

**DRAFT CLOSING REMARKS****MR. THOMAS STELZER****Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Co-ordination and Inter-Agency Affairs  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs****REGIONAL MEETING FOR AFRICA  
FOR THE 2012 ECOSOC ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW****Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 25 March 2012**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to use this opportunity to express again our special thanks to the Government of Ethiopia and the African Union Commission for their gracious hospitality. This meeting also would not have been possible without the committed efforts of the Executive Secretary and his staff at the UN Economic Commission for Africa, as well as colleagues at the International Labor Organization.

Our candid discussions today have produced a number of ideas. In July, Ethiopia will present a summary report of the meeting highlights to Ministers as part of the 2012 Annual Ministerial Review of ECOSOC in New York.

I'll keep my comments brief, as the day is late and so much has already been said. While I will not attempt to capture every aspect of our discussions, allow me to share some of the main messages which I will take back to New York with me.

1. We have discussed the solid growth trend that has emerged on the African continent after the peak of the 2008 global economic crisis. We have noted its potential to impact positively on enterprise development, job creation and productivity gains in the region.
2. We have concluded that too few people are able to take advantage of new opportunities because of remaining obstacles – A clever IT graduate with a promising business idea is constrained by a lack of appropriate infrastructure to support it. A worker wanting to improve her skills to find a better job cannot easily access the training she needs.
3. We also discussed the size and role of the informal sector in much of the region and the complexities that this poses for policymakers. Although informality might be an important entry-point to markets, the burdens of

formalizing can also discourage businesses from increasing productivity and realizing their potential. This has profound implications for growth, development and poverty reduction.

4. The continued need for access to financing, particularly in bank financing, has been a common thread in most of our discussion. Although it isn't a silver bullet, we are encouraged by the increasing recognition among our partners, including the banking sector and new, innovative social venture funds, that this is an important priority area.

Ensuring that African growth is sustained, inclusive and equitable will require a redoubling of our efforts. That is why one of the highlights of this meeting was the sense of possibility for the future of African enterprise development. As we heard from several speakers, we know what needs to be done with many examples of success stories.

1. We heard this morning about Ethiopia's strategy to promote SME development by prioritizing investment in specific sectors, such as light manufacturing, leather goods and apparel. This is in line with recent evidence released by the World Bank suggesting that Ethiopia's increased productivity in these specific sectors is now approaching China's.
2. Another interesting point of discussion was the sustainability of enterprise and job development. Recent partnerships in Zambia have expanded the space for sustainable business development. This has had knock-on effects at a variety of levels. To name a few: (a) people's perceptions about the importance of sustainable business practices, (b) the demand for green services and (c) the expansion of green jobs.
3. Finally, the plea of young people came out very clearly today. We need to give them a genuine voice in the processes that affect their participation in the labour market and in their societies. The Secretary-General has gotten the message. He recently announced the creation of a new position for a Special Representative to champion the concerns of youth, as well as the establishment of a new youth programme which puts young people at the centre of our work.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We opened our discussion today with the recognition that this meeting was one part of a broader effort to forge a regional strategy for successful small and medium enterprise development. Within ECOSOC we hope to build on this event at the global level to ensure stronger partnerships with Africa for the goals of job creation, productivity gains and poverty reduction.

We hope that you will remain engaged with us beyond this regional meeting and will join the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review in July, in New York.

Thank you.

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