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CODESA PILLAR IV: CAPACITY BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

*JOB CREATION AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES AS IMPACT EFFECTS OF
OTHER PILLARS*

CREATED BY
EUSL AB

Care to Change the World

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CODESA Pillar IV – Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer

Executive Abstract

This pillar establishes a **Digital & Social Innovation Academy** as a permanent, COMESA-wide mechanism to professionalize and scale human-capital capabilities required by Power Play's corridor connectivity, digital public infrastructure (DPI), and market-systems reforms. It advances three aims. First, it delivers competency-based upskilling and reskilling for **public officials** involved in trade facilitation, standards, data governance, and DPI operations. Second, it equips **SMEs and value-chain actors** with applied digital, financial, and export-readiness skills linked to cross-border interoperability and the AfCFTA environment. Third, it enables **civil-society and community practitioners** to participate in inclusion, safeguards, and accountability functions. Design and delivery are framed by COMESA's existing e-learning and training practice and will consolidate and scale those precedents under a single Academy governance and quality-assurance system ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [ITC-COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#); [CBC Online Courses](#)). [\[COMESA - H...e-Learning\]](#), [\[COMESA e-L...ing Portal\]](#) [\[ITC-COMESA...Trade ...\]](#) [\[Online Cou...ss Council\]](#)

The Academy aligns with the **AU Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030)** and the **Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25)**, ensuring coherence with continental objectives on digital single market, skills harmonization, TVET strengthening, and lifelong learning. Curricula will map to recognized digital-skills taxonomies (e.g., UNESCO/UIS global digital-literacy framework) and to labour-market evidence that internet availability and productive technology use increase jobs and reduce poverty in Africa ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [CESA 16–25](#); [UNESCO Digital Literacy Framework](#); [World Bank – Digital Africa](#)). The pillar integrates with agriculture and market-systems programmes (SDEP/SFPSEI) through ACTESA-linked modules for standards, warehouse receipts, and climate-smart value chains, leveraging current initiatives such as **CEHA** to reinforce job creation in agri-food systems ([ACTESA 2023 Council Report – CEHA](#)). [\[The Digita...ican Union\]](#) [\[CONTINENTA...FOR AFRICA\]](#) [\[A global f.... - UNESCO\]](#) [\[Digital Af...Bank Group\]](#) [\[ALLIANCE F...SA\) IC ...\]](#)

The ten-year mission plan delivers measurable outcomes in employability, enterprise productivity, standards domestication, and DPI operations readiness, while creating a long-term pathway that reaches **primary and secondary learners** through teacher-upskilling and digital-literacy diffusion in line with CESA—so the children graduating in the 2030s–2040s are “digitally ready” modern adults ([CESA 16–25](#); [UNESCO Digital Literacy Framework](#)). [\[CONTINENTA...FOR AFRICA\]](#) [\[A global f.... - UNESCO\]](#)

Context

COMESA is advancing a corridor-based integration strategy and an ICT programme portfolio that includes Digital Free Trade Area (DFTA), e-Government, and e-Legislation. These program lines are supported by an expanding body of training initiatives—e-learning portals, trade-facilitation curricula, and CBC's SME modules—which demonstrate institutional readiness to consolidate capacity building under a unified Academy structure ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#); [COMESA e-Learning](#); [ITC-COMESA Training](#); [CBC Online Courses](#)). Capacity building already extends to border-operations staff and small-scale traders through programmes implemented with international partners, offering a template for multi-stakeholder delivery and sustainability at border points and



OSBPs ([COMESA – Border Officials Training](#); [IOM/COMESA Trade Facilitation Training Module](#)). [\[MEDIUM TER...MESA Court\]](#) [\[Procurement...e Williams\]](#) [\[COMESA - H...e-Learning\]](#) [\[ITC-COMESA...Trade ...\]](#) [\[Online Cou...ss Council\]](#) [\[Capacity B... - COMESA\]](#) [\[COMMON MAR...TATION ...\]](#)

At the continental level, digitalization is a formal policy priority. The **AU Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030)** calls for a digitally empowered citizenry, an African digital single market, and innovative financing to close the infrastructure and skills gaps, while **CESA 16–25** emphasizes harmonized, quality education and skills for sustainable development and mobility. The Academy will concretize these strategies inside COMESA by translating them into accredited pathways for practitioners and by bridging them to school-system outcomes via teacher enablement and localized digital-literacy content ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [CESA 16–25](#)). [\[The Digi...ican Union\]](#) [\[CONTINENTA...FOR AFRICA\]](#)

Labour-market evidence underscores the urgency: despite broad 3G/4G availability in many countries, actual productive use remains low, constraining job creation and firm-level productivity. The World Bank's Digital Africa programme identifies a persistent uptake gap (coverage vs. use), with rigorous studies showing causal impacts of internet availability on employment and poverty reduction—pointing to the need for demand-side capability-building, not merely supply-side infrastructure ([World Bank – Digital Africa report](#); [World Bank press release – use gap](#)). In agriculture and food systems, ACTESA's CEHA initiative demonstrates both the feasibility and necessity of targeted skills for climate-smart horticulture and value-chain modernization—critical complements to SDEP/SFPSEI—and presents a ready partner for sector-specific Academy tracks ([ACTESA 2023 Council Report – CEHA](#)). [\[Digital Af...Bank Group\]](#) [\[Accelerati...eating ...\]](#) [\[ALLIANCE F...SA\) IC ...\]](#)

Finally, the Academy's competency frameworks will align to UNESCO/UIS global digital-literacy references and to DFI skills roadmaps (e.g., AfDB's SEPA Action Plan), ensuring portability, employer recognition, and bankability of skills investments over the decennial compact ([UNESCO Digital Literacy Framework](#); [AfDB – SEPA Action Plan 2022–2025](#)). [\[A global f... - UNESCO\]](#) [\[Skills for...n Plan ...\]](#)

Legal Basis

The Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer Pillar ("Pillar 4") is instituted within the legal and institutional architecture of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). The COMESA Treaty empowers the Community, acting through its organs, to promote market integration and cooperation in trade-related and socio-economic spheres and to establish subsidiary bodies and specialised institutions for the execution of regional mandates. The Secretariat's programmatic authorities are exercised through the Infrastructure & Logistics Division and the Information & Networking / ICT Division, which set the policy and operational direction for corridor development, trade facilitation, and digital transformation; Pillar 4 derives its programmatic location and lines of accountability from these divisions and the decisions of the policy organs (COMESA Treaty; [Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

As a matter of institutional precedent, COMESA has already instituted structured training and e-learning modalities for Member States' officials and private-sector actors, including the Secretariat's e-Learning Portal, the ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training Programme for border and cross-border trade actors, and the COMESA Business Council's (CBC) online SME courses. These instruments demonstrate the Secretariat's legal and operational capacity to convene, accredit, and deliver capacity-building at regional scale and to consolidate such offerings under a unified Academy governance and

quality-assurance regime ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#); [CBC Online Courses](#)).

Continental policy coherence is secured by aligning Pillar 4 to the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030)—which calls for a digitally empowered citizenry, an African digital single market, and innovative financing for digital infrastructure and skills—and to the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25)—which mandates harmonised, quality education, TVET strengthening, and lifelong learning to achieve Agenda 2063. Recognition and mobility of learning outcomes are facilitated by referencing African qualification instruments such as the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) and by mapping curricula to internationally recognised digital-skills taxonomies (e.g., UNESCO’s global reference framework for digital literacy) ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [CESA 16–25](#); [ACQF resource](#); [UNESCO Digital Literacy Framework](#)).

Pillar 4 also interfaces with COMESA specialised agency practice, notably the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), for sector-specific capacity (e.g., seeds, fertilisers, warehouse receipts, climate-smart horticulture through CEHA). This ensures that agricultural market-systems competencies central to SDEP/SFPSEI are included in the Academy’s accredited pathways, in conformity with approved regional strategies and standards-harmonisation efforts ([ACTESA Institutional & Council Report 2023](#)).

The processing of personal data within Academy systems (learning management systems, certification registries, practitioner directories) will comply with the COMESA Secretariat Data Privacy Policy, with operationalisation through recognised security and privacy standards across the Academy’s digital platforms (e.g., ISO/IEC 27001 and, as relevant, ISO/IEC 27701), and with disclosure practices consistent with Community policy for transparency and accountability ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy \(PDF\)](#); [ISO/IEC 27701 overview](#)). The Academy’s design further supports the implementation environment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by developing capacities for trade facilitation, standards implementation, and productive use of digital services across borders ([AfCFTA Secretariat](#)).

Mandate, Objectives, and Theory of Change

Mandate

Pillar 4 is mandated to design, establish, and sustain a Digital & Social Innovation Academy as a COMESA-wide instrument for human-capital development, professionalisation, and knowledge transfer in support of the Community’s corridor, trade-facilitation, digital-transformation, and market-systems programmes. The Academy shall (i) provide competency-based, accredited learning pathways for public officials (trade, customs, border management, standards, ICT/data governance), SMEs and value-chain actors (export readiness, digital commerce, supply-chain and quality standards), and civil society/community practitioners (safeguards, grievance, inclusion); (ii) integrate sectoral tracks aligned to ACTESA-led market-systems reforms (e.g., seeds, fertilisers, warehouse receipts, CEHA horticulture); and (iii) extend teacher-enablement and digital-literacy diffusion to reach primary and secondary learners over the decennial compact, in alignment with CESA and AU digital strategy ([Information & Networking / ICT](#); [COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [ACTESA 2023 Report](#); [AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [CESA 16–25](#)).

The Academy functions as a cross-cutting enabler of Power Play, DPI roll-out, and SDEP/SFPSEI, translating infrastructure and policy reforms into employability, enterprise productivity, and service-delivery readiness. Its mandate spans the 2026–2036 decennial compact, with continuation contingent on gate-based performance reviews and alignment with the fifty-year Agenda for Social



Equity 2074 trajectory. Labour-market evidence on the causal impact of internet availability on jobs and welfare underscores the need to complement infrastructure with demand-side capability-building—a central rationale for Pillar 4 ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [World Bank press release on uptake gap](#)).

