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CODESA PILLAR I: STRATEGIC ALLIANCE FOR SFPSEI

SDEP FROM EUSL IN CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH ACTESA'S FIVE FLAGSHIPS

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CODESA Pillar I: Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI

1. Executive Abstract

The Strategic Alliance for the Staple Food Programme SDEP and ECHO Implementation (SFPSEI) constitutes a joint operational framework between the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) through its specialized agency ACTESA and the proposed CODESA (COMESA Digitalisation, Education and Social Agency). This alliance is designed to accelerate agricultural transformation and regional integration by harmonizing agricultural policies, enhancing staple food productivity, and embedding digital enablers across value chains.

The mandate of this pillar is to operationalize COMESA's regional integration priorities under the Treaty, specifically in the domains of market access, food security, and digital connectivity, while leveraging ACTESA's established role in commodity trade facilitation and CODESA's mandate for digitalisation and social development. The alliance will deliver a ten-year program structured around four interdependent workstreams: (i) policy and standards harmonization; (ii) market systems and commodity exchanges; (iii) digital enablers for agriculture; and (iv) logistics and cold-chain pilots.

The financing model combines multilateral and bilateral donor contributions, DFI co-financing, and private sector participation through blended finance and PPP structures. Governance will be anchored in COMESA's institutional organs, with ACTESA and CODESA serving as co-implementing agencies under a joint steering committee reporting to the COMESA Council of Ministers.

Expected outcomes include:

- Harmonization of seed, fertilizer, bioprotectant, and biosafety regulations across 21 Member States.

- A 10% annual growth in intra-COMESA agricultural trade.

- Deployment of digital farmer ID systems, e-voucher platforms, and interoperable data systems.

- Reduction of post-harvest losses by 20% and increased adoption of climate-smart practices.

The alliance mitigates risks related to commodity price volatility, climate shocks, and cyber vulnerabilities through a comprehensive safeguards framework aligned with AfDB ISS, World Bank ESF, and COMESA ICT policy instruments.

2. Context

The COMESA region faces a structural food security challenge, with agricultural production growing at an average of 2% annually against a population growth rate of 3.5%, resulting in declining per capita food availability. Approximately **90 million smallholder farmers**, representing 90% of the agricultural workforce, remain constrained by limited access to quality inputs, fragmented markets, and inadequate infrastructure. Less than 10% of these farmers have access to improved seeds or fertilizers, and post-harvest losses in horticulture alone range between 30% and 50%.

ACTESA was established in 2009 as a specialized agency of COMESA under Article 182 of the Treaty to address these systemic constraints by improving the competitiveness of staple food markets and facilitating intra-regional trade. Its current strategic plan (2021–2031) prioritizes harmonization of

agricultural policies, development of regional value chains, and promotion of private sector investment in agriculture.

The SFPSEI flagship program, as articulated in ACTESA's proposal, consolidates five critical sub-programs—COMFREP (fertilizers), COMBIHAP (bioprotectants), COMBIP (biotechnology and biosafety), COMSHIP (seed harmonization), and CEHA (horticulture accelerator)—into a unified framework aligned with CAADP Pillars II and III. This integration is designed to unlock economies of scale, reduce transaction costs, and foster resilience through climate-smart agriculture and digital innovation.

CODESA's involvement introduces a transformative dimension by embedding **digital public infrastructure** into agricultural systems. This includes broadband connectivity for rural communities, interoperable data platforms for input and output markets, and e-government services to streamline regulatory processes. The digitalisation agenda aligns with COMESA's ICT and e-government strategies, as well as continental initiatives under the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy.

The alliance is further justified by the urgency of addressing climate risks, which threaten to exacerbate food insecurity and undermine regional stability. By integrating modular infrastructure solutions such as the **ECHO platform**—providing renewable energy, water management, and waste recycling—the program advances both agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability.

3. Legal Basis

The legal foundation for this mission plan is anchored in the **COMESA Treaty**, specifically Articles 3, 4, and 182, which establish the objectives of regional integration, economic cooperation, and the creation of specialized agencies. ACTESA was constituted under Article 182 as a specialized agency of COMESA by a decision of the **COMESA Authority of Heads of State and Government** on 9 June 2009, granting it legal personality and operational autonomy within the COMESA institutional framework.

The Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI derives its legitimacy from the following instruments:

1. **COMESA Treaty and Protocols**: Providing the overarching legal framework for regional integration, trade facilitation, and agricultural development.

2. **ACTESA Statutes and Strategic Plan (2021–2031)**: Defining ACTESA's mandate to harmonize agricultural policies, facilitate commodity trade, and strengthen regional value chains.

3. **COMESA Council and Intergovernmental Committee Decisions**: Endorsing the implementation of regional programs in agriculture, ICT, and infrastructure.

4. **Specialized Agency Precedent**: The establishment of ACTESA sets a precedent for CODESA as a specialized agency under COMESA, with a mandate to lead digitalisation and social development initiatives.

