest in the initiative and endorsing the proposed INFF mechanism.

3. Participants

From UNDP Uganda

- Mr. Thangavel Palanivel (unable to attend live)
– Email: thangavel.palanivel@undp.org

From EUSL/COMESA/ACTESA

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S Sustainable Destinations	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S Sustainable Destinations	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager

4. What Was Presented

5. What Was Agreed

- While a live exchange did not take place due to technical limitations, Mr. Palanivel confirmed via letter his and UNDP's support for the INFF concept and SDEP.
- He indicated that UNDP sees the SDEP initiative as aligned with their national development support goals, particularly in the domains of climate finance and inclusive growth.
- The support letter also suggested that UNDP Uganda would be open to further strategic alignment once internal consultations have been completed.

6. Critical Observations

- Although the lack of live interaction limited direct dialogue, the written support from Mr. Palanivel gives SDEP formal validation from a key UN agency, particularly one embedded in national policy implementation.
- The meeting highlights the importance of establishing technical alternatives (offline briefings, pre-recorded presentations, etc.) for stakeholders in bandwidth-challenged regions.
- The support strengthens the possibility for future co-programming or co-financing instruments facilitated through UNDP channels.

7. Implications for SDEP

- UNDP Uganda's formal interest provides an important entry point for dialogue with UN agencies at both national and regional levels.
- As a future party in the Eight-Party Agreement, UNDP would strengthen its institutional diversity and credibility, especially in donor negotiations.
- The endorsement enhances SDEP's legitimacy. Uganda, one of the programme's early-stage focus countries will also have Makerere University as the preferred implementation partner

8. Next Steps

Action	Responsible	Deadline
Archive and circulate the support letter from Mr. Palanivel internally	Daniel Bermå	Immediate
Schedule a follow-up with UNDP	Daniel Bermå	Immediate
Formalise UNDP Uganda's potential role in Eight-Party Agreement draft	Legal and Policy Team	[TBD]

9. Supporting Documents & Attachments

- **Support Letter from Thangavel Palanivel, UNDP**

Engagement with Mr. Albert Yuen – DVGuilford (Tuesday, Informal Briefing)

1. Objective of the Day

To provide an informal but strategically important briefing to Mr. Albert Yuen on the evolving investment framework for the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP), including the ACTESA Power Play and the proposed ACTESA Mandate Update. Special focus was given to the use of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) as a structuring and de-risking tool for regional implementation. The aim was to reaffirm alignment on strategic direction and secure continued backing from private finance.

2. Location and Setting

The interaction took place during a direct airport pickup of Mr. Yuen on Arlanda, Stockholm Airport. This informal meeting was not pre-scheduled as part of the official delegation itinerary but served as a valuable opportunity to align strategic intent before formal multilateral engagements later in the week.

3. Participants

From DVGuilford

- Mr. Albert Yuen (Private Financier, MoU signatory for ACTESA Power Play)

From EUSL

- Daniel Bermå (President)

4. What Was Presented

- A concise briefing on the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) model as a strategic instrument to structure large-scale investments across national and regional levels.
- Explanation of how the INFF would work in tandem transparency for funding of ACTESA Power Play to enhance clarity, traceability, and investor confidence.
- An updated overview of SDEP as a structured agricultural programme under ACTESA's coordination, supported by technology, training, and value-chain logistics.
- Illustration of INFF's role in operationalising the Eight-Party Agreement, enabling smoother coordination between COMESA, EUSL, AfDB, UNDP, SIDA, FAO, EAC, and private investors.
- Reiteration of the "Charity as a Business" principle, showing how the dual-purpose approach aligns with both commercial and developmental returns.
- Explanation of how the ACTESA Power Play acts as an umbrella framework to enable large-scale regional implementation.
- Explanation of how SDEP can be a programme and project holder for future projects.
- The ongoing evolution of ACTESA's institutional mandate, enabling it to serve not only as a coordination body but also as a structured implementation partner and trusted interface with both public and private financiers.

5. What Was Agreed

- Mr. Yuen expressed strong endorsement for the INFF as a valuable alternative and potential upgrade to the previous structuring framework.
- Mr. Yuen expressed strong endorsement of the SDEP as a strategically structured agricultural initiative, and welcomed the ACTESA Mandate Update as a necessary institutional upgrade.
- He reiterated his commitment to the ACTESA Power Play as a high-level mechanism capable of mobilising substantial financing over time, noting that DVGuilford stands ready to contribute to its further development.
- The INFF was described as a welcome enhancement that could help unlock and structure long-term private capital aligned with public sector objectives.
- Mr. Yuen also supported the concept of DVGuilford serving as a private finance representative within the Eight-Party Agreement coordination structure.

