LEAP-RE

Long-Term Joint EU-AU Research and Innovation Partnership on Renewable Energy

Research & Innovation Action

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D6.4 Financial Model of the Future Partnership

Version N°1

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1. Executive Summary

Long-Term Joint EU-AU Research and Innovation Partnership on Renewable Energy (LEAP-RE) has evolved into a structured African Union (AU) – European Union (EU) platform for renewable energy research and innovation (R&I) cooperation, bringing together funding agencies, research organisations, policymakers and private stakeholders across both continents.

As the current Horizon 2020 grant period ends in 2026, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the LEAP-RE programme requires the establishment of a permanent legal and operational structure capable of maintaining the co-funding mechanism, coordinating stakeholders and mobilising diversified resources.

Building on the analysis conducted under LEAP-RE Deliverable D6.1, the preferred option is the creation of an International Non-Profit Association (INPA) based in Brussels. This structure provides a flexible and internationally recognised framework adapted to multi-stakeholder cooperation, while ensuring transparency, operational continuity and financial accountability.

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The proposed INPA would:

- Provide a permanent governance framework for AU–EU renewable energy R&I cooperation;
- Ensure continuity of the co-funding mechanism;
- Enable direct fundraising and financial management;
- Maintain institutional knowledge and stakeholder coordination;

The proposed financial model combines:

- Membership fees;
- Public co-funding contributions;
- Project-based funding;
- Service-related revenues;
- Strategic partnerships and philanthropic support.

The governance model is designed to ensure balanced representation between African and European stakeholders, with clear decision-making structures and lean operational management.

This deliverable presents the financial architecture, governance principles and implementation pathway for the future association covering the period 2026–2030.

2. Context and Introduction

Since its launch in 2020, LEAP-RE has become a major platform for Africa AU EU Europe cooperation in renewable energy research and innovationR&I. The programme has supported more than 45 projects, engaged over 240 organisations across 33 countries, and established a structured bi-continental collaboration framework.

Beyond project funding, LEAP-RE has developed several strategic services and coordination functions, including:

- The LEAP-RE online platform;
- Capacity-building and 3 Renewable Energy Schools;
- Policy dialogue and stakeholder engagement activities;
- 7 strategic roadmaps and innovation support services.

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As the LEAP-RE programme matures, the continuation of these activities requires a stable institutional framework beyond the lifetime of the current grant agreement under Horizon 2020.

Several governance and legal options were assessed under Deliverable D6.1, including integration into existing European partnerships, public-private partnership models, and foundation structures. The assessment concluded that the creation of a dedicated INPA represents the most realistic and operational solution in the short and medium term.

The association would operate as a neutral, but and mission-driven platform aligned with major AU–EU policy frameworks, including e.g. the current AU–EU Innovation Agenda and the Global Gateway initiative.

The INPA structure also offers sufficient flexibility for progressive growth in membership, activities and funding sources, while remaining compatible with possible future institutional evolution toward more integrated partnership models.

Without institutionalisation, significant risks have been identified, including fragmentation of the network, loss of coordination capacity, weakening of the co-funding mechanism and reduced long-term impact of previous public investments.

The establishment of a permanent legal entity is therefore considered a strategic condition for ensuring the sustainability, visibility and long-term impact of LEAP-RE.

3. Purpose of Deliverable D6.4

Deliverable D6.4 defines the proposed financial model supporting the long-term institutionalisation of LEAP-RE through the creation of an INPA.

The deliverable aims to:

1. Define the financial and operational structure of the future association;
2. Identify diversified revenue streams, including membership fees and co-funding contributions;
3. Present the projected operational cost structure for 2026–2030;
4. Outline governance and financial management principles;
5. Assess financial risks and mitigation measures;
6. Provide a pathway toward medium-term financial sustainability.

The objective is to establish a credible and scalable framework capable of maintaining LEAP-RE activities beyond the current project cycle while supporting the long-term development of AU–EU renewable energy R&I cooperation.