Objectives (2026–2036)

1. **Public-sector capability:** certify cohorts of customs, border, trade, standards, and ICT/data-governance officials able to operate OSBPs, apply harmonised procedures, administer interoperable e-services, and enforce data-privacy and cybersecurity controls in line with COMESA and continental policy ([Information & Networking / ICT](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy](#)).
2. **SME digitisation and export readiness:** enable SMEs to adopt digital tools and standards for regional trade (e-commerce readiness, quality, logistics, payments), leveraging existing CBC and ITC-COMESA curricula consolidated under the Academy ([CBC Online Courses](#); [ITC–COMESA Training](#)).
3. **Agrifood value-chain skills:** professionalise ACTESA-linked market-systems competencies (seeds, fertilisers, biopesticides, warehouse receipts, grades and standards; CEHA horticulture) to improve productivity and inclusion in SDEP/SFPSEI target chains ([ACTESA 2023 Report](#)).
4. **Digital-literacy diffusion and teacher enablement:** align foundational digital-skills curricula to UNESCO/UIS references and AU strategies, upskill teachers, and create early pipelines so that primary and secondary learners can participate in the modern digital economy ([UNESCO Digital Literacy Framework](#); [AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [CESA 16–25](#)).
5. **Safeguards, inclusion, and accountability:** institutionalise training for stakeholder engagement (ESS10), environmental/social safeguards, grievance-handling, and gender/inclusion to protect the social licence of Power Play and associated programmes ([ESS10 Guidance Note](#)).
6. **Portability and recognition:** embed quality assurance, assessment standards, and qualification mapping (e.g., ACQF) to ensure regional recognition and employer uptake of certifications ([ACQF resource](#)).

Theory of Change

Problem diagnosis. Across COMESA, infrastructure coverage and policy frameworks have improved, yet productive use and institutional readiness lag—a documented “uptake gap” that constrains job creation, enterprise productivity, and service delivery. Without demand-side skills, digital public services, corridor investments, and market-systems reforms under-perform ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#)).

Inputs. Multi-donor financing, DFI-supported technical assistance, partnerships with universities/TVET providers, COMESA institutions (Secretariat divisions, ACTESA, CBC), and continental references (AU DTS, CESA, ACQF). Existing COMESA training assets (e-Learning Portal, ITC–COMESA modules, CBC courses) are consolidated to reduce duplication and achieve economies of scale ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [ITC–COMESA Training](#); [CBC Online Courses](#); [AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#)).

Activities.

- (i) Design a competency framework mapped to UNESCO/UIS digital-skills taxonomy and to occupational standards in trade/ICT/standards/agri-value chains;



- (ii) develop modular curricula (online, blended, in-person) with train-the-trainer cohorts;
- (iii) establish accredited **Academy tracks**: Public Administration (OSBPs, STR, AfCFTA procedures; DPI operations; data privacy and cybersecurity), SME Digitisation & Trade, Agrifood Market Systems (ACTESA), Teacher Enablement & Digital Literacy;
- (iv) deploy **learning sandboxes** and applied labs aligned to Power Play and SDEP/SFPSEI projects;
- (v) operate assessment, certification, and recognition processes mapped to **ACQF**;
- (vi) institutionalise **MEL** and quality-assurance systems ([UNESCO Digital Literacy Framework](#); [AfCFTA Secretariat](#); [ACTESA 2023 Report](#)).

Outputs. Accredited curricula; functional Academy governance; certified public-sector practitioners (trade, customs, standards, ICT/data); certified SME cohorts in e-commerce/export readiness; agrifood cohorts in ACTESA tracks; trained teachers and published open digital-literacy assets; open-access knowledge objects and implementation playbooks (COMESA-wide). These outputs consolidate and scale extant COMESA training while standardising quality and recognition ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [CBC Online Courses](#)).

Outcomes (intermediate).

- (i) Increased **productive use** of digital services by officials and SMEs;
- (ii) higher **border-post performance** (time/cost to trade reductions) owing to better-trained personnel and harmonised procedures;
- (iii) increased **SME formalisation and export participation**;
- (iv) improved **standards domestication and warehouse-receipt utilisation**;
- (v) wider **digital-literacy penetration** via trained teachers;
- (vi) strengthened **data-protection and cybersecurity** conformance in public services. Evidence underpinning these causal pathways includes empirical findings that internet availability—when paired with the capacity to use it—increases employment and reduces poverty ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [COMESA – Border Officials Training precedent](#)).

Impact (longer-term, Agenda 2074 trajectory). A digitally skilled and socially inclusive regional workforce underpinning a **sustainable, competitive, and integrated COMESA economy**, with durable improvements in jobs, firm productivity, and public-service delivery consistent with **Agenda 2063** and AfCFTA objectives ([Agenda 2063](#); [AfCFTA Secretariat](#)).

Regional public goods vs national support. Regional public goods include common curricula/standards, recognition frameworks, and open knowledge assets; national support covers last-mile adoption, teacher enablement, and localisation of sector modules, delivered with Member State institutions and accredited providers. Data protection and learner records are administered under the COMESA Secretariat's **Data Privacy Policy** ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy \(PDF\)](#)).

Scope

Pillar 4 establishes the **Digital & Social Innovation Academy** as a permanent, Community-level instrument for human-capital development that translates Power Play's corridor connectivity, digital public infrastructure (DPI), and market-systems reforms into employability, enterprise productivity, and service-delivery capability. The Academy's scope is defined along six dimensions: beneficiaries, geographic coverage, curricular architecture, delivery modalities, recognition and quality assurance, and compliance.

Beneficiaries and institutional perimeter. The Academy serves three beneficiary families: (i) **public officials** in customs, trade facilitation, standards bodies, border management, and ICT/data-governance



functions; (ii) **SMEs and value-chain actors** requiring digitisation, export readiness, and standards compliance; and (iii) **civil society and community practitioners**, including teacher cohorts for foundational digital literacy and inclusion. This perimeter consolidates and scales existing COMESA training assets (Secretariat **e-Learning Portal**, ITC–COMESA trade-facilitation modules, and **COMESA Business Council** courses), under a unified governance and quality-assurance regime managed through the Secretariat’s programme divisions ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#); [CBC Online Courses](#)). The agrifood market-systems tracks are delivered in formal partnership with **ACTESA**, leveraging current portfolio instruments (e.g., CEHA) for climate-smart horticulture and standards harmonisation ([ACTESA 2023 Institutional & Council Report](#)).

Geographic coverage and regional public goods. The Academy is **COMESA-wide** and provides regional public goods—common curricula, competency frameworks, accreditation rules, and open knowledge objects—while supporting national adoption and last-mile implementation through Member State institutions and accredited providers. The architecture complements COMESA’s corridor-based integration strategy and ICT programme portfolio (DFTA, e-Government, e-Legislation), ensuring coherence with programme directions and technical committees ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

Curricular architecture and competency standards. Curricula are organised into **stackable, competency-based pathways** at foundational, practitioner, and advanced levels, with micro-credentials that stack to professional certificates. Digital-skills content is mapped to internationally recognised taxonomies (e.g., **UNESCO/UIS global digital-literacy framework**) and aligned with labour-market evidence that productive internet use is a causal driver of jobs and welfare gains in Africa ([UNESCO Digital-Literacy Framework](#); [World Bank – Digital Africa](#)). Teacher-enablement and school-system diffusion are aligned with the **AU Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030)** and the **Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25)** to ensure long-term pipelines of digitally proficient graduates ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [CESA 16–25](#)).

Delivery modalities and learning infrastructure. Delivery combines **online, blended, and in-person** formats, with applied **learning sandboxes** tied to active Power Play and SDEP/SFPSEI projects (e.g., OSBPs, DPI interconnection points, warehouse-receipt pilots). The Academy federates existing e-learning platforms and migrates them to a common catalogue and standards for instructional design, assessment, accessibility, and multilingual delivery ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [CBC Online Courses](#)). Border-operations and trader-facing modules continue to leverage the ITC–COMESA programme, now integrated into Academy governance and quality control ([ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#)).

Recognition, quality assurance, and portability. Assessment and certification follow a **regional QA framework** mapped to the **African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)**, enabling portability and employer recognition across Member States and sectors ([ACQF / CESA reference](#)). Sector tracks (e.g., ACTESA standards, warehouse receipts, CEHA horticulture) adopt discipline-specific assessment rubrics agreed with specialised agencies and industry bodies ([ACTESA 2023 Institutional & Council Report](#)).

Compliance, data protection, and transparency. Academy platforms and learner records comply with the **COMESA Secretariat Data Privacy Policy** and are operated to internationally recognised controls (information security and privacy), while training procurement and provider contracting adhere to Community disclosure practices. These measures collectively protect personal data and reinforce trust in credentialing over the decennial compact ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

Workstreams

Pillar 4 is executed through eight mutually reinforcing workstreams. Each workstream includes its purpose, principal deliverables, and operational dependencies with COMESA divisions, specialised agencies, and continental strategies.

1. Academy design, accreditation, and quality assurance.

Purpose: establish the Academy's governance, competency frameworks, assessment standards, accreditation of providers, and recognition rules mapped to **ACQF** and aligned to AU strategies (**DTS 2020–2030, CESA 16–25**).

Deliverables: governance charter; competency dictionaries; assessment blueprints; recognition procedures; annual QA audits; provider accreditation rules.

Dependencies: Secretariat programme divisions (ICT; Infrastructure & Logistics) for policy direction; specialised agencies for sector rubrics; alignment with continental frameworks for portability ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [CESA 16–25 / ACQF](#)).

2. Public-sector professionalisation (trade facilitation, OSBPs, DPI operations, data governance).

Purpose: certify customs, border, trade, standards, and ICT/data officials to operate harmonised procedures and interoperable e-services at OSBPs and administrative interconnection points.

Deliverables: OSBP/STR tracks; AfCFTA procedures modules; DPI operator certificates (identity/registries/data exchange); data-protection and cybersecurity practitioner badges; applied practicums at live borders and DPI nodes.

Dependencies: COMESA corridor and ICT programmes; ITC–COMESA training integration; AfCFTA procedural alignment ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#); [ITC–COMESA Training](#); [AfCFTA Secretariat](#)).

3. SME digitisation, export readiness, and enterprise productivity.

Purpose: increase productive use of digital tools, e-commerce, quality systems, and cross-border logistics among SMEs to close the **coverage-to-use** gap identified in Africa's digital economy evidence base.

Deliverables: modular pathways on e-commerce readiness, online marketing, market-intelligence, business planning and finance, with capstones linked to corridor logistics services and DPI transactions; mentorship networks; investment-readiness clinics.

Dependencies: consolidation of **CBC** curricula into Academy QA; alignment with documented labour-market findings that productive use—not only coverage—drives jobs and welfare ([CBC Online Courses](#); [World Bank – Digital Africa](#)).

