I thank the co-sponsors for convening this event and for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on the important subject of “Women and Youth Entrepreneurship in Africa”.

Against the background of the post-2015 development agenda and Africa’s Agenda 2063, women and youth entrepreneurship is expected to play a critical role in driving structural economic transformation. In the current context of our theme, it remains a vital component of sustainable development and has a real potential to meeting some of the key goals and targets agreed upon in the two Agendas. Entrepreneurship has the potential for job creation and generation of innovations in key sectors, and Africa would need to embrace the right policies in this area if it is to achieve a 25% reduction in unemployment by 2023 and to specifically reduce youth and women’s unemployment by 2% per annum as set out in the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of the Agenda.

Indeed, the AU recognizes this fact and places great emphasis on channeling the creativity, energy and innovation of Africa’s youth into the driving force behind the continents political, social, cultural and economic transformation. Paragraph 58 (Aspiration 6) clearly states that young African men and women are expected to be the path breakers of the African knowledge society and will contribute significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship.

The increasing numbers of the youth joining the labour force have limited opportunities due to the inability of their countries’ economies to absorb them and growing youth unemployment has become both a socio-economic problem as well as a security concern on the continent. However, countries stand the chance of reaping demographic dividends that come with high youth populations if they are able to put the right policies and programmes in place.
It is important to give special attention to women in the light of the many gaps that still remain between males and females in realms such as education, employment and entrepreneurship. Women remain substantially under-represented as entrepreneurs, even in countries where women’s participation in the labour market has been constantly increasing. Beyond being a basic human right, women’s empowerment and gender equality is also a way to generate broad productivity gains. From a development perspective, empowering women and granting them equal rights in areas such as entrepreneurship and innovation are expected to have positive spillover effects on key development outcomes, such as pro-poor growth and the achievement of some key targets of the SDGs.

**Ghana’s Case**
My comments in large part are in relation to the key components of Ghana’s policy regarding youth employment and entrepreneurial education and what lessons we can take away with us in the design and focus of future programmes.

The government of Ghana is tackling the issue of youth entrepreneurship through a number of cross-sectoral policy measures embedded in our National Youth Policy, the Youth in Trades and Vocation module of the Youth Employment Agency, and the Youth Enterprise Support Initiative.

**National Youth Policy**
The overarching policy document that guides the government’s formulation and implementation of youth programmes is the National Youth Policy, which recognizes that entrepreneurial development, among other factors, propels and accelerates socio-economic development. Government has sought to promote entrepreneurial development through the following:

i. Integration of entrepreneurial skills into youth development activities
ii. Facilitation of access to credit for the youth
iii. Creation of corps of young entrepreneurs to serve as role models
iv. Celebration of successful young entrepreneurs.
v. Mainstreaming entrepreneurial development into school curricula to give it the necessary impetus.
Youth in Trades and Vocation Module of the Youth Employment Agency (YEA)

The Youth Employment Agency (YEA) was established under the Youth Employment Act 2015 (Act 887) to empower young people to contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic and sustainable development of the nation. Its objective is to support the youth between the ages of 15 to 35 years through skills training and internship modules to transit from a situation of unemployment to that of employment. To ensure sustainability, the policy focus of YEA was changed in 2009 from the traditional modules of offering paid jobs to providing opportunities for young entrepreneurs to become employers in their areas of operation.

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development is also working to strengthen and revamp the Graduate Business Support Scheme (GEBSS) and provide entrepreneurial/business development skills to unemployed graduates. The Ministry has further plans to revamp its demand-driven vocational and technical employable skills training programmes to equip artisans with the requisite skills needed by industries.

Youth Enterprise Support Initiative

YES initiative has been designed to help young entrepreneurs turn their ideas into thriving business enterprises. The programme, which is operating under the office of the President, draws support from other Ministries, Departments and Agencies such as the Ministries of Youth & Sports, Trade & Industry and Finance as well as National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) and the National Youth Authority (NYA). The programme targets aspiring young Ghanaian entrepreneurs aged between 18 to 35 years, with good business ideas looking for financial support and/or expert advice to bring their ideas to life. The initiative is also intended to support young entrepreneurs learn how to start and grow their businesses and also overcome related challenges. Through the programme, various training services are provided through business clinics to assist in business plan development. In addition, participants in the programme benefit from mentoring support where experienced business professionals will be available to guide them to succeed.
The National Youth Policy recognizes the strategic importance of agriculture to Ghana’s economy and development. In this regard, one of its priority areas is ‘Youth in Modern Agriculture’. The overall objective of this priority area is to promote youth participation in agriculture through the development of strategic interventions and approaches to attract the youth to the sector. The nature of proposed interventions include the promotion of participation of the youth in modern agriculture as a viable career, economic or business option in addition to the provision of resources to enhance the participation of the youth in agriculture.

