Twelfth Session of the African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (ARFSD–12)

SDG-STYIP Impact Labs

Concept Note

December 2025

1. Introduction

With only five years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda and significant milestones of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, the pace of implementation in African Member States remains insufficient. Although notable progress has been made, most countries face structural, financial, and institutional bottlenecks that require **rapid, targeted, and scalable acceleration efforts**.

The theme of ARFSD-12—"*Turning the Tide: Transformative and Coordinated Actions for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063*" which is aligned with that of the 2026 HLPF - *"Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for a sustainable future for all"*—calls for modalities that move beyond discussion and political statements to **practical, action-oriented mechanisms** that can be implemented immediately after the Forum.

The ARFSD is one of the three mandated mechanisms for follow-up, review and acceleration of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. ARFSD-12 (28–30 April 2026) will review progress on:

(i)   SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
(ii)   SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
(iii)   SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
(iv)   SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
(v)   SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

To enhance the Forum's transformational impact, ECA proposes the introduction of **SDG-STYIP Impact Labs**.

Why Impact Labs?

The SDG-STYIP Impact Labs draw inspiration from the role of scientific laboratories, which exist to test ideas, generate evidence, refine solutions through iteration, and scale what works. In the development context, interventions are often designed and implemented at scale without sufficient testing, adaptation, or learning, increasing the risk of inefficiency and limited impact. The Labs translate the laboratory model into the development space by providing a structured, collaborative environment where policy options, delivery mechanisms, partnerships, and financing approaches can be co-created, stress-tested, refined, and prepared for scale. By embedding evidence, learning, and accountability into the ARFSD process, the Labs support the

transition from ambition to tested, implementable, and finance-ready solutions for accelerating the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

2. SDG – STYIP Impact Labs

The SDG-STYIP Impact Labs are designed as co-creation and problem-solving platforms that leverage the ARFSD ecosystem to produce actionable, implementable, and financed interventions for accelerating the SDGs and Agenda 2063. Functioning as development laboratories, they provide a structured space for defining problems precisely, testing assumptions, refining solutions, and preparing interventions for replication and scale.

The Labs have three core functions:

1. **Issue Framing** – identifying emerging issues, critical barriers and high-potential entry points

2. **Intervention Generation** – co-creating practical, evidence-based solutions

3. **Action Generation** – converting solutions into funded commitments and projects

This year, the ARFSD will have SDG-STYIP labs. These labs will leverage the ARFSD process and serve three main functions: (1) Issue Framing; (2) Intervention Generation; and (3) Action Generation. The aim is to generate impact and results within specific SDGs. The labs will generally be a multi-stakeholder co-creation platform which will span across all three functionalities of the lab. It will bring together governments, UN agencies, private sector, youth, civil society, academia, and subregional bodies. This could start in March and be finalized during ARFSD.

a. Issue Framing (Problem-Solving Space)

The Labs will begin by identifying: emerging issues and systemic challenges, barriers to progress, and proven solutions from within Africa.

How would it work?

- Partners prepare ARFSD background papers (Nov 2025 –Jan 2026), synthesizing progress, good practices, financing gaps, emerging issues and structural constraints.

- From these, **SDG-STYIP Lab Issue Papers** will be drafted (January 2026), focusing on problem statements, priority thematic areas and potential acceleration levers.

- These issue papers anchor all subsequent Lab activities and ensure thematic alignment with Agenda 2063 and the ARFSD theme.

The issue framing process will also identify key assumptions underlying current approaches, helping to focus subsequent interventions on what needs to be tested, adapted, or re-designed to accelerate impact.

b. Function 2: Intervention Generation (Idea Creation & Prioritization)

Over a **10-week pre-Forum period (January–March 2026)**, the Labs will mobilize a wide range of stakeholders to generate concrete intervention ideas.

How would this work?

Three engagement channels will be used:

1. **Call for one-page proposals**

Disseminated through Member States, UNCTs, AU organs, private sector networks, youth groups, academia and civil society.