4. Agrifood market-systems professionalisation (with ACTESA).

Purpose: professionalise skills for **seeds, fertilisers, biopesticides, grades and standards, warehouse receipts, food-balance analytics**, and **CEHA** horticulture tracks to raise productivity, reduce post-harvest losses, and expand formal market access.

Deliverables: ACTESA-endorsed certificate series; inspector/assessor accreditation; warehouse-receipt operator and collateral-management modules; CEHA value-chain academies (e.g., avocado, onion, Irish potato).

Dependencies: ACTESA programme leadership and country pipelines; integration with SDEP/SFPSEI pilots; CEHA investment and matching-grants operations ([ACTESA 2023 Institutional & Council Report – CEHA](#)).



5. Teacher enablement and foundational digital literacy diffusion.

Purpose: extend Academy benefits to **primary and secondary** systems by equipping teachers with digital pedagogy and UNESCO-aligned digital-literacy content, ensuring today's learners graduate as digitally capable adults.

Deliverables: teacher-enablement certificates; classroom toolkits mapped to the **UNESCO/UIS** framework; localized content repositories; partnerships with national education ministries and teacher-training colleges.

Dependencies: alignment with **CESA 16–25** for system harmonisation; cooperation with universities/TVETs; integration with AU digital-skills objectives ([UNESCO Digital-Literacy Framework; CESA 16–25](#)).

6. Safeguards, inclusion, and social-accountability competences.

Purpose: institutionalise training on stakeholder engagement, grievance mechanisms, gender/inclusion, and environmental/social risk management to sustain the social licence of Power Play and related programmes.

Deliverables: **ESS10**-aligned stakeholder-engagement practitioner badge; grievance-mechanism operations courses; inclusion mainstreaming modules for corridor and DPI contexts.

Dependencies: linkage to pillar-level safeguards frameworks; partnership with implementing agencies at OSBPs and digital-service operators ([World Bank ESF – ESS10 Guidance Note](#)).

7. Knowledge commons, research translation, and open assets.

Purpose: convert implementation experience into open, reusable knowledge (playbooks, case studies, model clauses) and sustain a community of practice across Member States and providers.

Deliverables: open knowledge repository; annual practice notes; research translation briefs from corridor/DPI pilots; periodic Academy symposium.

Dependencies: COMESA programmes for source materials; alignment with e-learning catalogues and open-access policies ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

8. Platform, data governance, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL).

Purpose: operate the Academy platform under Community data-privacy rules; instrument learning analytics to drive quality improvement; and publish MEL reports tied to decennial **gate reviews**.

Deliverables: harmonised LMS catalogue; privacy-by-design controls and audit trails; annual MEL dashboards (enrolments, completion, employment/uptake outcomes); provider performance scorecards.

Dependencies: compliance with the **COMESA Data Privacy Policy**; integration with programme MEL; partnership with statistics units and donors for evidence standards ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#); [Building Capacity in Data Excellence – COMESA](#)).

Notes on phasing and integration

Workstreams 1 and 8 commence at **Inception** to establish governance, QA, and compliant platforms; workstreams 2–4 launch **Pilots** at priority corridors, DPI nodes, and ACTESA value-chains; workstream 5 scales from **Year 2–3** via teacher-training partnerships; workstream 6 accompanies corridor/DPI scaling to maintain safeguards discipline; and workstream 7 consolidates outputs into reusable public goods. This sequencing mirrors COMESA's corridor-based approach and ICT programme directions, while implementing continental strategies on digital transformation and education to ensure employer-recognised, portable outcomes ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#); [AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [CESA 16–25](#)).

Stakeholders

The Academy is a Community instrument executed within COMESA's legal and programmatic architecture. Policy direction and oversight originate with the policy organs acting through the Secretariat's **Infrastructure & Logistics Division** and **Information & Networking (ICT) Division**, whose corridor strategy and ICT portfolio (DFTA, e-Government, e-Legislation) provide the operational anchor for skills development across borders and administrations ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)). These divisions supply pipelines of learners (border, customs, standards, and ICT staff) and define the competencies needed to run One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) and interoperable digital public services aligned to regional integration objectives ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

Specialised agencies and COMESA institutions are principal implementation partners. **ACTESA** co-leads agrifood market-systems tracks (seeds, fertilizers, biopesticides, warehouse receipts, grades and standards) and climate-smart horticulture under CEHA, ensuring that Academy credentials translate regulatory harmonisation into farm-gate productivity and formal market access ([ACTESA Institutional & Council Report 2023](#); [CEHA matching-grants call – illustration](#)). The **COMESA Business Council (CBC)** provides SME curricula that are consolidated under the Academy's quality-assurance rules so that digital-commerce, finance, and management modules become portable and employer-recognised across Member States ([CBC Online Courses](#); [ICT Division](#)).

Member States and national authorities constitute the primary domestic counterparts. Ministries and agencies responsible for customs, trade facilitation, standards and metrology, education/TVET, ICT/data protection, and labour work with the Academy to nominate learners, localise content, and domesticate recognition procedures mapped to continental instruments such as the **Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25)** and the **African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF)** ([CESA 16–25](#); [ACQF resource](#)). Border agencies and trade desks are already addressed by structured training streams with international partners, which the Academy absorbs into a unified governance and certification pathway ([Capacity Building for Border Officials – COMESA](#); [ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#)).

Universities, teacher-training colleges, and accredited TVET providers deliver classroom and blended instruction under Academy recognition. The higher-education interface supports teacher-enablement and digital-literacy diffusion for primary and secondary systems, aligning content to the **AU Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030)** and UNESCO/UIS digital-skills taxonomies to ensure comparability and labour-market uptake ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [UNESCO Global Digital-Literacy Framework](#)). COMESA's existing e-learning portals provide the base infrastructure and learner-record systems to federate providers under a common catalogue and standards ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [CBC Online Courses](#)).

Private-sector and industry bodies—including logistics operators on priority corridors, telcos/cloud and ed-tech providers, commodity exchanges, and standardisation associations—participate in curriculum co-design, host practicums, and offer mentorships and apprenticeships that translate training into job placement and productivity gains. Their participation is organised through the corridor and ICT programmes and is targeted at closing the continent's persistent **coverage-to-use** gap in productive digital adoption documented for African firms and workers ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [World Bank press release on uptake gap](#)).

Development partners and DFIs (e.g., AfDB, World Bank, EIB, IOM/ITC) provide technical assistance, co-finance Academy operations, and verify MEL and fiduciary controls. Their existing support to

COMESA training (trade facilitation, statistics/data excellence) and to digital/economic transformation supply both the precedent and the evidence base for scaling a regional Academy linked to Power Play and SDEP/SFPSEI ([ITC-COMESA programme](#); [Building Capacity in Data Excellence – COMESA](#)).

Civil society and community actors—including women’s business associations, cross-border trader associations, and inclusion/safeguards groups—benefit from and contribute to Academy content on stakeholder engagement and grievance mechanisms, reflecting **ESS10** practice and reinforcing social licence for corridor and DPI operations ([World Bank ESF – ESS10 Guidance Note](#); [ITC-COMESA modules for traders](#)).

Finally, **continental frameworks and AfCFTA institutions** are stakeholders in recognition and regulatory alignment. The Academy’s qualifications and practice notes are configured to support **AfCFTA** implementation (procedures, standards, digital trade readiness) and to contribute to the AU’s digital and education strategies through evidence-based skills pipelines ([AfCFTA Secretariat](#); [AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#)).

Governance

The Academy’s governance ensures legal compliance, quality assurance, financial integrity, and operational accountability across the decennial compact while preserving portability and employer recognition of credentials. It is structured into four interlocking layers with defined decision rights and assurance lines.

1) Strategic oversight and policy compliance.

Policy authority rests with COMESA’s organs acting through the Secretariat. The **Programme Owners** are the **Infrastructure & Logistics** and **ICT** divisions, which set strategic priorities, approve annual work plans and budgets, and ensure alignment to corridor and ICT programme directions. Compliance with Community instruments—such as the **COMESA Data Privacy Policy** for learner records and platform operation—is mandatory, with periodic conformance reviews and remedial actions where needed ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

2) Academy Steering Committee (ASC).

The ASC is a delegated body chaired by the Secretariat, comprising: the two programme divisions (Infrastructure & Logistics; ICT), **ACTESA** and relevant COMESA institutions (e.g., CBC), Member State focal points (trade/standards/education/ICT), and non-voting development-partner observers. The ASC approves the competency framework, annual curricula portfolio, provider-accreditation decisions, MEL plans, and gate-review submissions; it also arbitrates escalations from quality audits or data-privacy assessments ([ACTESA 2023 Report](#); [COMESA e-Learning precedent](#)).

3) Academy Coordination Unit (ACU).

The ACU (a Secretariat unit) manages day-to-day operations: platform administration; procurement and contracting of providers; curriculum development; accreditation processes; certification issuance and registry; and MEL. The ACU appoints a **Data Protection Officer** for the Academy platform, implements privacy-by-design controls, and maintains audit trails for assessments and credentialing in conformity with the Community policy and recognised security/privacy practices ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).



4) Quality Assurance and Accreditation Board (QAAB).

The QAAB is an expert body reporting to the ASC. It includes subject-matter specialists from Member States, ACTESA track leaders, university/TVET representatives, and industry assessors. The QAAB defines assessment blueprints, conducts provider audits, validates exam security and integrity, and maps credentials to continental frameworks (e.g., **ACQF**) to ensure portability and comparability. Non-conformities trigger corrective-action plans or suspension of delivery rights ([ACQF / CESA reference](#); [CESA 16–25](#)).

Decision rights and legal instruments.

Strategic plans and budgets are approved by the ASC on Secretariat recommendation; provider accreditation and de-accreditation decisions are made by QAAB and ratified by ASC; recognition and portability mappings are adopted by ASC following QAAB technical advice; sector-specific curricula and assessor standards in agrifood tracks are co-approved with **ACTESA** under a Memorandum of Understanding that sets out decision rights, fiduciary obligations, and reporting duties ([ACTESA 2023 Report](#); [CBC Online Courses – precedent for SME modules](#)).

Assurance lines, transparency, and fiduciary controls.