5. **Continental and Global Commitments**: Alignment with the **Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)**, the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**, and the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly Goals 2 (Zero Hunger), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

The alliance will operate under a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** between ACTESA and CODESA, endorsed by the COMESA Council of Ministers, and will be subject to COMESA's financial regulations, procurement rules, and environmental and social safeguards frameworks.

4. Mandate, Objectives, and Theory of Change

Mandate

The Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI is mandated to:

- Harmonize agricultural input and output market regulations across COMESA Member States.

- Enhance staple food productivity and trade through integrated value chain development.

- Deploy digital enablers to improve efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity in agricultural systems.

- Foster climate resilience and sustainability through modular infrastructure and circular economy principles.

Objectives

The alliance pursues the following strategic objectives:

1. **Policy Harmonization**: Align national regulations on seeds, fertilizers, bioprotectants, and biosafety with COMESA standards.

2. **Market Integration**: Establish interoperable commodity exchanges and warehouse receipt systems to facilitate cross-border trade.

3. **Digital Transformation**: Implement farmer ID systems, e-voucher platforms, and regional data hubs to enable precision agriculture and traceability.

4. **Infrastructure Development**: Deploy ECHO modular platforms for renewable energy, water management, and waste recycling to support agricultural clusters.

5. **Capacity Building**: Strengthen institutional and human capacity through training, research partnerships, and knowledge transfer.

Theory of Change

The alliance is premised on the hypothesis that **regional agricultural transformation requires simultaneous progress in policy harmonization, market integration, digitalisation, and infrastructure development**. By addressing these interdependent domains, the program will create an enabling environment for smallholder farmers and agribusinesses to transition from subsistence to commercial production, thereby increasing productivity, reducing post-harvest losses, and enhancing food security.

Causal Pathway:

- **Inputs**: Financial resources, technical expertise, digital infrastructure, and policy instruments.

- **Activities**: Development of harmonized regulations, deployment of digital platforms, establishment of commodity exchanges, and capacity-building programs.

- **Outputs**: Operational regional standards, functional digital systems, improved market linkages, and trained stakeholders.

- **Outcomes**: Increased agricultural productivity, expanded intra-COMESA trade, and improved resilience to climate shocks.

- **Impact**: Inclusive and sustainable food systems contributing to regional economic integration and poverty reduction.

5. Scope and Workstreams

The Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI encompasses a **regional programmatic scope** covering all 21 COMESA Member States, structured around four interdependent workstreams that collectively operationalize the alliance's objectives:

Workstream 1: Policy and Standards Harmonization
This workstream addresses the fragmentation of agricultural input and output markets by:

- Harmonizing regulations on seeds, fertilizers, bioprotectants, and biosafety across Member States.

- Supporting the domestication of COMESA model laws and guidelines, including the COMESA Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations and Fertilizer Harmonisation Implementation Plan.

- Establishing mutual recognition agreements for bioprotectants and biotechnology products.

Reference: COMESA Divisions and Units, ACTESA Strategic Report

Workstream 2: Market Systems and Commodity Exchanges
This workstream focuses on:

- Developing interoperable commodity exchanges and warehouse receipt systems.

- Facilitating zero-tariff regimes and Common External Tariff (CET) harmonization for fertilizers and seeds.

- Establishing regional platforms for horticulture value chains under the COMESA–EAC Horticulture Accelerator (CEHA).

Reference: Infrastructure & Logistics Division

Workstream 3: Digital Enablers for Agriculture
CODESA will lead the deployment of digital public infrastructure to:

- Implement farmer ID systems and e-voucher platforms for input subsidies.

- Develop interoperable data platforms for market intelligence, traceability, and climate-smart agriculture.

- Integrate broadband connectivity and e-government services to streamline regulatory processes.

Reference: Information & Networking Division, COMESA ICT Status Report

Workstream 4: Logistics and Cold-Chain Pilots
This workstream will:

- Establish aggregation hubs and cold storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses.

- Deploy modular ECHO platforms for renewable energy, water management, and waste recycling.

- Promote climate-smart logistics solutions integrated with regional transport corridors.

Reference: COMESA Infrastructure Development

6. Stakeholders

The success of the Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI depends on a multi-tiered stakeholder ecosystem:

Institutional Stakeholders

- **COMESA Policy Organs**: Authority, Council of Ministers, and Intergovernmental Committee for strategic oversight.

- **ACTESA**: Lead agency for commodity trade, policy harmonization, and market systems.

- **CODESA**: Lead agency for digitalisation, connectivity, and social development.

- **COMESA Divisions**: Infrastructure & Logistics, Information & Networking, and Agriculture for technical alignment.

Reference: COMESA Specialized Agencies

Member States

- Ministries of Agriculture, Trade, Finance, and ICT for policy domestication and implementation.

- National regulatory authorities for seeds, fertilizers, and biosafety.

Private Sector

- Agribusinesses, seed companies, fertilizer manufacturers, and bioprotectant suppliers.

- ICT providers, telecom operators, and cloud service companies for digital infrastructure.

- Commodity exchanges and logistics firms for market integration.