2. **Online crowdsourcing platform**

Stakeholders submit ideas responding to guided questions:

- What is the most critical problem within this SDG?

- What practical intervention can address it?

- Who is already working on it?

- Where has it worked before?

- What is needed to scale it?

Contributors will be encouraged to clearly articulate what aspect of the problem their proposed intervention seeks to test or improve, and how learning from implementation could inform scale-up or replication.

3. **Virtual ideation dialogues**

- SDG-specific online meetings involving governments, UN agencies, private sector, youth, civil society, academia, RECs, and subregional bodies.

Outcome from Function 2

- A longlist of **20–30 potential interventions per SDG**, filtered to

  - **3–5 priority high-impact, evidence-based, implementable interventions**

  - These will be publicly announced at the ARFSD and showcased at the Knowledge Fair.

c. Function 3: Action Generation (Commitment & Implementation Platform)

The final function converts intervention ideas into joint **projects, commitments, and financing pathways**. Consistent with the laboratory approach, selected interventions will be developed as **prototypes, demonstration initiatives, or proof-of-concept projects**, with clearly defined scope, timelines, roles, and learning objectives, prior to large-scale implementation.

How will this work

1. **Early engagement of financing partners**

Key financing and implementation partners for example African Development Bank (AfDB), the CAW, Global Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility – 8 (GEF-8), philanthropy, private investors, and UN pooled funds are briefed on the Labs from the start.

2. **Workstream formation after selection of top interventions**

Multi-stakeholder working groups will be formed per intervention to develop concept notes, implementation plans, indicative budgets, partnership structures and potential financing arrangements.

3. **Announcement of commitments at ARFSD**

To solidify commitments, Governments, donors, and partners outline what they will support and the next steps at ARFSD.

Expected Results from Function 3

- Intervention portfolios ready for resource mobilization

- New public–private and intergovernmental partnerships

- Commitments feeding into VNRs, national development plans, and Agenda 2063 alignment processes

- Specific impact initiatives launched

Interventions designed with built-in learning and adaptation components to inform decisions on scaling and replication across countries and subregions.

3. Modalities and Governance

- **Uniform templates:** issue papers, submission forms, selection rubric, implementation templates

- **Coordination:** each SDG lab will have co-leads—ECA (substantive lead) + partner institution (technical lead)

- **Inclusivity:** special emphasis on youth, private sector, women innovators, and African research institutions

- **Transparency:** well delineated roles of partners etc, clear selection criteria based on scalability, evidence, alignment with SDG/Agenda 2063, and feasibility

- **Documentation:** all outputs feed into session reports/outcome documents (key messages and declaration) and knowledge fair at ARFSD and beyond e.g. the Africa Sustainable Development Report, Conference of Ministers

- **Reporting and knowledge sharing on the SDGs-STYIP Labs:** may consider setting up an online platform on these labs

4. Proposed Timeline

Period	Activity
Nov 2025 – Jan 2026	Development of ARFSD Background Papers
January 2026	Draft SDG-STYIP Labs Issues Papers
January 2026 – March 2026 (10 weeks)	Multiple channels for intervention generation (calls, online platform, virtual dialogues)
March 2026	Prioritisation and selection of top 3–5 interventions per SDG
April 2026 (pre-ARFSD)	Formation of working groups, engagement with financing partners
ARFSD-12 (28 – 30 2026)	Announcement of interventions, exhibition at Knowledge Fair, partnership commitments
Post-ARFSD (May – December 2026)	Project document finalization, resource mobilization, follow-up with partners

5. Expected Impact

Overall, the SDG-STYIP labs will be expected to have the following impact:

- Practical acceleration levers identified and supported
- Africa-led innovation and knowledge exchange amplified

- Increased pipeline of bankable, fundable projects
- Enhanced accountability and follow-through after ARFSD
- Stronger partnerships and private sector participation
- Reduced implementation risk through early testing, learning, and refinement of interventions prior to scale-up.