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**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Sustainability Strategy for the 50 Million African Women Speak Platform (50MAWSP)**

**March 2025**

# **Background**

As a continent, Africa has high rates of entrepreneurship, with many countries having almost equal participation between men and women. Women business owners in Africa however face gender-specific barriers such as limited access to information and networking opportunities, lower levels of education and business training, weak property rights that deprive them of collateral and tangible assets, legal barriers that impede their economic activities and cultural barriers that discourage women from thriving as entrepreneurs. The consequence is that women have challenges accessing financial and non-financial services and so the size and growth of their businesses suffer.

With support from the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in September 2016 to jointly implement the 50 Million African Women Speak Networking Platform Project (50MAWSP). The objective of the project is to contribute to the economic empowerment of women through the provision of a digital networking platform to enable women to access information on financial and non-financial services.

The platform provides women with a basic information service on aspects such as how to start/register a business, as well as opportunities to access information on business training, mentorship, affordable financial services/products and locally-relevant business information, while allowing them to build their networks, benefit from peer-to-peer learning and create knowledge communities, in their countries and across borders. The platform was officially launched in November 2019 and is accessible at [www.womenconnect.org](http://www.womenconnect.org).

The 50MAWSP initiative is implemented in 38 countries belonging to the COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS regional blocs. Every participating country has set up a Country Team made up of representatives from the public and private sectors as well as civil society. Specifically, the country teams are comprised of representatives from the ministries responsible for Gender, Trade and ICT among others; institutions responsible for enterprise development, financial institutions, women associations and membership-based entities working with women in business. Each country team is supported by a national focal point and it is this structure at the national level that works in tandem with the implementing partners (COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS) to generate content for the platform, as well as sensitize the targeted users about the platform’s existence and benefits.

Since the launch of the digital platform in 2019, 50MAWSP has evolved and in its current shape it facilitates engagements which entail a mix of online and offline interactions for its users, all of which are geared towards the 50MAWSP objective of promoting the economic empowerment of women through provision of business information, facilitating access to finance, access to training and access to business/professional networks.

The first phase of the project closed in March 2021 when support by the funder (AfDB) came to an end. The implementing partners agreed to a cost-sharing arrangement as a short-term intervention to sustain the operations of the platform while long-term funding and sustainability measures for 50MAWSP were sought.

It is in this context that COMESA, as the 50MAWSP lead implementing agency wishes to recruit a consultancy firm to conduct a feasibility study of the platform to identify opportunities for the platform’s growth and/or evolution and design a robust sustainability strategy to inform the 50MAWSP initiative’s direction, its establishment as a household name and leading source of information on market opportunities, finance, capacity building, mentorship, its revenue-generation/mobilization mechanisms, strategic partnerships, and ultimately ensure impact for women in business in the target countries.

**2. Objective of the consultancy**

The overall objective of the consultancy is to develop a comprehensive 50MAWSP sustainability strategy. The strategy will guide on the most ideal positioning for the initiative to register success and impact, highlight the best approaches for transforming into a revenue-generating and sustainable platform, and create/expand strategic partnerships that align with 50MAWSP's objectives.

**3. Scope**

The selected consultant will be required to undertake the following:

1. Conduct a situational analysis and/or desk review of the 50MAWSP initiative from its commencement to date, including undertaking a SWOT analysis and engaging key stakeholders at Member State level, implementing RECs, AfDB and private sector among others
2. Review the technical aspects (online and offline) that have been implemented to date with a view to identifying improvements and position the 50MAWSP initiative to provide most value to women and youth entrepreneurs in the three RECs.
3. Develop a sustainability strategy (including a financial sustainability plan) which entails revenue generation and funding diversification strategies, as well as approaches to mobilizing resources
4. Propose models for leveraging public-private partnerships to support 50MAWSP operations, including detailed draft TORs to operate the PPPs
5. Develop a phased implementation roadmap with clear milestones and key performance indicators

**4. Deliverables**

The consulting firm will deliver the following key outputs:

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| **No** | **Deliverables** | **Timeline** |
| 1 | **An Inception Report** which outlines the methodology, work plan, and stakeholder engagement approach | 15 calendar days from the date of signing the contract |
| 2 | **Situational Analysis Report** presenting findings from the operational and technical review | 20 calendar days after submission of inception report |
| 3 | **Sustainability Strategy (First Draft)** including key recommendations, potential funding mechanisms, and model PPP framework | 15 calendar days after submission of Situational Analysis Report of the draft sustainability strategy |
| 4 | **Sustainability Strategy (Final Draft)** incorporating RECs input/comments on first draft. Final draft to also include: model PPP framework and implementation roadmap | 10 calendar days after validation workshop and no later than 60 calendar days after signing of contract |

**5. Duration and reporting arrangements**

This assignment should be completed within a period not longer than 60 calendar days from the date of contract signature. As the 50MAWSP lead implementing agency, COMESA shall supervise this assignment. The consultant will report to the Director for Gender and Social Affairs. The draft documents will be shared and validated by the key stakeholders. The final document will be submitted to COMESA.

**6. Qualifications and Experience**

The ideal firm should possess the following qualifications and experience:

*Lead Consultant*

**Qualifications**

Master’s degree in one or more of the following fields: Business Administration, Project Management, Gender Economics or Information Technology from an internationally recognized university.

**Professional experience**

i) 7+ years’ experience in strategic advisory services, with at least five years of specific experience in at least two of the following: ICT-driven initiatives, trade facilitation, or women economic empowerment programs

ii) Demonstrable skills in business development, resource mobilization, IT, gender, and project design

iii) Proven experience working with national governments, private sector players, civil society groups and regional economic communities (RECs) such as COMESA, ECOWAS or EAC

iv) Excellent analytical skills

v) Excellent communication and writing skills

vi) Fluency in written and spoken English. Knowledge of either French or Arabic will be an added advantage.

*Expert 1*

**Qualifications**

Bachelor's degree or higher in Information Technology, Business Development, Business Management or related field from an internationally recognized university

**Professional experience**

i) 5+ years of management/leadership experience in ICT development/product development environments.

ii) Strong knowledge of Africa’s trade ecosystem and digital marketplaces

iii) Excellent analytical skills

iv) Excellent communication and report writing skills

v) Fluency in written and spoken English. Knowledge of either French or Arabic will be an added advantage

*Expert 2*

**Qualifications**

Bachelor's degree or higher in Gender, M&E, Social Sciences, Project Management, Public Policy, International Development, Economics, or related field.

**Professional experience**

i) 5+ years in monitoring and evaluation, program design, management and evaluation

ii) Demonstrable knowledge and/or experience of women's economic empowerment programs

iii) Understanding of how to measure success of projects in the Gender and ICT environments

iv) Excellent communication and report writing skills

v) Fluency in written and spoken English. Knowledge of either French or Arabic will be an added advantage.

**7. Application Process**

Interested consultants should submit the following:

• Technical Proposal – Describing the approach, methodology, and work plan.

• Curriculum Vitae (CVs) of the proposed team (minimum of 3 experts).

• References – At least two relevant references from past assignments.

**8. Location**

The consultant will work remotely.

**9. Remuneration**

The budget for this consultancy is USD20,000.00 all-inclusive.