6. Critical Observations

- This encounter confirmed the continued commitment from DVGuilford to the ACTESA Power Play, now with added enthusiasm due to the enhanced investment logic presented by the INFF.
- Mr. Yuen's feedback implicitly validates that private financiers are more likely to engage when regional initiatives present a coherent pathway from capital deployment to measurable impact.
- His support may act as a signal to other financiers, especially those awaiting de-risking assurances.

7. Implications for SDEP and ACTESA Power Play

- DVGuilford's endorsement strengthens the investor architecture of the SDEP, particularly within countries where capital absorption and structuring require multilateral trust.
- His continued involvement makes it viable to present multi-billion-dollar financing arrangements as already partially secured, enhancing SDEP's bankability with AfDB and SIDA.
- It also validates the INFF and EFFORT as a serious structuring tools — both capable of earning trust from private actors who are otherwise cautious about regional delivery risk.
- This further legitimizes the Eight-Party Agreement draft, particularly by demonstrating that the private sector has not only made SDEP and ACTESA Power Play bankable but actively contributes to system-level design.

8. Next Steps

9. Supporting Documents & Attachments

- DVGuilford support letter
- DV Guilford letter of intent to ACTESA and AfDB (previously signed)
- Mandate Update proposal
- ACTESA Power Play Description
- ACTESA Power Play Financial Perspective
- Boost Africa 2.0

Engagement with SIDA – Power Africa Team (Wednesday, Stockholm)

1. Objective of the Day

To formally present the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) and the proposed Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), with the objective of exploring potential participation—particularly around guarantees or blended financing structures—and to validate SIDA’s alignment with the emerging Eight-Party Agreement.

2. Location and Setting

The meeting took place at SIDA Headquarters in Sundbyberg, Stockholm. The format was a multilateral strategic discussion involving development finance, agricultural strategy, capacity building, and cross-sector governance. Notably, the presence of both FAO and DVGuildford alongside EUSL and COMESA gave the meeting an atmosphere of collective momentum and legitimacy.

3. Participants

From SIDA – Power Africa Team

- Caroline Bastholm caroline.bastholm@sida.se
- Anders Arvidson anders.arvidson@sida.se
- Maximilian Jönsson maximilian.jonsson@sida.se
- Samer Al Fayadh samer.fayadh@sida.se
- Adam Öjdahl adam.ojdahl@gov.se
- Olle Bergdal Mjengwa olle.bergdal.mjengwa@sida.se
- Henrik Rydberg henrik.rydberg@sida.se
- Habane Hassan habane.hassan@sida.se
- Gunnar Olvik gunnar.olvik@sida.se
- Maria van Berlekom maria.vanberlekom@sida.se

From FAO

- Felix Dzvurumu felix.dzvurumi@fao.org
- Peter Abui abui.peter@fao.org
- Bartel Con Bartel.con@fao.org

From EUSL/COMESA/ACTESA/DVGuildford

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S Sustainable Destinations	Director of Development - ECHO

Name	Organization	Position
Tomas Willers	R&S Sustainable Destinations	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager
Albert Yuen	DVGuildford	Private Banker/investor and financial Advisor

4. What Was Presented

- Overview of SDEP as a transformative regional programme, touching on agriculture, tech, and capacity-building in COMESA and EAC regions.
- Detailed walkthrough of the INFF model, highlighting its de-risking capacity and governance structure, and how it connects national and regional strategies under a single investment protocol.
- Explanation of the program setup, with its multiple programs and components
- Clear articulation of FAO's support as a UN anchor institution, offering both credibility and technical engagement to the model.

5. What Was Agreed

- SIDA expressed clear interest in the model and acknowledged its strong potential, especially in terms of integrated systems-thinking.
- They indicated a need for internal clarification regarding how to classify the initiative—i.e., whether it aligns best with agriculture, digital infrastructure, or skills development, given its cross-sector nature.
- There was no formal commitment made at this point, but a next step conversation was tentatively welcomed, depending on internal alignment within SIDA.