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4. Stakeholder Value Proposition and Expected Contributions

Stakeholder	Main Value Proposition	Expected Contribution
Funding agencies	Access to a structured AU–EU R&I network, joint programming opportunities, reduced fragmentation, impact monitoring	Financial contributions to joint calls and operational activities
Policymakers	Access to programme results, policy dialogue, visibility on impacts and success stories	Institutional support and alignment with national or regional initiatives
Public research organisations and academia	Access to collaborative projects, networking, capacity building and funding opportunities	In-kind expertise, e.g. project review, and participation in programme activities
Private sector (including private universities) and industry	Access to innovation pipelines, partnerships and mature ventures Contribution to environmental, social, and governance (ESG)	Financial support, investment in mature projects and sponsorship of services
Philanthropic organisations	Contribution to sustainable energy and SDG objectives	Grants and targeted financial support
Local communities and civil society	Access to project outcomes and local innovation initiatives	Participation In-kind participation in pilot activities and dissemination

5. Scope of Activities to be Financed

The future INPA will finance a limited set of core operational services supporting long-term AU–EU cooperation in renewable energy R&I. These activities constitute the main value proposition offered to members and stakeholders.

5.1 Digital Collaboration Platform

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program under Grant Agreement 963530.

The LEAP-RE online platform will remain the central digital infrastructure of the future partnership. It supports collaboration, knowledge exchange, project development and stakeholder engagement across the AU–EU R&I renewable energy ecosystem.

The platform currently provides collaborative workspaces and thematic groups, matchmaking and consortium-building tools, funding opportunity monitoring, knowledge repository and resource sharing, event management and communication functionalities. Since its launch in 2022, the platform has grown to more than 3,400 users and now operates as a broader community ecosystem rather than a simple project coordination tool.

The platform requires stable operational funding covering:

- Technical maintenance and hosting;
- Software development and cybersecurity;
- Community management and user support;
- Third-party digital services;
- Continuous platform upgrades.

5.2 Communication and Visibility Activities

LEAP-RE has developed significant digital visibility through its website, social media channels, newsletters and multimedia content. Communication activities support dissemination of programme results, visibility of funded projects, stakeholder engagement, and positioning of LEAP Energy + as a central AU–EU R&I cooperation platform.

Core communication costs include:

- Communication staff;
- Editorial and audiovisual production;
- Social media and website management;
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and newsletter tools;
- Webinar, podcast and dissemination activities.

5.3 International Stakeholder Forums

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program under Grant Agreement 963530.

Annual Stakeholder Forums have become a major coordination and visibility mechanism for the partnership, gathering representatives from academia, industry, public institutions and funding organisations. These events support strategic dialogue, policy coordination, project dissemination, matchmaking and networking.

Future editions require dedicated resources for:

- Event organisation;
- Hybrid participation infrastructure;
- Travel support;
- Innovation camps and pitching sessions.

5.4 Capacity Building and Training

The partnership will continue supporting Renewable Energy Schools, online learning activities and structured capacity-building programmes targeting researchers, students and innovation actors.

Required resources include:

- Curriculum development;
- Expert contributions;
- Digital learning infrastructure;
- Certification and evaluation processes;
- Secretariat and coordination support.

In the medium term, certification and evaluation services may generate limited service-based revenues.

5.5 Strategic Intelligence and Knowledge Services

The future INPA will maintain and expand strategic intelligence activities supporting evidence-based policymaking and programme design. This includes dynamic mapping of energy transition roadmaps, knowledge repository management, monitoring of AU–EU initiatives and funding trends, scientific dissemination and thematic analysis.

A "Living Roadmap Observatory" may be developed to provide continuously updated insights on technology trends, policy priorities and innovation gaps relevant to AU–EU cooperation.

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This activity requires:

- Knowledge management staff;
- Data and analytical expertise;
- Repository maintenance;
- Editorial and coordination resources.

These services strengthen the strategic value of the partnership for public funders and policymakers.

5.6 Innovation Acceleration and Lab-to-Market Support

Building on LEAP-RE portfolio activities, the future partnership will progressively strengthen support for innovation deployment and commercialisation. Potential services include venture-building support, startup incubation and acceleration, investor and industry matchmaking, technology transfer support, policy and regulatory guidance.

Special attention will be given to localisation and scaling pathways adapted to African and European market contexts.

This pillar requires:

- Dedicated innovation support staff;
- Expert mentoring networks;
- Seed support mechanisms;
- Partnerships with investors and accelerators.

Over time, this activity may evolve toward a mixed funding model combining grants, sponsorship and service-based revenues.