Development Partners and DFIs

- **African Development Bank (AfDB)**, **World Bank**, **EU**, **USAID**, **FCDO**, and **BMGF** for financing and technical assistance.

- **UNDP** for integration of SDEP research and policy alignment with SDGs.

Civil Society and Academia

- Farmer organizations, cooperatives, and NGOs for grassroots engagement.

- Universities and research institutions for innovation and capacity building.

7. Governance

The governance structure for the Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI is designed to ensure **institutional legitimacy, fiduciary integrity, and operational accountability** within the COMESA framework. It will operate under a **multi-tiered governance model**:

7.1 Oversight

- **COMESA Council of Ministers**: Provides strategic oversight and policy direction, ensuring alignment with the COMESA Treaty and regional integration objectives.

- **ACTESA Board**: Retains statutory responsibility for ACTESA's mandate and approves programmatic decisions related to commodity trade and agricultural policy harmonization.

- **CODESA Governing Board**: Oversees digitalisation and social development components, ensuring compliance with COMESA ICT and data governance frameworks.

Reference: COMESA Divisions and Units, COMESA Specialized Agencies

7.2 Joint Steering Committee (JSC)

A **Joint Steering Committee** will be established as the apex decision-making body for the alliance, co-chaired by the CEOs of ACTESA and CODESA, with representation from:

- COMESA Secretariat divisions (Infrastructure & Logistics, Information & Networking, Agriculture).

- Member State representatives (rotational basis).

- Development partners and DFIs (observer status).

- Private sector and civil society (advisory role).

The JSC will:

- Approve annual work plans, budgets, and procurement plans.

- Monitor compliance with fiduciary, environmental, and social safeguards.

- Resolve escalated issues and authorize corrective measures.

7.3 Assurance and Compliance

- **Financial Assurance**: IPSAS-compliant accounting, annual external audits, and quarterly financial reporting to COMESA and donors.

- **Procurement Assurance**: Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) for procurement transparency.

- **Safeguards Assurance**: Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework aligned with AfDB ISS and World Bank ESF; digital safeguards aligned with ISO/IEC 27001 and NIST CSF.

7.4 Technical and Operational Committees

- **Policy Harmonization Committee**: Coordinates regulatory alignment across Member States.

- **Digital Infrastructure Committee**: Oversees ICT architecture, cybersecurity, and interoperability.

- **Market Systems Committee**: Supervises commodity exchanges, warehouse receipt systems, and logistics pilots.

8. Funding and Financial Model

The Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI will adopt a **blended financing model** combining public, private, and concessional resources to ensure sustainability and scalability:

8.1 Sources of Finance

- **Multilateral and Bilateral Donors**: AfDB, World Bank, EU, USAID, FCDO, and BMGF for grants and concessional loans.

- **Development Finance Institutions (DFIs)**: AfDB and regional DFIs for infrastructure and value chain financing.

- **Private Sector Investment**: Through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for logistics, cold-chain, and digital infrastructure.

- **Member State Contributions**: Annual assessed contributions to support core program costs.

- **Innovative Instruments**: Matching grants, credit guarantee schemes, and blended finance facilities for SMEs and farmer organizations.

8.2 Financial Architecture

- **CODESA Development Fund**: A ring-fenced fund managed under COMESA financial regulations, with IPSAS-compliant reporting and independent audits.

- **Disbursement Mechanism**: Performance-based tranches linked to milestones and safeguards compliance.

- **Transparency and Disclosure**: All procurement and financial transactions disclosed via OCDS-compliant platforms.

8.3 Estimated Budget Envelope

The indicative ten-year budget for the Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI is projected at **USD 100 million**, considered as a pre-study spread over three countries:

- Policy Harmonization and Governance: 15%

- Market Systems, agriculture development and Commodity Exchanges: 25%

- Digital Infrastructure and Connectivity: 10%

- Logistics and Cold-Chain Pilots: 20%

- Capacity Building and MEL: 30%

Reference: ACTESA Flagship Proposal

9. Implementation Approach

The implementation of the Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI will follow a **phased, corridor-based, and digitally enabled delivery model**, ensuring alignment with COMESA's integration agenda and ACTESA's operational frameworks.

9.1 Delivery Model

- **Lead Agencies**: ACTESA (commodity trade and policy harmonization) and CODESA (digitalisation and connectivity).

- **Execution Partners**: COMESA Secretariat divisions, Member State ministries, private sector consortia, and development partners.

- **Implementation Unit**: A Joint Program Implementation Unit (PIU) hosted within ACTESA and CODESA, reporting to the Joint Steering Committee.

9.2 Phased Approach

- **Phase I – Foundation (Year 1–2)**

  o Establish governance structures and legal instruments (MoU, operational guidelines).

  o Conduct baseline studies and readiness assessments for policy harmonization and digital infrastructure.

  o Launch pilot programs for seed and fertilizer harmonization, farmer ID systems, and broadband connectivity in two regional clusters.