6. Critical Observations

- SIDA's Power Africa Team was positively inclined but institutionally cautious, consistent with their methodical and policy-aligned decision-making culture.
- The multilateral presence (FAO, DVGuildford, COMESA) significantly strengthened the credibility of the proposal.
- The ambiguity around sectoral classification appears to be more a bureaucratic matter than a substantive concern. The cross-sectoral strength of SDEP may require a tailored dossier or categorisation matrix for Swedish aid structures.

7. Implications for SDEP and ACTESA Power Play

- SIDA's involvement would be a cornerstone for de-risking, particularly for the EMN-backed agricultural bridge financing and any multilateral trust fund models being developed under INFF.
- Their difficulty in classifying the project does not diminish support, but requires a clarifying bridge from the SDEP strategic framework to SIDA's thematic architecture.
- This meeting confirms that SIDA may become a key institutional actor if alignment is facilitated through targeted communication and flexible engagement protocols.
- While not directly discussed in this meeting, Caroline Bastholm has been introduced to Albert Yuen and his financial commitments earlier.

8. Next Steps

Action	Responsible	Deadline
Follow-up meeting with Caroline Bastholm and Anders for clarification on classification	COMESA-EUSL Liaison Team	[TBD]
Invite SIDA to observe INFF architecture session with AfDB and UNDP (tentative)	Daniel Bermå	[TBD]

9. Supporting Documents & Attachments

- Photos
- Documentation from Albert Yuen (see Tuesday)

Engagement with Uppsala University – EFFORT Framework (Wednesday, Uppsala)

1. Objective of the Day

To gain a deeper understanding of EFFORT, a framework presented by Uppsala University and STUNS (the university's foundation for collaboration since 1984), and assess its compatibility and complementarity with SDEP, INFF, and their underlying program structures such as CEHA and COMBIHAP. The goal was to determine whether EFFORT can serve as an applied academic backbone to improve quantifiability, traceability, and integration between research, implementation, and private sector engagement.

2. Location and Setting

The meeting was held in Uppsala at the town hall in a focused roundtable setting. The tone was strategic and exploratory, aimed at bridging theoretical knowledge with field-based implementation, in alignment with EUSL and COMESA/ACTESA's focus on delivery, outcomes, and traceability. It must be emphasized that EFFORT has been presented earlier but at the time was not perceived as viable.

3. Participants

From Uppsala University & EFFORT

- **Professor Rafael Waters** (also a local politician, municipal council member and chairman of the municipal committee for Traffic and Urban Environment)

From EUSL/COMESA/ACTESA/DVGuildford

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S Sustainable Destinations	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S Sustainable Destinations	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager
Albert Yuen	DVGuildford	Private Banker/investor and financial Advisor

4. What Was Presented

- EFFORT was clarified not as a standalone project but a project framework developed at Uppsala University for aligning academic research with applied project design, targeting outcomes-based implementation.



- The core idea of EFFORT is to quantify impact, enable programmatic traceability from inception to conclusion, and anchor academic institutions as monitoring and verification actors within real-world social and economic programs.
- EFFORT is a framework where scientific research is mobilized to support development and solutions to practical, implementations driven challenges as defined by public and private stakeholders.
- EFFORT acknowledges the need to build capacity and improve practical skills, and do so by establishing cross-border, regional and international, cross-sectoral collaboration – co-creating scientific research and embedding PhD students with SDG stakeholders in bilateral “sandwich” projects where SDG fulfilment, high-quality research and regional development challenges overlap.
- EFFORT is solutions driven – identifying workable solutions and generating implementation projects, informing on risks, de-risking and enabling incentivizing of financial investments in such technical solutions projects that are in line with national goals and integrated national financial frameworks. The dialogue explored how CEHA and COMBIHAP and other programs could use EFFORT as a methodology, creating added structure for monitoring and academic feedback.
- Strong alignment was found with INFF, which also seeks to embed measurability and transparency as investment tools.

5. What Was Agreed

- EFFORT is highly compatible with INFF and SDEP, but it must be made explicitly clear that SDEP is not a part of EFFORT. Rather, EFFORT is a methodology that supports SDEP and its underlying programs.
- A formal support letter will be produced by Rafael Waters, Peter Sävblom, and Daniel Bermå, outlining Uppsala University and EFFORT’s alignment with and support for:
 - SDEP
 - INFF
 - Usage of the EFFORT methodology across selected implementation programs (like CEHA and COMBIHAP).
- The parties agreed that implementation should remain at the forefront, with academia supporting—not overshadowing—delivery.