5.7 Community Engagement and Local Innovation Piloting

The partnership will support local implementation and experimentation through training and co-creation activities, collaboration between cities, innovators and local stakeholders, pilot preparation and implementation support.

Main cost categories include:

- Capacity-building activities;
- Facilitation and mentoring;

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- Technical assistance;
- Partnership support and coordination.

This pillar has strong potential for co-financing through development cooperation and climate-related funding instruments.

5.8 Programme Management and Secretariat Functions

The future INPA will establish a lean permanent Secretariat ensuring operational coordination of the partnership. Core functions include financial and administrative management, coordination of co-funding activities, call implementation support, compliance and reporting, governance support.

Secretariat staffing and operational management constitute a major component of baseline operating costs and require stable long-term financing.

5.9 Impact Assessment and Monitoring

The future partnership will continue developing monitoring and impact assessment tools supporting portfolio-level impact analysis, SDG monitoring, policy reporting, and evidence-based decision-making.

Further development requires:

- IT development resources;
- Indicator framework refinement;
- Data governance and management capacity.

5.10 Thematic Clusters and Matchmaking

Thematic clusters and co-design activities support collaboration between African and European stakeholders through workshops, policy dialogues and digital networking tools.

These activities facilitate partner identification, consortium building, joint project preparation, knowledge exchange.

This pillar requires:

- Community facilitation;
- Platform moderation;

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- Matchmaking tool development;
- Coordination of thematic activities.

5.11 Scientific Outreach and Dissemination

Scientific dissemination remains an important component of the partnership's mission. LEAP-RE has already generated more than 100 scientific publications.

Future activities will support open-access dissemination, policy briefs and synthesis documents, scientific visibility of funded projects, dissemination through AU–EU networks and events.

This activity requires:

- Editorial coordination;
- Dissemination support;
- Communication and publication management.

6. Cost Structure and Financial Sustainability (2026–2030)

6.1 Overview of the Cost Structure

The future INPA will operate through a layered cost structure combining core operational expenditure with scalable programme activities.

Cost Category	**Main Activities**	**Nature**
Core staffing and Secretariat	Governance, administration, programme coordination, communication	Mainly fixed
Digital infrastructure	Platform maintenance, IT tools, monitoring systems	Semi-fixed
Events and stakeholder engagement	Forums, workshops, matchmaking activities	Variable
Capacity building and training	RESchools, MOOCs, certification activities	Variable

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Innovation and acceleration support	Venture-building, innovation camps, startup support	Scalable
Knowledge and policy interface	Roadmaps, policy dialogue, strategic intelligence	Semi-fixed
Monitoring and impact assessment	Portfolio analytics and reporting tools	Initial investment + operational costs

The operational layer includes:

- Secretariat and governance functions;
- Core staffing;
- Platform hosting and maintenance;
- Financial and administrative management;
- Basic communication activities;
- One annual stakeholder forum.

These functions constitute the structural backbone of the partnership and require stable and predictable funding.

Core staffing profile

Function	**Main Responsibilities**
Executive Director / Secretary General	Strategic coordination, partnerships, fundraising
Programme Manager(s)	Coordination of activities and projects
Financial and Administrative Officer(s)	Compliance, contracts and reporting
Communication and Community Manager(s)	Dissemination and stakeholder engagement
IT / Platform Manager(s)	Technical supervision and digital services
Policy and Knowledge Officer(s)	Strategic intelligence and policy interface

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A lean staffing model with phased recruitment is recommended during the transition period.

Additional activities may be expanded progressively depending on secured funding and partnership growth.

This includes:

- Mobile application development;
- Advanced matchmaking and digital services;
- Certification and quality-label activities;
- Startup Studio and acceleration services;
- Local innovation piloting and city partnerships;
- Enhanced impact monitoring systems.

This layer is designed to remain flexible and scalable.

7. Revenue Streams and Financial Sustainability Strategy

7.1 Revenue Architecture

The proposed financial model combines six complementary revenue streams.