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the GRATIS Foundation in collaboration with Plan Ghana and other partners have completed infrastructural work on a Centre which consists of a computer laboratory, library, science laboratory and 3 fully furnished lecture halls, offers practical training in modern automobile technology. The Foundation continued to execute its mandate of providing training in various engineering and processing fields to the Ghanaian youth, focusing on food processing, occupational safety health and environmental issues in food processing. The Foundation also manufactured 824 agro-processing equipment to support the activities of SMEs, 8 new products for use in the agro processing sector were also successfully designed, manufactured and tested and are currently available for sale.

Again, the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) provides Business Development Services (BDS) through 170 Business Advisory Centres (BACs) across the country. The NBSSI also assisted 256 SMEs to formalize their businesses with the Registrar General’s Department and the Ghana Standards Authority, as a means to improving access to credit for business growth leading to employment creation.

The Way Forward
Our experience has demonstrated an obvious need for an integrated approach involving, government, NGOs and development partners. It has shown that to create an enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem for young people, our interventions must be capable of addressing the many challenges including:
i. Cumbersome business regulations that pose entry barriers to the youth, but more critically, serve as a disincentive for effective collaboration and support from other Private Sector actors such as banks;

ii. Managerial incompetence and lack of capacity to start, operate and sustain their businesses. Traditional educational curriculum pays less attention to innovation and entrepreneurship and have mainly trained the youth for non-existent public sector jobs;

iii. Difficulty in accessing start-up capital and incentives. This is as a result of the fact that they simply do not have the collateral to access loans from financial institutions and more so are unable to design better business proposals.

And so these must be provided. What else needs to be done? (UNCTAD)

1. Need to formulate an integrated multi-sectoral youth entrepreneurship strategy, whose elements can impact significantly on youth entrepreneurship. This needs to involve all relevant stakeholders in the development of the strategy;

2. Recognizing that young people face considerable barriers within the regulatory environment, the key bottlenecks that impede young entrepreneurs from starting and growing their businesses, including complex regulatory processes and high business registration costs. Other measures include minimizing stigma around business failure, and facilitating restarts;

3. Effective entrepreneurship education is key to ensuring that young people acquire the competencies and skills they need to pursue entrepreneurship and to lay the groundwork for developing a culture of entrepreneurship. Building the capacity of teachers to inculcate entrepreneurship skills among students is critical in ensuring that entrepreneurship is integrated within the education system. In addition, there is need for strengthening the capacity of vocational training and apprenticeship systems to equip young people with the skills to pursue entrepreneurship and self-employment.

4. Addressing the bottlenecks that range from inadequate integration of entrepreneurship in the education system, limited practical or experiential
opportunities, lack of and/or limited orientation to enterprising attitudes, behaviours and skills among teachers and limited and/or poor quality business development services.

5. Technology and innovation are important drivers of economic development. Business incubators and accelerators provide a conducive environment that nurtures innovation. Investments need to be made in technological infrastructure and to provide the impetus for the spread of innovation as well as to ensure that young people have access to knowledge and the competencies as well as skills to exploit technology and create commercial products and services.

6. Finally, societal attitudes towards entrepreneurship, fear of failure, insufficient promotion of entrepreneurship opportunities, lack of platforms to foster young entrepreneurs’ engagement and lack of access to markets are barriers that undermine efforts to create a culture of entrepreneurship. It is essential to develop platforms that will facilitate opportunities to engage with young people as well as to promote the development of youth entrepreneurship networks and associations that advocate on behalf of young entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, I wish to use this opportunity to express Ghana’s appreciation to the support it continues to enjoy from development partners in many of our programmes to form impact entrepreneurs. The programmes speak to the need to create ecosystems for entrepreneurship and provides solutions to questions of how to transform the business idea into a business plan ready for implementation; how to develop the business tools and skills necessary to manage a new venture; and creating solid relations with investors and customers.

Supporting entrepreneurship means sustaining both economic and human development and generating job opportunities and wealth. These go hand in hand to achieving key targets of both the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

I thank you.