6. Critical Observations

- This meeting marks a strategic turning point in linking academic legitimacy to operational delivery without compromising the integrity or autonomy of either domain.
- EFFORT provides a flexible yet structured research-to-impact model, ideal for large-scale programmes that demand clear metrics and cross-sector accountability.

- EFFORT provides a framework that enables the participation of, and added value from, universities and other research institutions in the participating countries as well as with Swedish and Nordic universities.
- Misunderstandings about EFFORT's nature as a "project" were clarified, allowing a more precise role to be defined.
- It is imperative to maintain the correct hierarchy: EFFORT supports SDEP and INFF, not the other way around.
- As a framework, EFFORT can provide the same clarity as INFF for financing to relevant stakeholders.

7. Implications for SDEP and INFF

- EFFORT becomes a methodological partner, enabling robust monitoring, academic participation, and external validation.
- Helps secure funding and investment confidence, particularly in the context of INFF's financial traceability requirements.
- Provides a mechanism for building bridges between African and Nordic academic systems and African field realities under SDEP.
- Can become a normative reference point for evaluating and improving other frameworks, including future iterations of FlexSus.

8. Next Steps

Action	Responsible	Deadline
Draft and sign Joint Support Letter from Uppsala University (EFFORT)	Rafael Waters, Peter Sävblom, Daniel Bermå	22nd June
Design operational blueprint for applying EFFORT in CEHA and COMBIHAP	EUSL/ACTESA	[TBD]

9. Supporting Documents & Attachments

- EFFORT Framework Explainer
- EFFORT Support letter
- Photos

Engagement with African Development Bank (AfDB) Executive Director's Office & Finnish MFA – Finland Mission

1. Objective of the Day

To present the integrated structure of SDEP, INFF, and the ECHO Factory vocational training concept to the African Development Bank's Executive Director's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, with the purpose of obtaining alignment, support, and access to further Finnish institutional networks.

2. Location and Setting

The meeting took place during an official mission to Finland, with primary engagements held in Helsinki after travel by ferry. Discussions were hosted in a formal but solution-oriented setting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Helsinki, with clear emphasis on deliverables and long-term impact.

3. Participants

From AfDB Executive Director's Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Heikkilä Kaisa Kaisa.Heikkila@gov.fi
- Loikas Antti Antti.Loikas@gov.fi
- Petri Wanner petri.wanner@gov.fi

From EUSL/COMESA/ACTESA/DVGuildford

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S Sustainable Destinations	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S Sustainable Destinations	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager
Albert Yuen	DVGuildford	Private Banker/investor and financial Advisor
Janne Järvenoja	The Trust Fi	Legal firm

4. What Was Presented

- A consolidated overview of SDEP, its alignment with Agenda 2074 and Agenda 2063, and the role of INFF as a financial accountability and investment-enabling instrument.



- The ECHO Factory concept in Kotka, Finland, was introduced as a physical and educational hub for vocational training, green tech production, and Africa-Europe skills exchange, all tied into the SDEP pipeline.
- Specific attention was given to the bankability and traceability features made possible through FlexSus 2.0 and INFF, ensuring alignment with AfDB's governance standards and climate resilience goals.

5. What Was Agreed

- The AfDB Executive Director's Office will submit a formal support letter for SDEP, INFF, and the ECHO Factory in Kotka.
- AfDB's Finland office committed to open doors to relevant actors in the Finnish institutional ecosystem, including:
 - FinnFund
 - Other ministries and semi-public agencies focused on development finance, skills development, and sustainable tech.
- The presented model was described as "precisely the kind of multi-track, multi-actor implementation the Bank wants to support."
- MFA officials encouraged further integration of Finland-based expertise and resources into the framework, especially with regard to green industry and vocational excellence.

6. Critical Observations

- Immediate recognition was given to the strength of aligning infrastructure, finance, and education into a coherent investment-ready format.
- The location of Kotka was considered strategic by Finnish representatives, especially due to its existing logistics, academic, and industrial assets.
- AfDB representatives acknowledged that combining INFF (financial governance) and EFFORT (academic-to-practical monitoring) creates an innovative best-practice pipeline.
- Notable appreciation for clear implementation strategy and governance model that links field-level results with strategic donor and development finance platforms.

7. Implications for SDEP and INFF

- Finland becomes a prospective anchor country for piloting European-ECHO integration under the SDEP framework.
- The forthcoming support letter from AfDB ED Office will serve as a key policy lever in upcoming engagements with EU, Nordic Council, and Nordic finance institutions.
- Opens the path for formal involvement of Finnish entities in both co-financing and technical capacity-building.
- This expands SDEP's northern corridor for skills, tech transfer, and industrial collaboration, balanced with southern project delivery.