Financial reporting follows **IPSAS** and contracting is disclosed consistent with the **Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS)** to enable end-to-end transparency from planning to completion; provider performance scorecards and MEL dashboards are published annually. These measures reinforce accountability for scholarships, public procurement of training services, and development-partner funds ([IPSASB – Handbook](#); [OCDS documentation](#)). The Academy adopts a three-lines-of-defence model: first-line controls at ACU and providers; second-line QA and compliance (QAAB, DPO); third-line independent audits and evaluations by COMESA Internal Audit and external evaluators aligned to programme MEL and gate reviews ([Building Capacity in Data Excellence – COMESA](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

Recognition, portability, and employer uptake.

To protect learner value, every credential is mapped to competency frameworks aligned with **UNESCO/UIS** digital-skills references and to ACQF levels where applicable; cross-references to **AfCFTA** procedural competencies (e.g., digital trade facilitation, rules of origin processes) are included so that employers can interpret and reward skills consistently across borders ([UNESCO Global Digital-Literacy Framework](#); [AfCFTA Secretariat](#)).

Data protection, platform governance, and IP.

Learner data and credential registries are operated under the Community privacy policy with documented data-flows, retention rules, and incident-response procedures; access is role-based with audit trails and periodic penetration tests. Instructional content and assessments are licensed under terms that allow reuse within COMESA and prevent unauthorised commercial exploitation, while preserving the Academy's right to update and withdraw superseded materials ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#); [COMESA e-Learning Portal](#)).

Escalation and dispute resolution.

Material non-compliance (assessment integrity breaches, privacy incidents, procurement violations) triggers escalation from QAAB or the DPO to the ASC. The ASC may suspend providers, withhold certificates, or require remediation. Persistent breaches or systemic risks are elevated to the Secretariat for policy action under the Treaty framework; disputes with providers are handled under COMESA standard contractual clauses and, where appropriate, alternative dispute resolution provisions ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).



Gate reviews and continuation logic.

At **Pilots (2027)**, **Mid-Term (2030)**, and **End-Term (2036)**, the ASC reviews MEL evidence on enrolments, completion, skills adoption at OSBPs/DPI nodes, SME digitisation, ACTESA standards domestication, and teacher-enablement outputs, together with fiduciary and privacy conformance. Favourable findings condition tranche top-ups and renewal of the Academy's mandate into the next decennial compact; variances trigger corrective actions or scope adjustments in line with the Community's corridor and ICT programme priorities ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [World Bank – Digital Africa](#)).

Funding and Financial Model

1. Strategic Financing Architecture

The Academy's financial model is designed to ensure **predictable, multi-year funding** for a public-good function that cannot rely on commercial returns alone. Unlike corridor infrastructure or DPI platforms, capacity-building yields **social and economic externalities**—employability, productivity, and inclusion—that are not easily monetized. Consequently, the model prioritizes **grant-based and concessional financing**, supplemented by **cost-recovery mechanisms** for sustainability, without compromising access for priority cohorts (public officials, SMEs, teachers, and vulnerable groups).

The architecture comprises three complementary windows:

a) Core Programme Financing (Grants and Concessional Loans).

The primary financing source is **Development Finance Institutions (DFIs)** and multilateral partners, notably the **African Development Bank (AfDB)**, which has a strong precedent in human-capital and digital-skills programmes (e.g., SEPA Action Plan, Boost Africa). AfDB's role is critical because private-sector ROI in this domain is structurally limited. Additional co-financing is expected from the **World Bank**, **EU Trust Funds**, and bilateral donors under education, digital transformation, and trade-facilitation envelopes ([AfDB SEPA Action Plan](#); [World Bank Digital Africa](#)).

b) Cost-Sharing and Membership Contributions.

Member States contribute through **annual assessed contributions** earmarked for scholarships and national delivery nodes. Contributions are scaled to GDP and trade volumes to maintain equity. These funds co-finance national cohorts and teacher-training partnerships, ensuring political ownership and sustainability beyond donor cycles.

c) Private-Sector and PPP Participation (Targeted).

While full cost recovery from private actors is unrealistic, **in-kind contributions** (e.g., hosting practicums, providing digital platforms, offering mentorship) and **sponsorship of SME cohorts** by large corporates (especially in logistics, ICT, and agribusiness) are incentivized through recognition schemes and CSR alignment. This approach mirrors CBC's existing SME-support model and leverages AfCFTA-driven supply-chain integration ([CBC Online Courses](#); [AfCFTA Secretariat](#)).

2. Financial Instruments and Flow

Grant and Concessional Windows.

- **AfDB:** anchor financier for Academy establishment, platform development, and initial curriculum design.
- **World Bank and EU:** co-finance MEL systems, teacher enablement, and digital-literacy diffusion.



- **Bilateral donors:** fund gender/inclusion tracks and scholarships for vulnerable groups.

Trust and Ring-Fencing.

All funds flow through the **CODESA Development Fund**, applying IPSAS-based accounting and OCDS-compliant procurement disclosure. A dedicated **Academy Sub-Account** ensures ring-fencing for transparency and auditability ([IPSASB Handbook](#); [OCDS](#)).

3. Cost Structure and Sustainability Measures

Fixed Costs (Years 1–3):

- Platform development and integration of existing COMESA e-learning assets.
- Governance and QA systems (ASC, QAAB).
- Curriculum design and accreditation frameworks.

Variable Costs (Years 2–10):

- Delivery of modular training (online/blended/in-person).
- Scholarships for officials, SMEs, and teachers.
- MEL and quality audits.

Sustainability Measures:

- **Sliding-scale tuition** for SMEs and corporates (with exemptions for vulnerable groups).
- **Certification fees** for advanced professional tracks, capped to avoid exclusion.
- **Open-access knowledge assets** to reduce duplication and attract donor co-financing for public goods.

4. Risk Mitigation in Financing

- **Donor-dependency risk:** mitigated by Member State cost-sharing and phased introduction of modest cost-recovery streams.
- **Currency and liquidity risk:** mitigated by holding funds in convertible currencies and applying AfDB/World Bank treasury safeguards.
- **Continuity risk beyond 2036:** addressed through gate-based renewal logic tied to MEL evidence and fiduciary compliance.

5. Continuation Logic and AfDB Role

AfDB's role is **structural**: as lead financier and policy partner, it anchors the Academy's credibility and ensures alignment with continental human-capital strategies. AfDB's **SEPA Action Plan** and **Boost Africa** experience in blended finance provide a tested framework for structuring multi-donor contributions and leveraging private-sector in-kind support without imposing unrealistic ROI expectations ([AfDB SEPA Action Plan](#); [Boost Africa](#)).

Implementation Approach (2026–2036)

1. Implementation Principles and the Role of Vocational Training



The Academy's implementation approach is deliberately **project-coupled**. Vocational training ****follows—not leads—****the major delivery programmes (Power Play, SDEP/SFPSEI, and Digitalisation). Training is therefore sequenced to real projects and live operating environments so that learners acquire competencies **in situ** and to standards required by corridor works, border operations, market-systems reforms, and DPI roll-outs. This approach reflects COMESA's corridor-based integration strategy and the Secretariat's ICT programme portfolio (DFTA, e-Government, e-Legislation), ensuring that skills are developed where they are used: **at OSBPs, within logistics nodes, on civil-works sites, and in administrative interconnection points** ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#) ; [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

In agriculture, vocational pathways are aligned to **SDEP/SFPSEI** and to ACTESA's market-systems work (seeds, fertilisers, warehouse receipts, CEHA horticulture), so trainees learn against active value-chain pilots and compliance regimes. In Digitalisation, pathways range **from trenching and fibre deployment to server, cloud, network, and cybersecurity operations** in line with continental strategies which call for large-scale digital skills and a functioning African digital single market ([ACTESA Institutional & Council Report 2023](#) ; [AU Digital Transformation Strategy 2020–2030](#)).

This project-first approach responds directly to the **“coverage-to-use” gap** documented for Africa: infrastructure and connectivity alone do not produce jobs unless accompanied by the skills to use them productively. Implementation therefore couples training to concrete tasks and services, consistent with empirical findings that **internet availability produces causal gains in employment and welfare when uptake is enabled** ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#) ; [World Bank press release \(2023\)](#)).

2. Phasing and Gate Reviews

Implementation proceeds through four phases with **gate reviews** tied to fiduciary, safeguards, privacy, and performance obligations already adopted for CODESA pillars.

Inception (0–6 months). The Academy Coordination Unit (ACU) consolidates COMESA's existing e-learning assets (Secretariat portal, ITC–COMESA modules, CBC catalogues) into a single catalogue and establishes quality-assurance, assessment, and data-privacy controls. A decennial workplan is approved by the Academy Steering Committee (ASC) and mapped to corridor, SDEP/SFPSEI, and DPI project calendars ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#) ; [ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#) ; [CBC Online Courses](#) ; [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Gate 1: platform/QA readiness; IPSAS and OCDS baselines established for procurement and provider contracting ([IPSASB Handbook](#) ; [OCDS](#)).

Pilots (6–24 months). Cohorts are embedded in: (i) **OSBPs and logistics nodes** to learn cross-border procedures, risk management, and service standards; (ii) **DPI interconnection points** to learn identity, registries, data exchange, and incident response; (iii) **SDEP/SFPSEI sites and ACTESA chains** to learn climate-smart practices, standards, and warehouse receipt operations; and (iv) **digital-literacy/teacher enablement** pilots aligned to UNESCO/UIS references and CESA.

Gate 2: verification of applied-learning outcomes and site supervisor attestations; early adoption indicators at borders and DPI nodes; sector-specific validations with ACTESA ([ACTESA Council Report 2023](#) ; [UNESCO Digital-Literacy Framework](#) ; [CESA 16–25](#)).

Scale (Years 3–7). Training expands with corridor build-outs and DPI federation; apprenticeship placements are formalised; micro-credentials stack to professional certificates mapped to the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF). SME digitisation and export-readiness tracks scale through CBC provider networks ([ACQF/ CESA reference](#) ; [CBC Online Courses](#)).



Gate 3 (Mid-Term 2030): independent review of border time/cost metrics, DPI service SLAs, standards domestication and warehouse-receipt utilisation, SME uptake, and teacher enablement outputs, alongside IPSAS/OCDS and privacy conformance.

Consolidation (Years 8–10). Pathways stabilise; credit transfer and recognition are updated; open knowledge assets (playbooks, model SOPs) are published. The Continuation Dossier for 2036–2046 is prepared, with cross-REC comparability coordinated through PIDA where relevant ([PIDA – AUDA-NEPAD](#)).