- **Phase II – Scale-Up (Year 3–7)**

  o Expand harmonized regulatory frameworks to all Member States.

  o Operationalize regional commodity exchanges and warehouse receipt systems.

  o Deploy ECHO modular platforms and broadband connectivity in priority corridors.

  o Roll out digital farmer services (e-vouchers, traceability systems) region-wide.

- **Phase III – Consolidation and Exit (Year 8–10)**

  o Institutionalize CODESA as a fully recognized COMESA specialized agency.

  o Transition operational responsibilities to Member States and regional bodies.

  o Embed sustainability mechanisms (PPP models, fee-for-service systems).

  o Conduct final evaluations and knowledge transfer to ensure continuity beyond the program lifecycle.

9.3 Delivery Principles

- **Regional Public Goods**: Prioritize interventions that generate cross-border benefits (e.g., harmonized standards, interoperable systems).

- **Digital-First**: Embed digital enablers in all workstreams to enhance efficiency and transparency.

- **Safeguards Compliance**: Apply AfDB ISS, World Bank ESF, and COMESA ICT/data protection policies throughout the program.

- **Transparency and Accountability**: Use OCDS for procurement and IPSAS for financial reporting.

10. Timeline and Milestones (2026–2036)

The ten-year implementation horizon is structured into **four major phases with decision gates**:

Phase	Duration	Key Milestones
Inception & Design	Months 0–6	- MoU signed between ACTESA and CODESA - Joint Steering Committee constituted - Baseline studies and readiness assessments completed

Phase	Duration	Key Milestones
Phase I – Foundation	Year 1–2	- Governance and PIU operational - Harmonization pilots launched in 5 Member States - Digital farmer ID and e-voucher pilots deployed - Initial ECHO platform feasibility studies completed
Phase II – Scale-Up	Year 3–7	- Harmonized seed, fertilizer, and bioprotectant regulations adopted by 21 Member States - Regional commodity exchange operational - Broadband connectivity extended to 60% of rural clusters - Cold-chain and logistics hubs established in 3 corridors
Phase III – Consolidation	Year 8–10	- CODESA institutionalized as COMESA specialized agency - PPP models operational for infrastructure and digital services - Final evaluation and sustainability plan approved - Knowledge transfer and exit strategy implemented

Decision Gates:

- **Gate 1 (End of Year 2)**: Approval to scale based on pilot performance and safeguards compliance.

- **Gate 2 (End of Year 7)**: Approval for consolidation based on mid-term evaluation and financial sustainability indicators.

Reference: COMESA Infrastructure & ICT Strategy, ACTESA Strategic Report

11. Risk Management

The Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI will adopt a **comprehensive risk management framework** aligned with COMESA's governance standards and international best practices (AfDB ISS, World Bank ESF, ISO 31000). Risks will be categorized, monitored, and mitigated through a structured **Risk Register** maintained by the Joint Program Implementation Unit (PIU) and reviewed quarterly by the Joint Steering Committee.

11.1 Risk Categories and Key Risks

- **Strategic Risks**:

  o Misalignment between Member State priorities and regional objectives.

  o Political instability affecting cross-border trade and program continuity.

- **Operational Risks**:

  o Delays in policy harmonization and domestication at national level.

  o Limited institutional capacity for digital systems deployment.

- **Fiduciary and Procurement Risks**:

  o Non-compliance with IPSAS and OCDS standards.

- o Risk of procurement delays or irregularities.

- **Environmental and Social Risks**:

  - o Land degradation, deforestation, and biodiversity loss from agricultural expansion.

  - o Gender exclusion and inequitable benefit distribution.

- **Cybersecurity and Data Risks**:

  - o Breaches of farmer data privacy and cross-border data transfer vulnerabilities.

- **Financial Risks**:

  - o Volatility in donor funding and private sector investment flows.

- **Climate and Commodity Price Risks**:

  - o Climate shocks impacting production and logistics.

  - o Price volatility in staple commodities affecting market stability.

11.2 Mitigation Measures

- **Governance**: Embed risk oversight in the Joint Steering Committee with escalation protocols.

- **Policy Instruments**: Use model laws and mutual recognition agreements to accelerate harmonization.

- **Capacity Building**: Deploy targeted training for regulators and ICT teams.

- **Safeguards**: Apply AfDB ISS and World Bank ESF for environmental and social compliance; ISO/IEC 27001 for data security.

- **Financial Controls**: Implement IPSAS-compliant accounting, external audits, and OCDS procurement disclosure.

- **Contingency Planning**: Maintain a financial buffer and climate risk insurance mechanisms.

Reference: COMESA Infrastructure & ICT Strategy, ACTESA Strategic Report

12. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

The MEL framework will ensure **accountability, adaptive management, and evidence-based decision-making** across the ten-year program horizon.

12.1 MEL Architecture

- **Lead Responsibility**: MEL Unit within the Joint PIU, reporting to the Joint Steering Committee and COMESA Secretariat.

- **Evaluation Moments**:

  - o **Baseline Assessment**: Completed during inception phase.