8. Next Steps

Action	Responsible	Deadline
Receive and archive formal support letter from AfDB ED Office	Heikkilä Kaisa	June 2025
Engage FinnFund and Kotka City authorities for next steps on ECHO Factory	Janne Järvenoja/Daniel Bermå	August 2025
Draft Finnish engagement roadmap under SDEP/INFF	Daniel Bermå, Janne Järvenoja, Kaisa Heikkilä	August 2025

9. Supporting Documents & Attachments

- AfDB ED Office Support letter
- Photos

Compliance & Regulatory Governance Session with TrustFi – Helsinki

1. Objective of the Session

To deepen the legal and compliance dimension of the SDEP and INFF frameworks by evaluating the minimum EU regulatory baseline, the risks associated with country-level corruption, and the viability of SDEP as a project-level compliance ecosystem that can operate even where sovereign governance fails. The session also aimed to present legal pathways for COMESA participation that safeguard institutional financing.

2. Location and Setting

The session was hosted in Helsinki, facilitated by Janne Järvenoja, who also acted as EUSL's local liaison during the Finland mission. The presentation was directed toward senior representatives from EUSL, COMESA/ACTESA, with a particular focus on regulatory feasibility and risk mitigation, especially targeted towards compliance for the five underlying programs

3. Participants

From TrustFi

- **Janne Järvenoja** – Legal Advisor & Compliance Specialist, TrustFi (Helsinki)

From EUSL/COMESA/ACTESA

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager
Albert Yuen	DVGuildford	Private Banker/investor and financial Advisor

4. What Was Presented

- A detailed overview of TrustFi's compliance architecture, particularly focused on cross-border program design, and how INFF and SDEP can be constructed to meet European legal and financial integrity requirements.
- The presentation highlighted the minimum compliance stack required to be legally interoperable with EU, Nordic and AfDB governance standards, including:
 - GDPR and data traceability



- Procurement transparency and due diligence
- Challenges between programs and implementation, finding a bare minimum of common ground
- Case-specific attention was given to the challenges faced by some COMESA countries that are not eligible for AfDB funding due to systemic corruption.
- It was demonstrated how SDEP—through a blend of INFF, EFFORT and legal protocols—can create an internal compliance zone, independent of the sovereign context.
- The suggestion was made that SDEP evolves into a project governance framework with built-in traceability and legal safeguards, operating analogously to but distinct from EFFORT.

5. What Was Agreed

- TrustFi issued a formal support letter directed to COMESA, SDEP and INFF, affirming the legal and compliance viability of the presented model.
- It was agreed that existing experiences in similar fields would be implemented for operations and financial control via INFF and considered to be the minimum legal baseline across SDEP zones.
- TrustFi agreed to remain available as a legal adviser for the development of a SDEP-specific compliance toolkit, to be used for onboarding actors across legally diverse jurisdictions.
- It was understood by all that compliance cannot fix country-level corruption, but that SDEP participation can be firewalled through legal protocols, making funding and operations traceable and protected.

6. Critical Observations

- Janne Järvenoja's insights were tailored and contextually relevant to the regulatory gap between COMESA and EU/Nordic standards, and provided credible pathways to mitigate risk.
- The proposed bare minimum compliance standard serves as a strong starting point to unlock Nordic institutional cooperation and reduce legal exposure.
- The distinction between country compliance and project compliance was made explicit, reinforcing that SDEP may act as a project-governance construct within non-compliant states.
- This presents SDEP as a “compliance envelope” that can attract international funding without the reputational or legal liabilities otherwise associated with certain host states.

7. Implications for SDEP, INFF, and COMESA

- The compliance protocols introduced by TrustFi make it viable to operate SDEP even in high-risk jurisdictions, without exposing investors or multilateral partners to legal uncertainty.
- SDEP's evolution into a project-governance model analogous to EFFORT opens possibilities for:
 - Third-party compliance certification
 - Tiered funding models based on legal adherence
 - Policy-linked implementation frameworks

- TrustFi may act as the compliance design lead for a dedicated SDEP Legal Protocol, integrated into GSIA's governance architecture.