3. Delivery Model and Site-Based Learning

Academy Coordination Unit (ACU). Operates the platform, accredits providers, issues credentials, administers MEL, and enforces privacy/security controls. Assessment integrity, proctoring, and credential registry operations are documented and audited against Community policy ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

National Delivery Nodes. Ministries/agencies (customs, standards, education/TVET, ICT) act as **host organisations** for cohorts and apprentices. Where appropriate, universities/TVETs are contracted providers under QAAB accreditation; their syllabi are mapped to AU strategies and UNESCO/UIS digital-skills taxonomy to ensure portability and comparability ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#) ; [UNESCO Digital-Literacy Framework](#)).

Workplace Learning (“learning sandboxes”).

- **Power Play / Corridors:** trenching, cable-laying, OSBP fit-out, EHS and quality control, border-agency workflow and data-sharing.
- **Digitalisation:** configuration/operation of identity/registry systems, secure data exchange, privacy-by-design, incident response; server, cloud, and network operations to recognised control frameworks.
- **SDEP/SFPSEI / ACTESA:** post-harvest handling, cold chain, warehouse receipt operations, grades/standards conformity, inspector/assessor practicums.

These sandboxes sit **within** the responsible project entities to ensure that training follows the project rather than vice-versa, and that competencies are evaluated against real service standards ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#) ; [Information & Networking / ICT](#) ; [ACTESA Council Report 2023](#)).

4. Curriculum Design, Recognition, and RPL

Curricula are **competency-based** with micro-credentials that stack into professional certificates. Occupational standards for public officials and SME practitioners reference COMESA programme directions (corridors/ICT), **UNESCO/UIS** digital-skills taxonomy, and where relevant **AfCFTA** procedural competencies. The Academy recognises prior learning (RPL) and on-the-job evidence through supervisor attestations and practical assessments; QAAB validates the rubrics and ensures **ACQF** mapping for regional portability ([UNESCO Digital-Literacy Framework](#) ; [AfCFTA Secretariat](#) ; [ACQF/ CESA reference](#)).

5. Provider Procurement, Contracting, and Assurance

Provider selection follows competitive procurement with **OCDS** disclosure across the full contract life-cycle; financial reporting is **IPSAS**-compliant. Contracts include QA clauses, data-protection obligations, and audit rights. Non-performance triggers corrective action or de-accreditation by QAAB ([OCDS](#) ; [IPSASB Handbook](#)).



6. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

The MEL system tracks: enrolments, completion, certification, **adoption on-the-job** (e.g., border service times, DPI transaction volumes, warehouse-receipt utilisation), SME digitisation, teacher enablement outputs, and safeguards training coverage (ESS10). Data are published in annual dashboards and reviewed at each gate. Evidence standards follow COMESA statistics practice and development-partner requirements, with transparency facilitated via COMESA communications channels and open knowledge assets ([Building Capacity in Data Excellence – COMESA](#) ; [World Bank – Digital Africa](#)).

7. Safeguards, EHS, Cybersecurity, and Data Privacy

EHS and social safeguards are embedded in all site-based learning; stakeholder-engagement and grievance modules meet **ESS10** standards. DPI training applies **privacy-by-design** and recognised security controls in operations and assessments, referenced to prevailing frameworks; learner records and credential registries operate under the Community’s privacy policy with audit trails, role-based access, and incident-response plans ([World Bank ESF – ESS10 Guidance](#) ; [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

8. Risk Management Specific to the “Follows-Project” Model

Project-timing and access risk. Training windows are contingent on works schedules. Mitigation: rolling cohort calendars; portable modules for off-site learning; cross-border placements to avoid idle cohorts. **Quality/consistency risk across sites.** Mitigation: QAAB-issued assessor standards and common rubrics; supervisor accreditation; independent sampling of practical assessments. **Labour-market absorption risk.** Mitigation: target cohorts for OSBP/DPI operational posts; SME mentorship; ACTESA-linked placement in value chains; **teacher-enablement** to diffuse foundational skills for long-term demand ([ACTESA Council Report 2023](#) ; [CESA 16–25](#)).

9. Illustrative Implementation Timeline (Extract)

- **2026 (Inception):** ACU set-up; provider accreditation; catalogue consolidation; Gate 1.
- **2027 (Pilots):** OSBP/DPI/ACTESA cohorts on live sites; teacher-enablement pilots; Gate 2.
- **2028–2030 (Scale):** expansion with corridor/DPI federation; SME digitisation via CBC networks; Mid-Term Gate 3 with independent review.
- **2031–2036 (Consolidation):** steady-state delivery; open knowledge corpus; Continuation Dossier for 2036–2046, with cross-REC alignment via PIDA where relevant ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#) ; [PIDA – AUDA-NEPAD](#)).

10. Closing Alignment

This approach operationalises your direction that **vocational training is a hard requirement but does not lead** the major programmes; it instead **learns from and with them**, turning Power Play’s worksites, Digitalisation’s platforms, and SDEP/SFPSEI’s value-chains into **learning sandboxes**. It remains fully consistent with COMESA’s programme architecture and continental strategies on digital transformation and education, with quality, portability, and employer recognition assured through QA governance and ACQF mapping ([Information & Networking / ICT](#) ; [AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#) ; [ACQF/ CESA](#)).

If you approve, I can proceed to draft the **Timeline & Milestones** specific to Pillar 4 (as a concise Gantt narrative keyed to corridor/DPI/SDEP calendars) and the **Risk & MEL addendum** with Gate-based continuation criteria tailored to the Academy.

Chapter: Timeline and Milestones (2026–2036), with Relative Triggers to SDEP, Power Play Corridors, and Digitalisation Packages

Temporal anchors and implementation assumptions

This timeline is structured to preserve the project-coupled principle that vocational training **follows** implementation in SDEP/SFPSEI, Power Play corridors/OSBPs, and Digitalisation (DPI) workstreams. Consequently, milestone dates are expressed both as **calendar targets** within the 2026–2036 compact and as **relative triggers** keyed to the effective dates and commissioning windows of upstream projects. This approach is consistent with COMESA's corridor strategy and ICT programme direction, which require skills to be developed where services are delivered—OSBPs, logistics nodes, and administrative interconnection points—rather than in isolation ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)). It also responds to evidence that jobs and welfare gains arise when digital **uptake** accompanies infrastructure availability, hence the emphasis on training **after** projects reach operational readiness ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [World Bank press release, 13 Mar 2023](#)).

Year 1 (2026): Inception and Gate 1 (0–6 months)

The Academy Coordination Unit is constituted; the unified catalogue federates the Secretariat's e-learning portal, ITC–COMESA trade-facilitation modules, and CBC SME courses; quality assurance, assessment, and data-privacy controls are established, and the Decennial Results Compact is approved by the Academy Steering Committee ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#); [CBC Online Courses](#)). Gate 1 is passed when IPSAS baselines and OCDS procurement plans are in force and privacy-by-design controls for the Academy platform conform to Community policy ([IPSASB – Handbook](#); [Open Contracting Data Standard](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Relative deployment windows linked to upstream programmes

The following **relative triggers** govern the start of vocational pathways and applied learning:

1. **SDEP/SFPSEI agrifood cohorts** start **T = E(SDEP) + 6–9 months**, once sites, value-chain partners, and ACTESA instruments (e.g., warehouse receipts, standards pilots) are operational so trainees can learn on live chains ([ACTESA 2023 Institutional & Council Report](#)).
2. **Digitalisation (DPI) cohorts** start **T = Award(DPI package) + 3–6 months**, after minimal viable services (identity/registries/data exchange) are stood up at two administrative interconnection points; this sequencing aligns with AU digital-market objectives and ensures training reflects real interfaces and SLAs ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy 2020–2030](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).
3. **OSBP/corridor cohorts** commence **T = Commission(OSBP) – 4–6 months** to allow pre-commissioning shadow operations and joint drills with border agencies and trader-desk officers, building on the COMESA/IOM/ITC practice of structured border-staff preparation ([Capacity Building Programme for Border Trade Officials](#); [IOM–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training Module](#)).

Years 1–2 (mid-2026 to end-2027): Pilot waves and Gate 2

Pilot Wave A launches at one corridor/OSBP cluster, two DPI nodes, and two SDEP/SFPSEI value-chain sites; teacher-enablement pilots begin with two teacher-training colleges mapped to UNESCO/UIS digital-skills references and CESA. Gate 2 is reached at Q4-2027 upon independent verification that border cohorts meet service-readiness tests, DPI operator cohorts achieve agreed availability/latency

SLAs in supervised rotations, and agrifood trainees pass ACTESA-endorsed standards/warehouse-receipt assessments ([UNESCO digital-literacy framework](#); [CESA 16–25](#); [ACTESA 2023](#)).

Years 3–5 (2028–2030): Scale-up to five corridor clusters and federation of DPI; Mid-Term Gate 3

The Academy scales to at least five corridor clusters and federates DPI cohorts to additional Member States; SME digitisation and export-readiness pathways expand through CBC networks and embedded mentorship at logistics nodes. Mid-Term Gate 3 in Q4-2030 ties tranche top-ups to observed **time/cost to trade** reductions at treated borders, **cross-border DPI transaction volumes**, **warehouse-receipt utilisation**, SME adoption indicators, and continued IPSAS/OCDS and privacy conformance. These metrics operationalize the evidence that outcomes hinge on productive use, not coverage alone ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [OCDS](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Years 6–7 (2031–2032): Consolidation of recognition and portability; cross-REC comparability

Credentials are fully mapped to the African Continental Qualifications Framework; credit transfer and recognition agreements with universities/TVETs mature; where corridor continuity extends beyond COMESA borders, comparability of occupational standards is aligned with PIDA coordination to facilitate workforce mobility along trans-regional assets ([ACQF/ CESA resource](#); [PIDA – AUDA-NEPAD](#)).

Years 8–10 (2033–2036): Steady-state delivery and Gate 4 (End-Term)

Steady-state cohorts continue at all active corridor/OSBP clusters and DPI nodes; teacher-enablement reaches an agreed national coverage in participating States. The Continuation Dossier for 2036–2046 is prepared and justified with MEL evidence and fiduciary/safeguards records. Gate 4 in Q4-2036 recommends renewal based on impact bands achieved and readiness of the next decennial pipeline, in line with COMESA programme priorities and continental strategies ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#)).