  - o **Mid-Term Review**: End of Year 5 to inform scale-up and course correction.

  - o **Final Evaluation**: End of Year 10 to assess impact and sustainability.

12.2 Data Systems

- **Financial Data**: IPSAS-compliant reporting integrated with COMESA systems.

- **Procurement Data**: OCDS-compliant disclosure for transparency.

- **Program Data**: Digital dashboards tracking KPIs in real time, linked to farmer ID and e-voucher systems.

12.3 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- **Policy Harmonization**:
  - Number of Member States adopting COMESA-aligned seed, fertilizer, and biosafety regulations.

- **Market Integration**:
  - Volume of intra-COMESA staple food trade (metric tons).
  - Number of operational commodity exchanges and warehouse receipt systems.

- **Digital Transformation**:
  - Percentage of farmers registered in digital ID systems.
  - Number of interoperable e-services deployed regionally.

- **Infrastructure and Logistics**:
  - Kilometers of broadband backbone deployed.
  - Number of ECHO modular platforms operational.

- **Social and Gender Inclusion**:
  - Percentage of women and youth beneficiaries in program interventions.

12.4 Learning and Adaptation

- **Annual Learning Reviews**: Document lessons learned and best practices for dissemination across Member States.

- **Knowledge Products**: Policy briefs, case studies, and technical toolkits published on COMESA and ACTESA platforms.

- **Regional Knowledge Exchange**: Annual forums for Member States, private sector, and development partners.

13. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The KPI framework is designed to be auditable, comparable across Member States, and coherent with COMESA treaty objectives, ACTESA's specialized agency mandate, and the digitalisation remit envisaged for CODESA. Each indicator includes a precise definition, unit, data source, frequency, and

disaggregation (sex, age where applicable). Where baseline values differ by country, the Secretariat will publish an annual **KPI Dictionary and Results Compendium** as Annex A.

KPI Design Principles. Indicators focus on regional public goods (harmonisation, cross-border interoperability, corridor logistics, digital public infrastructure) and on outcomes cited in ACTESA's flagship proposal (e.g., CEHA targets on post-harvest loss reduction) and COMESA programme lines in infrastructure and ICT (treaty organs; divisions for Infrastructure & Logistics and Information & Networking) (Divisions / Units; Infrastructure & Logistics Division; Information & Networking Division; ACTESA 2023 Report).

13.1 Core KPI Set (Regional)

Domain	Indicator (Definition)	Unit	Baseline (2026)	Target Y5 (2031)	Target Y10 (2036)	Primary Source / Frequency
Policy harmonisation	Member States that have domesticated COMESA-aligned **seed, fertilizer, bioprotectant, and biosafety** instruments (COMSHIP/COMFREP/COMBIHAP/COMBIP)	Count (0–21)	TBD at inception	≥14	≥21	ACTESA Secretariat administrative records; annual (ACTESA 2023 Report)
Market integration	Growth in **intra-COMESA staple food trade** (rolling, inflation-adjusted)	% per annum	Baseline growth series	≥5% p.a.	≥10% p.a.	COMESA Trade/Statistics; annual (Divisions / Units)
Standards & SPS	**Harmonised standards/SPS measures** adopted regionally and in force (new or updated)	Count	Baseline inventory	+20	+40	ACTESA/COMESA Council records; annual (ACTESA 2023 Report)
Digital DPI for agri	Farmers with **digital identity** enrolled and linked to farm registries/e-voucher rails (♀/youth disaggregation)	% of targeted farmers	0	40%	80%	PIU dashboards; semi-annual (COMESA ICT Status Report)
e-Voucher efficiency	Input subsidies disbursed via **interoperable e-vouchers**; reconciliation within 30 days	% of total subsidies	Baseline mapping	60%	90%	PIU/OAG finance; quarterly (IPSAS)

Domain	Indicator (Definition)	Unit	Baseline (2026)	Target Y5 (2031)	Target Y10 (2036)	Primary Source / Frequency
Cyber/data resilience	Mean time to **detect/respond** (MTTD/MTTR) cyber incidents affecting public agri platforms	Hours	TBD	≤24/≤48	≤8/≤24	SOC/CERT reports; quarterly (Information & Networking Division)
Connectivity	Rural agri clusters with **broadband access** ≥10 Mbps downlink	% of clusters	Baseline survey	50%	80%	COMESA ICT programme; annual (COMESA Infrastructure Development – ICT)
Logistics & cold chain	Aggregation hubs with **functional cold chain** integrated to corridors	Count	Baseline map	30	75	PIU field verification; annual (Infrastructure & Logistics Division)
Post-harvest loss	**Post-harvest loss** in fruits/vegetables in targeted corridors	%	~30–50% (varies)	≤25%	≤20%	CEHA MEL; annual ([ACTESA proposal CEHA targets, user-provided]; cf. ACTESA 2023 Report)
Inclusivity	Women/youth share among beneficiaries of digital ID, e-vouchers, training	% share	Baseline disagg.	≥40% women; ≥30% youth	≥50% women; ≥40% youth	PIU beneficiary registry; semi-annual
Biosafety service delivery	Median **time to decision** on biosafety dossiers using regional PoE	Days	Baseline scan	−25% vs baseline	−50% vs baseline	COMBIP secretariat; annual (ACTESA 2023 Report)