8. Next Steps

Action	Responsible	Deadline
Receive TrustFi support letter for legal validation	EUSL Secretariat	June 2025
Formalise Janne's role in advisory capacity	GSIA Legal Secretariat	June 2025

9. Supporting Documents & Attachments

- TrustFi Compliance Presentation (Helsinki)
- TrustFi Support Letter (addressed to COMESA, SDEP, INFF)
- Presentation Factory
- Photos

Strategic Meeting in Helsinki, for Kotka City – ECHO Factory, Port Logistics, and Labour Market Integration

1. Purpose of the Meeting

The meeting aimed to explore the possibility of establishing Kotka City as a strategic hub for logistics, production, and vocational training connected to the implementation of SDEP and the INFF framework. The goal was to identify how local infrastructure in Kotka – particularly the port and surrounding industrial zones – could be used for the production and export of ECHO modules to Africa and EU-based hubs, while simultaneously addressing Finland's demographic and labour market challenges through job creation in rural areas.

2. Location and Context

The meeting was held in Helsinki due to time constraints. Kotka is a coastal city in southeastern Finland with a major commercial port about an hour east of Helsinki. The meeting took place directly following a series of strategic meetings involving AfDB, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and other actors. Kotka was presented as a potential implementation site for a pilot factory, in line with the INFF and SDEP's modular deployment strategy.

3. Participants

From Kotka and Stevedco (harbor/shipping company):

- **Mia Brunila**, mia.brunila@stevedco.fi – Acting in a dual capacity:
 - Representative of Kotka City
 - Private owner/operator representative for Kotka Harbor and export services

From our delegation:

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA
Fungwa Kabati	COMESA	Finance Manager
Albert Yuen	DVGuildford	Private Banker/investor and financial Advisor

4. Key Presentations

- Mia presented a detailed plan (see attached presentation) including:

- Proposed site for an ECHO modular factory
- Export routes via Kotka Harbor, both directly to Africa and to intra-EU hubs
- Strategic use of underutilized industrial zones for employment initiatives
- Direct links with Finland's public employment agency to create vocational training programs

5. Reactions and Outcomes

- The proposal was positively received by all parties.
- EUSL and DVGulford emphasized the value of localized EU-based production to support transparent value chains, job creation, and climate-aligned logistics.
- Albert mentioned that investing in this is a tangible item for him
- The Kotka vocational training concept was aligned with SDEP's goals for skill development, particularly among underserved groups.
- The harbor's existing export routes were considered ideal for high-volume container logistics to SDEP zones in Africa.

6. Strategic Alignment

The Kotka proposal supports the following pillars of the SDEP/INFF framework:

- Local ownership and circular economy principles (Agenda 2074)
- Export-driven employment generation
- EU-Africa bridge-building via education, production, and trade
- Alignment with AfDB priorities regarding infrastructure, logistics, and inclusive development

7. Action Points

- Mia to facilitate direct contacts between EUSL and:
 - Public employment agency for training initiatives
 - City authorities for zoning and permits
- EUSL and R&S to follow up with:
 - Draft outline of a pilot project in Kotka
 - Letters of intent to formalize the collaboration

8. Documents and Attachments

- Presentation by Mia on Kotka, harbor operations, and factory location (*attached*)
- Draft overview of vocational integration pathways (*in progress*)

9. Next Steps

- EUSL/R&S to prepare a joint feasibility document with Kotka representatives
- Site visit to Kotka
- Mia to provide confirmation on employment agency cooperation and potential funding instruments in Finland

ECHO Presentation – Strategic Deployment, Technology Stack and Smallholder Integration

1. Purpose of the Session

The final session during the return ferry crossing focused on a detailed presentation of the ECHO system by key technical developers and stakeholders. The objective was to clarify existing capacities, the technological components, and the deployment model of ECHO within the SDEP/INFF framework. Special emphasis was placed on scalability, smallholder integration, and COMESA's expected inquiries regarding system maturity and feasibility.

2. Location and Context

The session took place informally but strategically aboard the ferry back from Finland in one of the ferry's conference room, allowing for uninterrupted dialogue following the high-level meetings in Helsinki and Kotka. This environment enabled a deep-dive discussion among core EUSL and COMESA delegates.