Milestone ledger (indicative; calendar and relative triggers)

Window	Milestone	Evidence for completion
2026 Q1–Q2	ACU operational; unified catalogue; QA/assessment/privacy controls; Gate 1	IPSAS baselines; OCDS procurement plan; DPO appointed; LMS privacy-by-design conformance (IPSASB ; OCDS ; COMESA Data Privacy Policy)
E(SDEP) + 6–9 months	SDEP/SFPSEI agrifood cohorts start at first two value-chain sites	ACTESA assessment rubrics; warehouse-receipt practicum logs; supervisor attestations (ACTESA 2023)
Award(DPI) + 3–6 months	DPI operator cohorts start at two interconnection points	SLA targets set; incident-response drills completed; privacy conformance checklist (Information & Networking / ICT ; AU DTS)
Commission(OSBP) – 4–6 months	OSBP pre-commissioning cohorts and joint drills	Border service scenario tests; TIDO coordination records; trader-engagement sessions (COMESA)



Window	Milestone	Evidence for completion
		Border Officials Training ; IOM–COMESA training module)
2027 Q4	Gate 2 – pilots verified; first teacher-enablement cohorts completed	Independent verification report; UNESCO-mapped digital-literacy outputs; OSBP/DPI adoption logs (UNESCO framework)
2028–2030	Scale to ≥5 corridor clusters; federation of DPI; SME pathways mainstreamed via CBC	Time/cost-to-trade trend; DPI transaction volumes; SME digitisation KPIs; MEL dashboard (World Bank – Digital Africa ; CBC courses)
2030 Q4	Gate 3 – mid-term review and tranche top-up	Independent evaluation; IPSAS/OCDS compliance; privacy audit; adjustments approved (OCDS ; COMESA Data Privacy Policy)
2031–2032	ACQF mapping complete; credit-transfer agreements in force; cross-REC comparability	QAAB mapping dossier; MoUs with universities/TVETs; PIDA coordination notes (ACQF/ CESA ; PIDA)
2033–2036	Steady-state delivery; Continuation Dossier finalised; Gate 4	Outcome bands achieved; fiduciary/safeguards record; renewal recommendation (Infrastructure & Logistics)

Notes on the “6–9 months after SDEP establishment” perspective

The **E(SDEP) + 6–9 months** window ensures that agrifood trainees enter **mature pilot environments** with active ACTESA instruments and buyer interactions, rather than abstract classrooms. This lag is long enough to make trainees productive on site, but short enough to close the “coverage-to-use” gap that otherwise persists between infrastructure creation and labour-market benefits ([ACTESA 2023 Institutional & Council Report](#); [World Bank – Digital Africa](#)).

Continuation criteria

Renewal into 2036–2046 is contingent on the Gate 4 record demonstrating: (i) border time/cost reductions and OSBP availability bands; (ii) DPI service-level conformance and verified transaction volumes; (iii) ACTESA standards domestication with warehouse-receipt utilisation; (iv) SME digitisation and export-readiness adoption; (v) teacher-enablement outputs aligned with UNESCO/UIS framework; and (vi) IPSAS/OCDS and privacy conformance maintained ([UNESCO digital-literacy framework](#); [IPSASB](#); [OCDS](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).



Risk Management

Framing and governance. Risk management for Pillar 4 is constituted as a formal, evidence-based function embedded in Academy governance (ASC/QAAB) and aligned with COMESA programme authorities for **Infrastructure & Logistics** and **Information & Networking (ICT)**. The register adopts the same taxonomy used across CODESA pillars—strategic, operational, fiduciary/procurement, environmental & social (E&S), cyber/data, legal & compliance, academic/quality, political-economy, and delivery risks—with named owners and escalation thresholds to gate reviews (Pilots, Mid-Term, End-Term) ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

Strategic and political-economy risk. Divergent national priorities and staffing rotations may delay cohort mobilisation or recognition of credentials. Mitigation consists of (i) formal recognition and portability through mapping to continental instruments—**CESA 16–25/ACQF**—and (ii) MoUs with ministries and agencies specifying nomination calendars, recognition/credit-transfer rules, and on-the-job placement commitments ([CESA 16–25](#); [ACQF reference](#)).

Operational and delivery risk (project-coupled model). Because vocational training follows SDEP/SFPSEI, corridor/OSBP, and Digitalisation (DPI), schedule slips upstream can constrain cohort access to “learning sandboxes.” Mitigation includes rolling cohort windows, cross-site placements, portable pre-site modules, and supervisor-accredited practicums so training remains tied to live operations while retaining flexibility if commissioning dates move ([Capacity-building for border officials – COMESA](#); [ITC-COMESA training](#)).

Fiduciary and procurement risk. Misprocurement or poor provider performance would undermine quality and credibility. Controls require **IPSAS** financial reporting and **OCDS** disclosure for the full contract life-cycle (planning–award–implementation), with QAAB audit rights, performance scorecards, and de-accreditation powers for persistent non-conformance ([IPSASB Handbook](#); [Open Contracting Data Standard](#)).

Cybersecurity and data-protection risk. The Academy’s learning platform, assessment systems, and credential registry process personal data and performance records. Mandatory conformance is to the **COMESA Secretariat Data Privacy Policy**, with design and operations benchmarked to recognised security and privacy control frameworks (e.g., **ISO/IEC 27001** for ISMS; **NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5** for security and privacy controls). Risk treatments include privacy-by-design, role-based access, encryption at rest and in transit, audit trails, penetration testing, incident-response runbooks, and periodic conformance reviews by the Data Protection Officer ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#); [NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5](#)).

Academic/quality risk. Inconsistent assessment or “credential inflation” would erode portability and employer trust. QAAB mitigations comprise standardised assessment blueprints, proctoring integrity controls, assessor accreditation, external moderation of scripts and practicums, and alignment of digital-skills content to recognised taxonomies (e.g., **UNESCO/UIS** global digital-literacy framework) to guarantee comparability across providers and countries ([UNESCO digital-literacy framework](#); [COMESA e-Learning precedent](#)).

E&S and social licence risk. All on-site practicums (OSBPs/logistics nodes, DPI interconnection points, SDEP/SFPSEI value chains) observe the safeguards discipline used across CODESA: screening, instrument preparation, stakeholder engagement, grievance access, and incident reporting in line with development-partner frameworks (e.g., **World Bank ESF – ESS10** for engagement and disclosure).

Academy cohorts receive dedicated ESS10 modules; compliance is checked during gate reviews ([ESS10 Guidance Note](#)).

Market and uptake risk. Africa's persistent **coverage-to-use** gap—high network availability but low productive adoption—can blunt outcomes if training is not applied on the job. The project-coupled design directly addresses this by embedding learning in live OSBPs/DPI nodes and value chains; MEL tests **adoption** (not just completion), with tranche top-ups contingent on demonstrated on-the-job use. This mirrors empirical findings that employment and welfare gains materialise when availability is matched by use ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [WB press release, 13 Mar 2023](#)).

Continuity and financing risk. As a public-good function, Pillar 4 depends on multi-year donor finance and Member-State cost-sharing. The model's ring-fenced Academy Sub-Account, diversified sources (AfDB anchor; World Bank/EU/bilateral co-finance), and modest, equitable cost-recovery for advanced tracks mitigate shortfalls, while gate-based continuation relies on auditable evidence of outcomes and IPSAS/OCDS compliance ([AfDB SEPA Action Plan](#); [OCDS](#)).

Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) and KPIs

Architecture and cadence. MEL verifies delivery, tests adoption, and informs gate decisions. It comprises: (i) baselines at Inception; (ii) continuous administrative/telemetry capture from the Academy platform and from host sites (OSBPs/DPI/value chains); (iii) independent verification at **Gate 2 (Pilots)**, **Gate 3 (Mid-Term 2030)**, and **Gate 4 (End-Term 2036)**; and (iv) transparent publication—annual dashboards, provider scorecards, and evaluation reports—consistent with COMESA statistics practice and programme communications ([Building Capacity in Data Excellence – COMESA](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

Data governance. Learner and assessment data follow the **COMESA Data Privacy Policy**, with anonymisation for analytics, defined retention schedules, and auditable access controls; DPI-related training data also reference continental policy direction on data governance where relevant to cross-border services ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#); [AU Digital Transformation Strategy 2020–2030](#)).

Evaluation questions. MEL asks whether the Academy (a) improved **service readiness** at OSBPs and DPI nodes, (b) increased **productive use** of digital tools by SMEs, (c) accelerated **standards domestication and warehouse-receipt utilisation** in ACTESA chains, and (d) diffused **foundational digital literacy** through teacher enablement—thus addressing the availability-vs-use gap documented for African labour markets ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [ACTESA Council Report 2023](#)).

KPI set (definition and measurement). KPIs are compact, auditable, disaggregated (country, corridor cluster, sex/age where appropriate), and tied to gate thresholds.

1. OSBP/Corridor Service Capability

Definition: reduction in average **border-crossing time** and logistics cost at treated border pairs; OSBP availability (% scheduled hours met); number of border-agency staff certified and deployed.

Measurement: time-measurement studies and operational logs; Academy certification registry.

Rationale: corridor-based integration objective ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#)).

2. DPI Operations and Administrative Interoperability



3. *Definition:* DPI service availability (uptime) and median **latency** for cross-border transactions; number of interoperable e-services “live”; **security/privacy conformance** checks passed. *Measurement:* system telemetry, SLA dashboards, conformance audits against recognised control frameworks.

Rationale: productive use drives jobs and welfare; conformance sustains trust ([Information & Networking / ICT](#); [WB – Digital Africa](#)).

4. **SME Digitisation and Export Readiness**

Definition: proportion of trained SMEs adopting digital tools (e-invoicing, e-payments, e-commerce storefronts) within 6–12 months; growth in **digital sales share**; number of SMEs completing export-readiness capstones linked to corridor logistics. *Measurement:* post-training surveys with verification (transaction screenshots, platform logs); CBC network reporting.

Rationale: closes “coverage-to-use” gap for firms ([CBC online modules](#); [WB press release, 13 Mar 2023](#)).

5. **Agrifood Market-Systems Application (with ACTESA)**

Definition: number of **standards adopted/domesticated** (seeds, fertilisers, grades), **warehouse-receipt utilisation rate**, and reduction in post-harvest loss on targeted value chains; number of certified inspectors/operators. *Measurement:* ACTESA programme data, exchange linkages, warehouse-receipt registries, cohort certification logs.