Domain	Indicator (Definition)	Unit	Baseline (2026)	Target Y5 (2031)	Target Y10 (2036)	Primary Source / Frequency
Transparency	Competitive tenders with **OCDS-compliant** publication (plans, awards, contracts)	% of eligible tenders	0	80%	100%	PIU procurement; quarterly (OCDS)
Financial integrity	Timely **IPSAS** financial statements and unqualified audit opinions	Yes/No; Count	N/A	Yes annually	Yes annually	COMESA finance; annual

Notes on computation. KPI methods and verification protocols will be codified in Annex A. Financial and procurement indicators are aligned with IPSAS and OCDS transparency practice; cyber metrics follow NIST/ISO norms referenced in COMESA ICT documentation (COMESA ICT Status Report; COMESA Data Privacy Policy).

14. PESTEL Analysis

14.1 Narrative

Political. The alliance benefits from the legal architecture of the COMESA Treaty and the Authority/Council decisions that created specialized agencies such as ACTESA, providing a clear precedent for CODESA. Regional policy organs enable harmonisation of standards and coordinated implementation across divisions (Infrastructure & Logistics, Information & Networking) (Divisions / Units; COMESA Specialized Agencies). Political economy risks remain where national priorities, electoral cycles, or instability may delay domestication of regional instruments.

Economic. The programme targets growth in intra-COMESA trade through standards, market systems, and corridor logistics. Financing gaps in infrastructure and SME working capital justify blended finance, guarantees, and PPPs, consistent with COMESA's corridor strategy and ACTESA's market development functions (Infrastructure & Logistics Division; ACTESA 2023 Report).

Social. With ~90 million smallholders and persistent rural poverty, social inclusion, skills development, and gender equity are material to outcomes. Capacity building through regional academies and digital literacy reduces adoption barriers and supports equitable access to inputs and markets (as reflected in ACTESA's stakeholder and capacity components) (ACTESA 2023 Report; Information & Networking Division).

Technological. Digital public infrastructure—farmer ID, e-vouchers, interoperable data platforms, e-government workflows—mirrors COMESA's ICT work on digital FTA, e-legislation, and interoperability. Cybersecurity and data governance (including privacy and cross-border flows) must be addressed via architecture standards and incident response capabilities (COMESA ICT Status Report; COMESA Data Privacy Policy).

Environmental. Climate shocks amplify volatility in yields and logistics; programme design therefore emphasises climate-smart practices, cold-chain to reduce loss, and modular renewables and water systems (ECHO) to strengthen resilience and reduce emissions intensity, consistent with regional

sustainability thrusts of COMESA and ACTESA's CEHA focus (Infrastructure & Logistics Division; ACTESA 2023 Report).

Legal. Harmonisation utilises model regulations (seed, fertilizer, bioprotectants, biosafety) and mutual recognition under ACTESA's processes, while digital dimensions align with COMESA's data privacy policy and e-government instruments. Contracting will rely on COMESA procurement frameworks and OCDS disclosure to manage fiduciary risk (COMESA Specialized Agencies; COMESA Data Privacy Policy).

14.2 PESTEL Table

Factor	Drivers / Constraints	Implications for the Alliance	Mitigation / Leverage
Political	Treaty organs; specialized agencies; differing national priorities	Enables regional programmes; requires consensus and sustained buy-in	Use Council/IC channels; staged domestication; JSC diplomacy (Divisions / Units)
Economic	Infrastructure finance gaps; trade costs; SME capital needs	Necessitates blended finance and PPPs; phased roll-out	Corridor sequencing; guarantees; commodity finance (Infrastructure & Logistics Division)
Social	Inclusion gaps; skills deficits; rural poverty	Adoption risks; equity considerations	Regional academy; targeted outreach; gender/youth quotas (ACTESA 2023 Report)
Technological	ICT readiness variance; cyber posture; interoperability	Risks to platform reliability and trust	Enterprise architecture standards; CERT/SOC; interoperability profiles (COMESA ICT Status Report)
Environmental	Climate risks to agriculture/logistics; resource stress	Requires resilient design and loss minimisation	Climate-smart ag; cold-chain; modular renewables and water (ECHO) (Infrastructure & Logistics Division)
Legal	Data/privacy; e-transactions; model laws; procurement	Compliance workload across 21 jurisdictions	Model clauses; mutual recognition; OCDS transparency (Data Privacy Policy)

15. SWOT Analysis

15.1 Narrative

Strengths. The alliance leverages ACTESA's status as a COMESA specialized agency with an explicit mandate for staple food market development and standards harmonisation, and the Secretariat's convening power across divisions and Member States. The corridor approach to infrastructure and ICT

provides a pragmatic delivery vector for interoperable systems and logistics (COMESA Specialized Agencies; Infrastructure & Logistics Division).