3. Presenters and Participants

Presenters:

- **Andres Järbrink** – Technical lead, ECHO platform

Observers:

Name	Organization	Position
Daniel Bermå	EUSL	President
Andres Järbrink	R&S	Director of Development - ECHO
Tomas Willers	R&S	ECHO
Dr John Mukuka	COMESA	CEO, ACTESA
John Chambamakasa	COMESA	Policy Advisor, ACTESA

4. Content of the Presentation

The following elements were included:

- Overview of existing decentralized ECHO components
- Plan for centralization into a unified system product combining:
 - Renewable energy modules
 - Water treatment and irrigation
 - Software layer for monitoring, transparency, and decision support
- Introduction of “impact containers”, including:

- Cold storage
- Packing and processing units
- Mobile transport-ready formats for rural settings
- Supporting video materials showcasing comparable global installations

5. Key Discussion Points and Questions

Two central questions emerged during the Q&A:

a) Does ECHO exist today?

Response:

Yes. ECHO exists as decentralized, tested technologies. What remains is centralization and standardization into a cohesive, modular system under one interoperable framework, aligning with SDEP's objectives and making it investment-ready.

b) How to bridge the scale gap between ECHO and smallholder farmers?

Response:

Daniel Bermå and Dr. John Mukuka addressed this as follows:

- Partnerships with umbrella farmer organizations like TAHA (Tanzania Horticulture Association) and EHPEA (Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association). In both Ethiopia and Tanzania these organisations are mentioned as partners.
- These organizations:
 - Aggregate members into shared investment units
 - Distribute infrastructure (e.g. water, energy, cold storage) across micro-clusters of farmers
 - Serve as EMN network channels for splitting financing, ensuring equitable access and use
- Vocational training under SDEP will further bridge the human capacity divide and ensure local ownership of ECHO installations.

6. Strategic Relevance

This session reinforced:

- ECHO's readiness for pilot deployment under INFF/SDEP
- That the model is technically credible, financially modular, and scalable
- That smallholder inclusion is designed into the architecture, not a retrofit
- That ECHO meets COMESA's risk-mitigation concerns via shared ownership, transparency tools, and pooled access

7. Action Points

- Finalize a technical whitepaper on ECHO centralization process



- Prepare pilot templates for TAHA, EHPEA and similar clusters
- Reiterate the smallholder integration strategy in all external briefings

8. Documents and Attachments

- ECHO technical presentation (*attached*)
- Visual/video examples (*reference link to be inserted*)
- Cold storage and packing container blueprints (attached) onepager

9. Next Steps

- Integrate the ECHO model into INFF programmatic pillars as a modular infrastructure tool
- Initiate compliance and governance review through TrustFi to certify ECHO readiness under EU/COMESA criteria
- Continue discussions with TAHA/EHPEA and other RECs to pre-map pilot deployment zones

Chapter 1: Purpose and Strategic Framing of This Document

This document has been prepared and submitted under the leadership of ACTESA with full support from its strategic partners — including the European Social Label (EUSL), DVGulford, Uppsala University's EFFORT initiative, the AfDB Executive Directors Office in Finland, UNDP, and FAO — with the express intention of advancing two critical and interconnected processes.

First, it serves as a formal consolidation of the most recent high-level meetings held in Stockholm, Uppsala, and Helsinki (June 9–12, 2025), where consensus was reached among key institutional stakeholders to formally elevate the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) into the African Development Bank's active pipeline through the Advanced Procurement Process (APP). The summary of these meetings — arranged chronologically and supported by presentations and support letters — outlines the comprehensive and multi-sectoral foundation of the programme, as well as its wide institutional backing.

Second, and parallel to the above, this document initiates the process of formally designing and launching an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) under the coordination of ACTESA within COMESA. Recognizing that several COMESA member states face barriers to direct funding due to governance concerns, the introduction of an ACTESA-led INFF mechanism aims to provide a compliance-based framework that builds trust, reduces risk, and enables regional actors to move forward despite country-level complexities. This INFF, tailored specifically to agricultural project pipelines, will provide a gateway for structured investment and programmatic coordination — ensuring that development does not stall due to national-level impediments.

The SDEP proposal, as outlined in this report, will serve as a primary case and pilot for this INFF framework, validating its utility and building a strong precedent for replication across other sectors and regions.

Chapter 2: Positioning SDEP as an Agricultural Programme with Integrated Components

In alignment with the ongoing dialogue between COMESA/ACTESA and AfDB, as well as the feedback from multiple donor and partner institutions, we hereby clarify the strategic positioning of the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) as an agricultural project at its core. While the programme contains strong cross-sectoral elements — notably in technological integration, infrastructure, and vocational training — these should be understood as enablers of agricultural transformation rather than independent objectives.

