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| **Name of Donor** | **Name of Project** |
| **African Development Bank (AfDB)** | Fifty Million African Women Speak Networking Platform Project |
| **Grant start date**: | 30th October 2016 |
| **Grant End date:** | 31st December, 2020 |
| **Grant Amount:** | USD 5,386,200.00 |
| **Disbursed before current year:** (2019) | USD 2,243,013.37 |
| **Balance:** | USD 3,143,186.63 |
| **Disbursed in 2019**: | USD 1,542,610.00 |
| **Balance yet to be disbursed:** | USD 1,600,576.63 |

1. **Brief about the project**

**Overview**

COMESA Secretariat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in September 2016, with two regional economic communities (RECs) namely EAC and ECOWAS to jointly implement the 50 Million African Women Speak Networking Platform Project from September 2016 and the final Disbursement will be on 31st December 2020. This followed the approval of USD 12.4 million grant for the project by the African Development Bank (AfDB). The grant is spread between COMESA, EAC and ECOWAS. The project is aimed at creating a networking platform dedicated to women entrepreneurs in Africa, particularly in the three RECs.

The project is a digital/virtual marketplace intending to connect business women and encourage peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, and information and knowledge sharing. The platform will cover 38 1countries and will enable women to access business training, mentorship, financial services and locally relevant business information, while building their own networks of contacts. The project is an innovative social media platform to enable women to start, grow and scale their business through the dynamic exchange of ideas. The Platform will be accessible through devices such as mobile phones, iPads and computers (Laptops & desktops).

The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the economic empowerment of women through the provision of a networking platform to enable women entrepreneurs to access information on financial and non-financial services. Specifically, the objective of the project is to establish a digital platform to improve the ability of women entrepreneurs to network and connect with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentorship, sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and to access financial services, market opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders and between countries. The project has four components, namely:

* + Support for ICT equipment and application;
  + Support for platform and related statistical data base/content development, and targeted services for women entrepreneur;
  + Support for back office/in-country resources; and
  + Project management/Capacity building.

The implementation of the project to achieve the above objectives will be within the framework of the listed four components.

1. **Overview of 2019 programme and expenditure implementation**

Most of the activities between January and August 2019 were focused on the following:

1. Completion of software design and development, and deployment of

the 50MWS platform;

1. Completion of system integration testing for the 50MWS platform COMESA with the Software Vendor and commission it for operations
2. Completion of stakeholder meetings for the project in 3 Member States

to set up Country Teams that will support project implementation;

1. Finalize recruitment of the Country Content Developers and conduct induction training workshops them once they are onboard;
2. Purchase of IT equipment and other communication tools for Country

Teams

1. Design and procurement of promotional materials for the platform launch and awareness
2. Conduct Technical training for the 50MWS portal
3. Hold regular meetings with SPIUs to ensure proper

coordination and fast tracking of project activities

1. Hire individual consultant to develop a communication strategy for the

project;

Table 1, below presents expenditure incurred in the period in implementing the above activities



As reflected in the above table, budget utilisation during the first half of the year was USD 622,322.12 representing 25% of the 2019 budget. In the Second half of the year USD 336, 310 will be spent towards the design and development of the platform software while USD USD 262,790 will be incurred on the Project Global launch, migration of the platform onto the cloud, National Content Developers and in-country and back office support activities. The balance of USD 375,590 will be spent on staff and other administrative costs. It is expected that the budget outturn will be 70% by the end of 2019.

1. **Risk Management**

Major risks faced by the programme include;

1. Unforseen delays in the completion of the design and development of the project software
2. Delays in getting approvals from Member States to allow hosting of country engagement meetings.
3. There were some delays incurred in the process of obtaining approval for the 2019 Annual Work Plan from the Coorporating Partner
4. **Recommendation**

Based on the budget outturn analysis and risk, management proposes the following;

1. High Level Advocacy and support for the implementation in Member States
2. Engaging the Cooperating partner on the need to expedite the process of approving budgets and workplans;
3. Engaging the Cooperating Partner for a no-cost extension, as the delays in the procurement of project ICT infrastructure and development of the Platform forced the project implementation unit to defer some activities to 2019 and 2020