Weaknesses. Heterogeneity in national regulatory capacity, ICT maturity, and statistical systems complicates uniform execution. Fiscal space constraints in some Member States may slow co-financing and operationalisation of PPPs; cyber capabilities and data governance also vary materially (COMESA ICT Status Report; Divisions / Units).

Opportunities. Harmonisation at scale reduces transaction costs and catalyses intra-regional trade. Digital public infrastructure (farmer ID, e-vouchers, e-government) increases efficiency and transparency. Continental frameworks like **CAADP** and **AfCFTA** strengthen policy coherence and market access for compliant value chains (AU – CAADP; AfCFTA Secretariat).

Threats. Climate shocks, pest/disease outbreaks, and commodity price volatility can undermine production and market stability. Cyber incidents threaten trust in digital rails; donor funding volatility could jeopardise long-term investments without robust blended finance structures (ACTESA 2023 Report; COMESA ICT Status Report).

15.2 SWOT Tables
Internal Factors

Strengths	Weaknesses
Specialized agency experience (ACTESA); Secretariat convening/coordination; corridor strategy across Infrastructure & ICT; existing regional instruments (COMSHIP/COMFREP/COMBIHAP/COMBIP) (COMESA Specialized Agencies; Infrastructure & Logistics Division; ACTESA 2023 Report)	Heterogeneous national capacity and ICT/cyber maturity; constrained fiscal space; uneven data quality and MEL capabilities (COMESA ICT Status Report)

External Factors

Opportunities	Threats
Scale economies from harmonisation; digital DPI for agriculture; alignment with CAADP and AfCFTA; DFI appetite for corridor PPPs (AU – CAADP; AfCFTA Secretariat)	Climate/commodity shocks; pest and SPS disruptions; cyber incidents; financing volatility and crowding-out risk (ACTESA 2023 Report; Information & Networking Division)

Cross-walk to Programme Management
The KPI, PESTEL, and SWOT constructs will be embedded operationally as follows: (i) the **Risk Register** will reference PESTEL-tagged drivers for each high-rated risk; (ii) **annual work plans** will prioritise activities that leverage SWOT-identified strengths/opportunities while directly treating weaknesses and threats; and (iii) the **Results Compendium** will publish KPI performance with methodological notes and verification statements aligned to IPSAS/OCDS and COMESA ICT data governance guidance (COMESA ICT Status Report; Data Privacy Policy).

References

1. **COMESA – Divisions and Units**: <https://www.comesa.int/comesa-divisions-units/>

2. **COMESA – Infrastructure & Logistics Division**: <https://www.comesa.int/infrastructure-logistics-division/>

3. **COMESA – Information & Networking Division (ICT)**: <https://www.comesa.int/information-networking-division-2/>

4. **COMESA – ICT Sector Status Report (2023)**: <https://www.comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/5.-CS.ID_.JTCM_.XIII_.3-ICT_EN_2.pdf>

5. **COMESA – Data Privacy Policy (Secretariat)**: <https://www.comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Approved-Data-Privacy-Policy.pdf>

6. **COMESA – Specialized Agencies (incl. ACTESA)**: <https://www.comesa.int/comesa-specialised-agencies/>

7. **ACTESA – Intergovernmental Committee & Council Report (Nov 2023)**: <https://www.comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/3n.-ACTESA-IC-and-Council-Report-November-2023_EN.pdf>

8. **African Union – CAADP**: <https://au.int/en/caadp>

9. **AfCFTA Secretariat**: <https://afcfta.au.int/>

16. Safeguards

The Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI will operate under a **dual-layer safeguards framework** integrating **environmental and social (E&S) standards** with **digital and data governance protocols**, ensuring compliance with COMESA policy instruments and international norms.

16.1 Environmental and Social Safeguards

- **Framework Alignment**: The program adopts the **African Development Bank Integrated Safeguards System (AfDB ISS)** and the **World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF)** as reference standards, adapted to COMESA's regional context.

- **Screening and Categorization**: All subprojects (e.g., cold-chain hubs, ECHO modular platforms) will undergo E&S screening to determine risk category (A, B, or C) and required instruments (ESIA, ESMP).

- **Key E&S Risks**:
    - Land acquisition and resettlement for logistics hubs.
    - Biodiversity impacts from agricultural intensification.
    - Occupational health and safety in storage and transport facilities.
    - Gender-based violence (GBV) and exclusion risks in program delivery.

- **Mitigation Instruments**:
    - **Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)** for corridor-level interventions.

- o **Resettlement Policy Framework (RPF)** for land-related impacts.

- o **Gender Action Plan (GAP)** to ensure equitable participation and benefits.

- o **Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM)** accessible at community and regional levels.

Reference: AfDB ISS, World Bank ESF

16.2 Digital and Data Safeguards

- **Policy Anchors**: COMESA **Data Privacy Policy** and ICT harmonization instruments (Data Privacy Policy; COMESA ICT Status Report).