This clarification reflects not only our shared intent but also addresses concerns raised during recent consultations, where the multifaceted nature of SDEP led to challenges in categorizing its primary focus. By situating agriculture at the center of the intervention logic, we are both aligning with the African Development Bank's mandate for food system resilience and establishing a clear framework for evaluation, financing, and implementation.

The agricultural framing allows SDEP to focus on:

- Smallholder farmer support through improved productivity and market integration
- Infrastructure for cold storage, irrigation, and post-harvest handling
- Regional integration via coordinated value chains

- Application of shared renewable energy and water systems in farming communities
- Skill-based training for youth and local workers in agri-related industries

This repositioning also dovetails with the ACTESA mandate and justifies the establishment of an ACTESA-INFF — an instrument that enables the mobilization of capital, the monitoring of agricultural KPIs, and the integration of project data into national and regional strategies.

Through this approach, SDEP becomes the flagship agricultural development initiative under COMESA's innovation and food security agenda — driving impact not only through direct implementation but by acting as a platform for governance improvement, capacity building, and continental cooperation.

The recent high-level coordination mission in Sweden, hosted under the leadership of COMESA with its agricultural wing ACTESA, has produced an unequivocal result: the Social Development and Empowering Programme (SDEP) must proceed, which has also been voiced by team members from AfDB.

Representatives of ministries of finance from multiple African countries — the formal shareholders and programme owners — have confirmed their sustained political and institutional support for both SDEP as a programme and the European Social Label (EUSL) as a designated implementation partner. This ownership consensus is reinforced by the direct involvement of COMESA and ACTESA, providing both legitimacy and strategic integration within the region's economic architecture.

On the European side, a parallel support structure has now materialized. Through its Executive Director's Office in Finland, the African Development Bank has received direct confirmation that key shareholders in the Bank endorse the continuation and approval of SDEP. While a similar alignment from Sweden (AfDB Executive Directors Office and SIDA) is pending, indications are strong that the Nordic cluster supports the programme's intent and methodology. In parallel, leading research institutions such as Uppsala University and multilateral entities including FAO and UNDP have already aligned with SDEP through the EFFORT framework and the development of INFF-compatible models.

This convergence across African ownership, European donor governance, and institutional research bodies has removed the previous ambiguity regarding political will, compliance, and project design. What remains is the active participation of the African Development Bank itself — not as an observer or reviewer, but as a committed institutional partner.

Call to Action: The African Development Bank's Role Must Now Be Defined

As stated by Mr. Albert Yuen of DVGuildford during the Helsinki session, *"There is a missing piece in the puzzle."* That piece — now increasingly evident — is the absence of direct engagement from the African Development Bank in the structuring, funding, and rollout of SDEP.

The Bank's participation is not simply desirable; it is necessary. Without AfDB's involvement, the programme remains stuck in preparatory stages despite institutional, technical, and political readiness.

Through ACTESA and with full mandate from COMESA, Dr. John Mukuka, representing the agricultural ministries of 21 member states, holds the authority to formally request and require the Bank's cooperation. His intervention is now activated — not in contradiction of Bank procedures, but in accordance with the collective expectation that the African Development Bank, as Africa's premier development finance institution, will fulfill its role.

We call upon the African Development Bank to:

- Engage directly with COMESA and its INFF team to begin the structural work required for the ACTESA-INFF track;
- Continue to process the already sent in Proposals
- Accelerate the formal validation and onboarding of SDEP through the Advanced Procurement Process;
- Work jointly with supporting shareholders and institutions to define mechanisms for compliance, risk mitigation, and phased disbursement;
- Acknowledge the regional mandate behind this programme and commit the technical resources required to execute it.

EUSL stands ready to be the driving factor for both AfDB, ACTESA and COMESA as well as the ECHO platform, compliance and vocational training programs in both Finland and relevant countries in Africa. Africa cannot afford further delays. The tools are ready. The stakeholders are aligned. The time for action is now.

Thank you



Daniel Bermå
President
European Social Label
Care to Change the World

Attached documents in zip file, General folder:

- ACTESA Power Play Onepager
- EU-Africa Gateway vs Boost Africa 2.0
- Growthify EU Africa Markets
- INFF framework for COMESA and Boost Africa 2.0
- SDEP-MACF (proposed collaboration with SIDA)
- INFF – 8 session 2a presentation (very good!)
- INFF Facility flyer sept 2023
- INFF A Short and Practical Introduction
- Integrated National Financing Framework in Africa

Files NOT included due to file size:

- Photos
- ECHO Presentation

All files can be found [here](#)