Revenue Stream	**Main Function**
EU and multilateral / bilateral public funding (AfDB, AUDA-NEPAD, World Bank, etc.)	Core programme support and strategic projects
Membership fees	Contribution to baseline operational costs
National Funding Agency contributions	Joint calls and co-funding mechanisms
Service-based revenues	Certification, advisory and acceleration services
Development and philanthropic funding	Capacity building and local implementation
Strategic partnerships and in-kind contributions	Cost reduction and ecosystem leverage

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7.3 EU and Public Funding

EU funding must remain a key stabilising component during the transition phase, particularly through:

- Horizon Europe Coordination and Support Actions;
- Cluster 5 calls;
- Global Gateway and development cooperation instruments;
- Service contracts related to monitoring or coordination activities.

The future INPA should progressively position itself for long-term participation under future European programming frameworks, including FP10.

7.4 Membership Fee Model

Membership fees are expected to contribute progressively to the financing of fixed operational costs.

Proposed membership categories

Category	**Typical Members**	**Contribution Level**
Full Members	Funding agencies, ministries	High
Institutional Members	Universities, research organisations	Medium
Associate Members	SMEs, NGOs, clusters	Lower
Strategic Partners / Observers	Development banks, networks	Case-by-case

The strategic objective is for membership contributions to cover a meaningful share of Secretariat and governance costs by 2028.

Membership should provide access to:

- Governance participation;
- Matchmaking and networking services;
- Visibility and dissemination opportunities;
- Participation in thematic activities and strategic roadmaps;

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- Access to funding intelligence and collaborative tools.

7.4.1 Incentives for membership

The long-term success of the International Association will depend on its ability to provide clear and tangible value to its members. While participation in the partnership reflects a shared commitment to strengthening AU–EU cooperation on sustainable energy research and innovation, membership should also offer concrete incentives. These may include privileged access to a trusted international network of funding organisations, research institutions and innovation stakeholders; the opportunity to shape the strategic research and innovation agenda of the partnership; participation in the design and implementation of joint calls and collaborative initiatives; access to shared knowledge, intelligence and best practices; increased visibility at international level; and opportunities to leverage additional financial resources through coordinated funding mechanisms. As the Association matures, these incentives are expected to evolve, creating a virtuous cycle in which active membership enhances both the collective impact of the partnership and the individual strategic objectives of participating organisations.

7.5 National Funding Agency Contributions

National Funding Agency (NFA) contributions remain a central pillar of the LEAP-RE co-funding model and a key element of the partnership's political legitimacy.

These contributions support:

- Joint AU–EU calls;
- Administrative management of co-funded activities;
- Strategic alignment of national R&I priorities.

Possible contribution mechanisms include:

- Co-funding envelopes;
- Annual membership contributions;
- Administrative support contributions;
- Voluntary thematic top-ups.

The INPA should seek multi-annual commitments and early indication of national funding envelopes to improve predictability.

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7.6 Service-Based Revenues

Several activities may progressively evolve toward partial cost-recovery models.

Potential services include:

- Certification and evaluation services;
- Venture-building and acceleration programmes;
- Portfolio monitoring and impact assessment;
- Advisory and due-diligence services;
- Event sponsorship and participation fees.

While initially limited, these revenues are important for long-term diversification.

7.7 Startup Studio and Venture-Building Activities

The proposed Startup Studio will support the transformation of AU–EU research outputs into scalable sustainable energy ventures.

Its activities may include:

- Venture incubation and acceleration;
- Investor readiness support;
- Technology transfer and commercialisation;
- Partnerships with innovation ecosystems and accelerators.

The Studio is expected to operate through a hybrid funding model combining:

- Public and development funding;
- Service-based revenues;
- Corporate partnerships;
- Potential long-term equity participation mechanisms.

This activity should be implemented progressively through a pilot phase before large-scale deployment.

7.8 Financing future joint calls

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Beyond its governance and coordination functions, the INPA is expected to become a key instrument for strengthening the financial sustainability of the partnership.

By establishing a permanent framework for mobilising and pooling resources from its members and other partners, the Association could support the preparation and implementation of future joint calls while progressively reducing dependence on successive European Commission coordination grants.

Depending on the governance arrangements adopted, the Association may facilitate the collection, management or coordination of financial contributions from African and European funding organisations, as well as from international organisations, philanthropic foundations and private-sector partners.

Such a mechanism would provide participating funding agencies with a flexible and trusted framework to align resources around jointly defined priorities, improve the continuity of transnational funding activities, and reinforce the long-term autonomy and resilience of the AU–EU research and innovation partnership.