- **Standards**:

  - o **ISO/IEC 27001** for information security management.

  - o **NIST Cybersecurity Framework** for risk-based controls.

- **Controls**:

  - o Encryption of farmer ID and e-voucher data at rest and in transit.

  - o Role-based access and multi-factor authentication for all digital platforms.

  - o Incident response protocols with 24-hour reporting to COMESA CERT.

- **Cross-Border Data Governance**:

  - o Compliance with COMESA model clauses for data transfer.

  - o Mutual recognition agreements for digital signatures and e-transactions.

16.3 Safeguards Governance

- **Safeguards Unit**: Embedded in the Joint PIU, reporting to the Joint Steering Committee and COMESA's Infrastructure & ICT divisions.

- **Disclosure**: All safeguards instruments published on COMESA and ACTESA portals in line with **Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS)** transparency commitments.

17. Communications and Advocacy

The communications strategy will position the Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI as a **flagship regional integration program**, reinforcing COMESA's leadership in agricultural transformation and digitalisation.

17.1 Objectives

- Build political and public support for policy harmonization and digital reforms.

- Mobilize private sector and DFI participation in blended finance structures.

- Ensure transparency and accountability to Member States and development partners.

17.2 Target Audiences

- **Primary**: COMESA policy organs (Authority, Council, Intergovernmental Committee), Member State ministries, ACTESA and CODESA boards.

- **Secondary**: Development partners, DFIs, private sector consortia, farmer organizations, civil society, and media.

17.3 Channels and Tools

- **Institutional Channels**: COMESA and ACTESA websites, quarterly bulletins, and policy briefs.

- **Digital Platforms**: Social media campaigns aligned with COMESA's ICT outreach strategy; webinars and e-learning modules for stakeholders.

- **Advocacy Events**: Annual **Regional Food Security and Digitalisation Forum** under COMESA auspices; side events at AU and AfCFTA summits.

- **Transparency Instruments**: OCDS-compliant procurement disclosures; IPSAS-based financial reporting; publication of MEL dashboards.

17.4 Key Messages

- The alliance delivers **regional public goods**: harmonized standards, interoperable digital systems, and resilient logistics.

- It operationalizes **Agenda 2063**, **CAADP**, and **AfCFTA** commitments through a COMESA-led mechanism.

- It safeguards **inclusion, sustainability, and transparency**, ensuring benefits for smallholders, women, and youth.

Reference: COMESA Information & Networking Division, ACTESA Strategic Report

18. Sustainability and Exit Strategy

The sustainability framework ensures that the Strategic Alliance for SFPSEI transitions from a **donor-driven program** to a **self-sustaining regional mechanism** embedded within COMESA's institutional architecture and Member State systems.

18.1 Institutional Sustainability

- **Integration into COMESA Structures**:

  - o CODESA will be institutionalized as a **COMESA Specialized Agency** under Article 182 of the Treaty, mirroring ACTESA's legal status.

  - o Governance functions (Joint Steering Committee, technical committees) will transition into COMESA's standing committees for agriculture, ICT, and infrastructure.

- **Member State Ownership**:

  - o National focal points will be embedded in ministries of agriculture and ICT to ensure continuity of harmonization and digitalisation agendas.

  - o Regional policy instruments (model laws, mutual recognition agreements) will be fully domesticated by Year 7, reducing reliance on external technical assistance.

Reference: COMESA Specialized Agencies, ACTESA Strategic Report

18.2 Financial Sustainability

- **Cost Recovery and Fee-for-Service Models**:

  - o Commodity exchanges and warehouse receipt systems will introduce transaction fees to cover operational costs.

  - o Digital farmer ID and e-voucher platforms will adopt tiered service models for private sector integration (e.g., input suppliers, insurers).

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**:

  - o Cold-chain and logistics hubs will operate under PPP concessions, reducing fiscal burden on Member States.

- **Regional Development Fund**:

  - o The **CODESA Development Fund**, established under COMESA financial regulations, will evolve into a revolving facility capitalized by Member State contributions, DFI co-financing, and private equity participation.

Reference: COMESA Infrastructure & Logistics Division

18.3 Operational Sustainability

- **Capacity Building**:

  - o The Digital and Social Innovation Academy will institutionalize continuous training for regulators, SMEs, and civil society, ensuring a pipeline of skilled professionals.

- **Technology Transfer**:

  - o Open-source architectures and regional interoperability standards will reduce vendor lock-in and ensure long-term maintainability.

18.4 Exit and Handover

- **Exit Criteria**:

  - o Full domestication of harmonized regulations in all 21 Member States.

  - o Operationalization of digital platforms and commodity exchanges under sustainable business models.

  - o Achievement of ≥80% of KPI targets, verified through independent evaluation.

- **Handover Mechanism**:

  - o By Year 10, the Joint PIU will be dissolved, and residual functions absorbed by ACTESA, CODESA, and COMESA divisions.

  - o Knowledge assets (policy toolkits, digital blueprints, MEL datasets) will be archived in COMESA's Knowledge Management System for open access.