Rationale: productivity and market access under SDEP/SFPSEI ([ACTESA Council Report 2023](#)).

6. **Teacher Enablement and Digital-Literacy Diffusion**

Definition: teachers certified and retained; learners reached with UNESCO-mapped digital-literacy content; proportion of schools using Academy materials in regular instruction. *Measurement:* teacher-college/Ministry records; sample-based verification; content-usage analytics.

Rationale: long-term pipeline to a digitally ready workforce ([UNESCO digital-literacy framework](#); [CESA 16–25](#)).

7. **Fiduciary, Procurement, and Privacy Conformance**

Definition: IPSAS audit opinion (unqualified/qualified); **OCDS** publication coverage and quality; privacy incidents (count, severity) and time-to-closure.

Measurement: audited financial statements; OCDS validators; incident registers and DPO reports.

Rationale: continuation criteria and public trust ([IPSASB Handbook](#); [OCDS](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Gate thresholds (extract).

- **Gate 2 (Pilots):** (i) operator cohorts deployed at ≥ 2 DPI nodes meet agreed uptime/latency bands; (ii) first OSBP cluster evidences service-readiness drills; (iii) agrifood cohorts complete ACTESA-endorsed practicums; (iv) teacher-enablement pilots deliver baseline-aligned outputs.
- **Gate 3 (Mid-Term 2030):** statistically significant **time/cost-to-trade** reductions at treated borders; sustained DPI SLAs and verified **cross-border transactions**; warehouse-receipt



utilisation rising on targeted chains; SME adoption verified in ≥50% of trained firms; fiduciary/privacy compliance maintained.

- **Gate 4 (End-Term 2036):** target bands achieved or exceeded across KPI families, with documented employer uptake, portability (ACQF mapping), and readiness of next-decennial pipeline.

Learning and course correction. Variance analysis triggers specific remedies (e.g., revise cohort timing to better match OSBP commissioning; adjust SME modules to platform constraints; intensify supervisor-assessor training where practicum pass rates lag). Findings are published in annual MEL notes and incorporated into the Continuation Dossier; open assets (playbooks, SOPs) are deposited in the Academy repository for cross-country reuse ([COMESA e-Learning portal](#); [Building Capacity in Data Excellence – COMESA](#)).

PESTEL – Narrative

Political. The Academy operates within a treaty-based regional architecture that empowers COMESA to create specialised institutions and implement harmonised programmes through the **Infrastructure & Logistics** and **Information & Networking (ICT)** divisions. This confers legal authority and policy continuity for a cross-border training system, while continental strategies—**Agenda 2063** and the **AU Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030)**—reinforce the political mandate for a digitally skilled citizenry and a continent-wide digital single market. Political-economy risks stem from national turnover and uneven domestication of regional decisions, which are mitigated by formal programme governance and results-based gate reviews (COMESA Treaty; [Infrastructure & Logistics](#); [ICT Division](#); [AU DTS 2020–2030](#); [Agenda 2063](#)).

Economic. Capacity building generates public goods (employability, productivity, inclusion) that rarely yield commercial ROI, which justifies reliance on **grant and concessional finance** (e.g., AfDB and World Bank) and measured cost-recovery only in advanced tracks. At the same time, empirical evidence shows that **productive use** of digital technologies—when fostered by skills—raises jobs and reduces poverty; the Academy’s project-coupled design is therefore economically efficient because it translates infrastructure into utilisation and returns. AfDB’s **SEPA Action Plan** and similar human-capital initiatives provide a structured financing precedent ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [WB Press Release, 13 Mar 2023](#); [AfDB – SEPA Action Plan 2022–2025](#)).

Social. The pillar addresses inclusion, youth bulge pressures, and the long-term need for **teacher enablement** and digital-literacy diffusion. Existing COMESA practice shows the feasibility of targeted training for border officials and small-scale traders, which the Academy consolidates and scales; the approach also institutionalises community-level engagement and grievance handling consistent with international norms. Social risks (access, gender, affordability) are mitigated by scholarships and the integration of inclusion modules and channels ([COMESA Border Officials Training](#); [ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#); [ESS10 Guidance Note](#)).

Technological. The Academy is inseparable from digital public infrastructure (DPI) and administrative interoperability. Its design therefore embeds **security and privacy conformance** (e.g., ISO/IEC 27001 and NIST SP 800-53) and aligns training to recognised digital-skills taxonomies so that competencies are portable and comparable. The **COMESA Data Privacy Policy** and the AU’s continental digital policy direction (including data-governance guidance) provide a normative envelope for cross-border learning platforms and credential registries ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#); [NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5](#); [UNESCO Global Digital-Literacy Framework](#); [AU DTS 2020–2030](#)).

Environmental. Site-based learning occurs at OSBPs/logistics nodes, DPI interconnection points, and SDEP/SFPSEI value-chain locations. Consequently, the Academy operationalises **environmental and social safeguards** used by development partners (AfDB ISS; World Bank ESF), integrates EHS training, and uses ACTESA's climate-smart horticulture and standards work (e.g., **CEHA**) to address resilience in agri-food systems (AfDB ISS; World Bank ESF; [ACTESA 2023/CEHA](#)).

Legal. Recognition and portability of qualifications depend on harmonisation with continental instruments (**CESA/ACQF**) and transparent, auditable operations. The Academy therefore maps credentials to ACQF, applies **IPSAS** for financial reporting and **OCDS** for procurement disclosure, and codifies stakeholder-engagement obligations (ESS10) to sustain the legal defensibility and public trust of its operations ([CESA 16–25 / ACQF](#); [IPSASB – Handbook](#); [OCDS](#); [ESS10 Guidance Note](#)).

PESTEL – Compact Table

Factor	Drivers / Constraints	Implications for Pillar 4	Mitigation / Leverage
Political	Treaty authority; programme divisions; AU strategies	Enables regional Academy; risk of uneven domestication	Use COMESA organs; gate-based compacts; align with AU DTS/Agenda 2063 (COMESA Treaty; AU DTS)
Economic	Public-good nature; skills = jobs when used	Requires grant/concessional finance; link training to utilisation	AfDB/World Bank anchor; project-coupled cohorts to drive use (Digital Africa ; AfDB SEPA)
Social	Inclusion gaps; need for teacher pipelines	Must mainstream inclusion and invest in teacher enablement	Scholarships; ESS10 practice; teacher-training partnerships (ESS10)
Technological	DPI; cybersecurity/privacy; skills standards	Necessitates secure platforms; portable skills	ISO/IEC 27001; NIST 800-53; UNESCO-mapped curricula; COMESA policy (COMESA Data Privacy ; UNESCO DL)
Environmental	On-site learning at borders, logistics, farms	EHS and safeguards compliance needed	Apply AfDB ISS/WB ESF ; climate-smart tracks via ACTESA/CEHA (AfDB ISS; ACTESA 2023)
Legal	Recognition/portability; fiduciary transparency	Requires ACQF mapping; IPSAS/OCDS discipline	QAAB mapping to ACQF ; IPSAS audits; OCDS publication (IPSASB ; OCDS)

SWOT – Narrative

Strengths. The Academy is anchored in a **treaty-based** regional system with standing programme divisions and proven training assets (Secretariat e-learning portal; ITC–COMESA trade-facilitation

modules; CBC SME curricula). Its **project-coupled** model converts infrastructure into utilisation and measurable outcomes; governance embeds quality assurance, privacy/security, and fiduciary transparency, while **ACTESA** provides sectoral depth and live agri-food pipelines for applied learning ([COMESA e-Learning](#); [ITC-COMESA](#); [CBC Courses](#); [ACTESA 2023](#)).

Weaknesses. Heterogeneous national capacity and uneven digital readiness can slow recognition and deployment. Donor dependence poses continuity risks; the Academy’s schedule is **downstream of projects**, so commissioning delays can compress training windows. Provider quality is variable across countries; privacy/security maturity also varies and must be raised consistently ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy](#)).

Opportunities. AfCFTA implementation, corridor investments, and the AU digital agenda create sustained demand for certified public-sector and SME skills. **ACQF** mapping can secure portability and employer recognition; **CEHA** and wider ACTESA programmes can scale climate-smart value-chain competencies; teacher enablement extends benefits to the next generation, cementing long-term returns ([AfCFTA Secretariat](#); [ACQF/ CESA](#); [ACTESA 2023/CEHA](#)).

Threats. Financing volatility and political turnover may disrupt scale-up; **cyber incidents** could damage trust in credentials; resistance to qualification harmonisation may slow portability; climate shocks can interrupt on-site practicums in corridors and agri-food locations. Procurement lapses or weak provider performance could undermine credibility without strict QA and disclosure ([NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5](#); [IPSASB – Handbook](#); [OCDS](#)).

SWOT – Compact Tables

Internal factors

Strengths	Weaknesses
Treaty-based mandate; established COMESA training assets (Secretariat LMS; ITC-COMESA; CBC)	Heterogeneous national capacity and digital readiness; variable provider quality
Project-coupled model ensures utilisation , not just training	Donor-dependence; schedule depends on upstream project commissioning
Governance with QA, privacy/security, IPSAS/OCDS transparency	Uneven privacy/security maturity across delivery nodes

External factors

Opportunities	Threats
AfCFTA demand for competent border/DPI/standards staff; ACQF portability	Financing volatility; political turnover delaying domestication
ACTESA/CEHA value-chain scaling; teacher pipelines for long-term impact	Cyber incidents undermining trust; climate events disrupting practicums
Continental digital agenda (AU DTS) reinforces skills investment case	Resistance to qualification harmonisation; procurement/quality failures



Key references for SWOT tables:

[COMESA e-Learning](#); [ITC–COMESA](#); [CBC Courses](#); [AfCFTA Secretariat](#); [AU DTS](#); [ACQF/ CESA](#); [ACTESA 2023/CEHA](#); [IPSASB – Handbook](#); [OCDS](#); [NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5](#); [World Bank – Digital Africa](#).

Safeguards

The safeguards regime for Pillar 4 is configured to the particularities of the Academy’s delivery contexts—on-site practicums at One-Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) and logistics nodes, administrative interconnection points for digital public infrastructure (DPI), and SDEP/SFPSEI agrifood value chains—as well as to its data- and assessment-intensive operations. It binds implementing entities and accredited providers to development-partner frameworks for environmental and social risk management, to the Community’s data-privacy requirements, and to internationally recognized security and privacy controls for information systems and credential registries.

