



## **LETTER OF INTEREST AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT**

**Date:** 15 February 2026

**To:**

The ACTESA Secretariat, COMESA, Dr John Mukuka, CEO, [jomukuka@comesa.int](mailto:jomukuka@comesa.int)

**Cc:** East African Community (EAC) Secretariat, Dr Simon Kiarie, [skiarie@eachq.org](mailto:skiarie@eachq.org)

**Cc:** African Development Bank Group (AfDB) Mr Neeraj Vij, [n.vij@afdb.org](mailto:n.vij@afdb.org)

**Cc:** Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) Mr Ibrahim Tahat, [ibrahim.tahat@badea.org](mailto:ibrahim.tahat@badea.org)

**Subject: Expression of Academic Interest and Intended Institutional Participation in the COMESA-Endorsed SFPSEI Programme – Ethiopia**

Dear Sir/Madam

My Greetings,

I am writing in my capacity as Assistant Professor at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University (AASTU) to formally express my interest and intention to participate, subject to institutional endorsement and funding availability, in the implementation of the Staple Food Programme: SDEP and ECHO Implementation (SFPSEI) in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

This expression of interest is made in recognition of the fact that SFPSEI has been formally endorsed and adopted by the COMESA Council of Ministers as a regional flagship programme, with ACTESA mandated to lead its coordination and implementation in collaboration with Member States, development partners, and designated alliance partners. AASTU recognises this programme as a strategically important regional initiative addressing food security, climate resilience, infrastructure, and institutional capacity through integrated, systems-based approaches.

I have been formally invited, subject to institutional agreement, to serve as Lead Professor for SFPSEI implementation in Ethiopia, with a particular mandate to support the integration of digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and data-driven systems into food systems, energy infrastructure, logistics, and public-sector capacity-building components of the programme. I have initiated internal consultations with AASTU leadership to ensure full institutional alignment and appropriate endorsement of this engagement.

AASTU views this prospective engagement as part of a wider regional academic and institutional collaboration. In this regard, we attach particular importance to structured cooperation with Makerere University, including the Makerere Regional Centre for Crop Improvement (MaRCCI), which has already expressed formal support for SFPSEI implementation under the ACTESA framework and for collaboration with EUSL and development finance institutions. AASTU sees strong complementarity between Makerere's established strengths in crop science, seed systems, and climate-smart agriculture, and AASTU's expertise in digital systems, artificial intelligence, and advanced analytics, and considers such collaboration essential for effective regional implementation.

This intended participation is also conceived as being aligned with, and complementary to, the FAO–EUSL–University of Juba Memorandum of Understanding framework, which provides a foundational institutional platform for SFPSEI-related academic collaboration, capacity building, and implementation in the region. AASTU's engagement would be structured to support and extend this framework, particularly by contributing advanced digital and analytical capabilities to first-wave implementation countries, including Ethiopia and South Sudan.



From an academic and implementation perspective, my intended contribution, subject to formalisation, would focus on the application of artificial intelligence, natural language processing, and cognitive systems to support:

- data-driven planning, monitoring, and early-warning mechanisms for food and energy systems;
- digital integration across agricultural and horticultural value chains, infrastructure platforms, and market interfaces;
- capacity building through embedded MSc and PhD training linked directly to SFPSEI implementation environments;
- cross-border academic collaboration under the EFFORT consortium model led by Uppsala University.

In Ethiopia specifically, AASTU also anticipates a close working relationship with the Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association (EHPEA), a key private-sector stakeholder within the CEHA framework. Such collaboration is regarded as particularly relevant for the implementation and scaling of horticultural value chains, including avocado, where digital traceability, logistics optimisation, and market integration are critical success factors.

This letter is provided as an expression of interest and indicative institutional positioning, particularly in support of ongoing and prospective financing discussions with AfDB, BADEA, and other aligned development finance institutions. It does not constitute a legally binding commitment and remains subject to the successful mobilisation of programme funding, internal institutional approvals, and the conclusion of appropriate formal agreements, including a Memorandum of Understanding.

AASTU looks forward to continued dialogue with ACTESA, regional institutions, development partners, and academic counterparts to further define the scope and modalities of this collaboration and to contribute meaningfully to the success of SFPSEI in Ethiopia and the wider Eastern Africa region.

Yours Sincerely,

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