8. Governance and Operational Synergies

The INPA structure provides a coherent governance framework capable of supporting AU–EU co-funded activities through:

- Centralised Secretariat functions;
- Harmonised financial and administrative procedures;
- Shared reporting and monitoring systems;
- Integrated strategic planning.

This structure reduces fragmentation and strengthens the attractiveness of participation for funding agencies and institutional partners.

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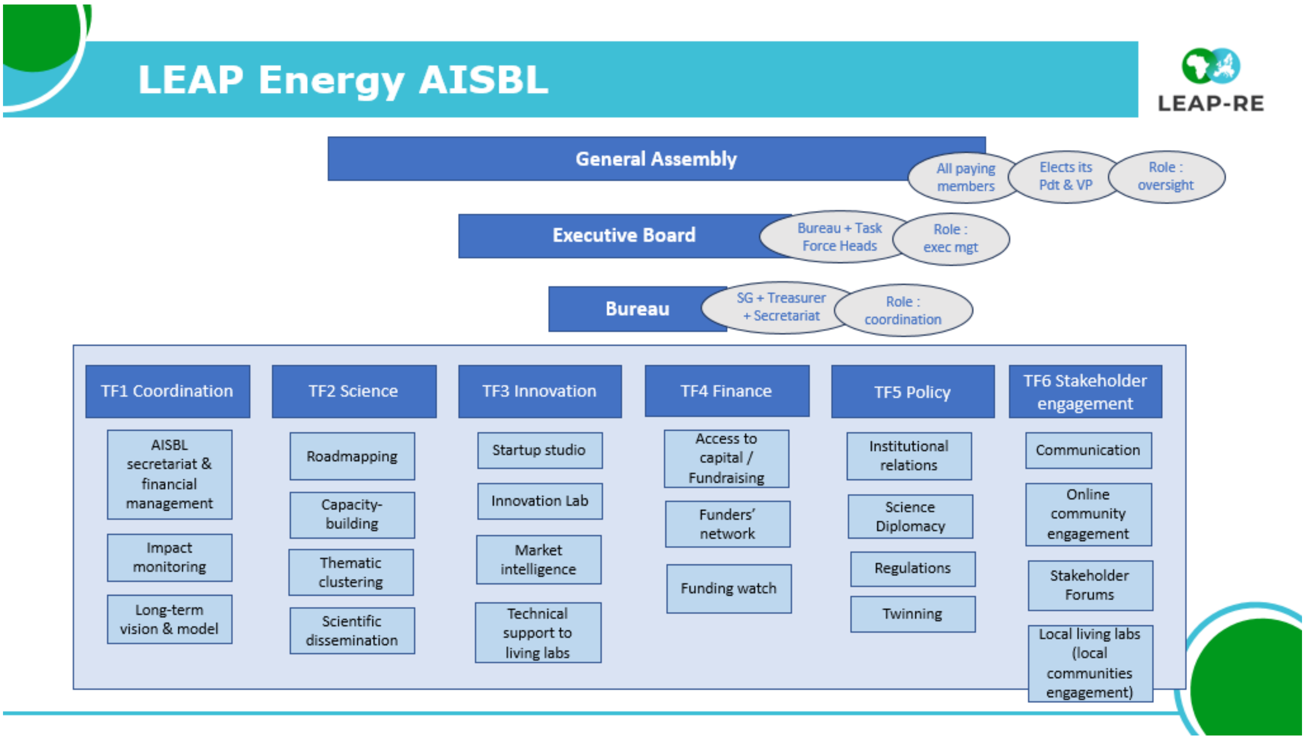

9. Conclusion

The proposed financial model offers a balanced and resilient pathway for institutionalising the partnership beyond its project-based origins.

It consolidates six years of public investment under LEAP-RE by:

- Preserving the co-funding architecture;
- Strengthening the AU–EU innovation interface;
- Embedding local stakeholder engagement mechanisms;
- Supporting lab-to-market transition;
- Creating a durable governance and financial backbone.

By 2030, the partnership can evolve into a stable, diversified, and strategically positioned bi-continental platform, capable of supporting sustainable energy research, innovation deployment, and policy alignment at scale.

The model therefore represents not only a financially viable structure, but a credible institutional foundation for the next phase of AU–EU energy cooperation.

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