Environmental and social risk management. All site-based learning activities operate under the screening, instrument preparation, monitoring, and incident-management discipline recognized by development partners, notably the African Development Bank’s Integrated Safeguards System and the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework. This includes attention to labor and working conditions, community health and safety, stakeholder engagement, and grievance redress, with on-site practicums embedded in OSBP commissioning plans and SDEP/SFPSEI field operations so that mitigation measures are live-tested alongside service roll-out (AfDB ISS; World Bank ESF). In line with ESS10, Stakeholder Engagement Plans are prepared for Academy placements that affect communities or traders, and access to safe, non-retaliatory grievance channels is mandatory for trainees, trainers, and third parties ([ESS10 Guidance Note](#)).

Data protection and privacy-by-design. The Academy’s learning platform, proctoring systems, and credential registry are administered in conformity with the COMESA Secretariat Data Privacy Policy, with data-flow mapping, purpose limitation, role-based access, encryption in transit and at rest, audit trails, and defined retention schedules. Cross-border transfers of personal data linked to multi-country cohorts or portability services are documented and restricted to what is necessary to provide recognition and verification. Periodic conformance reviews are carried out by the designated Data Protection Officer, and corrective actions are escalated through the Academy Steering Committee where appropriate ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Information security controls. To protect the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of learner records, assessment content, and credential registries, the Academy operates to internationally recognized control catalogs and management systems. At minimum, the platform is governed by an information-security management system aligned with ISO/IEC 27001, and its technical and organizational controls are benchmarked to the NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5 catalogue for security and privacy. Where privacy accountability must be explicitly evidenced for credentialing functions, a Privacy Information Management System aligned with ISO/IEC 27701 is maintained or contractually required of platform providers (ISO/IEC 27001; [NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5](#); [ISO/IEC 27701 \(overview\)](#)).

Assessment integrity and fairness. Assessment instruments are protected as confidential assets; exam item banks, practical rubrics, and scoring schemes are access-controlled and versioned. Proctoring, identity assurance, and invigilation protocols are documented; breaches result in invalidation and re-assessment under Quality Assurance and Accreditation Board (QAAB) procedures. Reasonable accommodations for disability and language are provided to ensure equitable access to assessment

opportunities, with any processing of sensitive data handled under the Community's privacy policy and applicable national law ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Child and vulnerable-person safeguarding. Teacher-enablement activities touching primary and secondary systems must respect applicable national child-protection legislation and institutional codes of conduct. The Academy requires background checks and training for instructors deployed to school settings and applies World Bank ESF engagement norms for community settings, including proportionate grievance channels and reporting escalation when allegations arise (World Bank ESF).

Grievance, whistleblowing, and incident response. Grievance channels are publicized to trainees, staff, and affected third parties, with safe reporting options for harassment or misconduct during practicums at borders, DPI nodes, or farms/warehouses. Security and privacy incidents follow run-books with investigation, containment, notification (where required by policy), remediation, and lessons-learned steps; material incidents are reported to the Academy Steering Committee and summarized in annual public disclosures in keeping with COMESA's transparency posture ([COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#); [ESS10 Guidance Note](#)).

Fiduciary integrity and procurement safeguards. Financial reporting for Academy operations and scholarships follows the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS), and all training procurement and provider contracts are disclosed using the Open Contracting Data Standard for full life-cycle transparency. QAAB audits provider performance and integrity; non-conformities trigger corrective action or de-accreditation ([IPSASB – Handbook](#); [OCDS](#)).

Continental policy alignment. To the extent that curricula and digital operations touch cross-border data governance and digital trade enablement, the Academy takes cognizance of the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy and, where relevant, continental guidance on data-policy harmonization to facilitate trusted services and portability of credentials across Member States ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy 2020–2030](#)).

Communications & Advocacy

Communications and advocacy for Pillar 4 are a statutory function designed to sustain transparency, participation, and recognition of Academy credentials across Member States, employers, providers, and communities. They are anchored in the COMESA Communication Strategy 2022–2025 and aligned to stakeholder-engagement standards used by development partners for inclusive, safe communication with affected parties.

Strategic posture and alignment. The Secretariat treats communication as a management function rather than an afterthought, following the COMESA Communication Strategy's audience segmentation, message discipline, channel selection, and validation protocols. Academy-level plans are harmonized with corridor and ICT programme communications so that learners, supervisors, and employers receive consistent information about cohort calendars, recognition, and on-the-job adoption expectations ([COMESA Communication Strategy 2022–2025 – PDF](#)).

Transparency and disclosure cadence. The Academy publishes, at minimum, an annual report comprising IPSAS-based financial statements, procurement disclosures compliant with the Open Contracting Data Standard, provider accreditation directories, and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) dashboards that report enrolments, completions, and verified on-the-job adoption at OSBPs, DPI nodes, and agrifood value chains. Gate-review summaries (Pilots, Mid-Term, End-Term) are released

with key findings and corrective actions to maintain public confidence and donor assurance ([IPSASB – Handbook](#); [OCDS](#)).

Stakeholder engagement and outreach. Consistent with ESS10, the Academy maintains proportionate engagement plans for cohorts and communities affected by site-based learning. Communication products explain rights, responsibilities, safeguards, and grievance channels in accessible formats and languages, recognizing the diversity of border users, traders, farmers, and civil servants. Where teacher-enablement activities are undertaken, ministries and training colleges are engaged in advance to synchronize schedules, content standards, and recognition pathways ([ESS10 Guidance Note](#); [COMESA Communication Strategy 2022–2025 – PDF](#)).

Employer and market recognition. Advocacy targets employer bodies along corridors (logistics operators, customs brokers, inspection companies), ICT operations partners (telcos, cloud and data-center operators), and agrifood value-chain firms linked to ACTESA programmes. Materials provide concise crosswalks from Academy certificates to occupational roles and service-level expectations, and they document alignment to continental instruments (ACQF) to support portability and hiring decisions. SME-facing campaigns leverage COMESA Business Council channels and the ITC–COMESA learning platforms to recruit and retain enterprise cohorts ([ACQF/ CESA reference](#); [CBC Online Courses](#); [ITC–COMESA Trade Facilitation Training](#)).

Knowledge commons and public goods. The Academy curates a public repository of open assets—implementation playbooks, SOPs, practice notes, and model contract clauses—derived from live OSBP, DPI, and SDEP/SFPSEI experiences. This “commons” supports replication, reduces transaction costs for new providers, and strengthens regional comparability, while ensuring sensitive content (exam items, personal data) remains protected under privacy and security controls ([COMESA e-Learning Portal](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Crisis communication and incident transparency. The Academy maintains pre-cleared protocols for incident notification, spokesperson designation, rumor management, and corrective-action disclosure. These cover EHS and social incidents during practicums, assessment-integrity breaches, and data-privacy/security events. Communications are coordinated with the Secretariat’s programme divisions and adhere to the Communication Strategy’s channel guidance and disclaimers, thereby ensuring timely, accurate information and preserving institutional credibility ([COMESA Communication Strategy 2022–2025 – PDF](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Continental narrative and policy advocacy. Externally, the Academy’s narrative is positioned within the African Union’s Digital Transformation Strategy and Agenda 2063, emphasizing that the Academy converts infrastructure and policy reforms into human-capital utilization that yields jobs, productivity, and a trusted digital single market. Advocacy materials explicitly reference the empirical “availability-versus-use” findings for Africa’s digital economy to justify multi-year investment in skills, and they link Academy outputs to AfCFTA-relevant procedural competencies for border and administrative interoperability ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy 2020–2030](#); [World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [AfCFTA Secretariat](#)).

Cadence and governance of communications. The Academy Steering Committee approves annual communication plans and reviews performance each quarter; provider-level communications are governed by accreditation rules to protect the integrity of the Academy brand, avoid misleading claims about certification or portability, and enforce the use of approved descriptors and crosswalks to occupational roles ([COMESA Communication Strategy 2022–2025 – PDF](#)).



Final Word

Pillar 4 formalizes a practical compact between infrastructure, policy, and people. By design, it **follows** Power Play corridors, Digitalisation (DPI) deployments, and SDEP/SFPSEI value-chain pilots, converting assets and regulations into **utilization**, jobs, and institutional capability. It does so within the Community's treaty and programme authorities, through a single, accredited **Digital & Social Innovation Academy** that is governed, quality-assured, and evidence-led. In the near term, cohorts are timed to real projects—including the **6–9-month** window after SDEP establishment—so officials, SMEs, teachers, and value-chain actors learn **in situ** against live operating standards, rather than abstract curricula ([Infrastructure & Logistics Division](#); [Information & Networking / ICT](#)).

Financially, the Academy acknowledges that capacity building is a **public good** and therefore relies on **grant and concessional financing**, with the **African Development Bank** in an anchoring role and measured cost-recovery only where appropriate. This construct is warranted by the empirical record that productive **use** of digital technologies—when paired with skills—raises employment and reduces poverty, while mere coverage does not ([World Bank – Digital Africa](#); [AfDB – SEPA Action Plan 2022–2025](#)).

Institutionally, portability and employer recognition are secured through **ACQF-mapped** credentials and a standing **QAAB** that standardizes assessment, integrity, and provider performance. Compliance is non-negotiable: **IPSAS** for financial reporting and **OCDS** for procurement disclosure uphold fiduciary transparency; **privacy-by-design** and recognized security controls protect learner data, assessment content, and credential registries in line with the **COMESA Data Privacy Policy** ([IPSASB Handbook](#); [OCDS](#); [COMESA Data Privacy Policy – PDF](#)).

Strategically, the ten-year compact (2026–2036) is gated by auditable results—**time/cost-to-trade** reductions at treated borders, **DPI service-level** performance and cross-border transactions, **ACTESA-linked** standards domestication and warehouse-receipt utilization, **SME digitization** outcomes, and **teacher enablement** consistent with UNESCO/UIS references—so that continuation to 2036–2046 is earned, not presumed ([ACTESA 2023 Council Report](#); [UNESCO Digital-Literacy Framework](#)).

In the broader continental frame, the Academy is a concrete delivery arm for the **AU Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030)** and **Agenda 2063**: it turns corridor and digital investments into competent administrations, bankable firms, and a digitally ready generation. It is intentionally modest in form and exacting in standards, built to outlast cycles and to scale by replication—one border, one node, one classroom at a time—until a **sustainable and inclusive COMESA** workforce is no longer a goal but a norm ([AU Digital Transformation Strategy](#); [Agenda 2063](#)).