

WELCOME ADDRESS BY HAJIYA AMINA M. az ZUBAIR, OFR, SENIOR SPECIOAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT ON MDGs AT THE OPOENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON “THE ROLE OF SUB-NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN AFRICA”

Protocols

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this very important gathering of key stakeholders in our struggle to achieve the MDGs in Africa. It a reflection of the importance of the subject matter that we are graced with so many distinguished speakers and valued partners coming from all the corners of the continent. The papers and discussions that we will consider during this conference will not only facilitate mutual learning from our various experiences at a regional level but also contribute to facilitate collective reflection on how we can refine our efforts in the MDG processes in our own countries.

The Millennium Development goals in Africa holds the promise of saving millions of lives; empowering women, addressing the scourge of illiteracy, hunger and malnutrition; and ensuring that Africa’s children have access to education of good quality and good health to lead productive lives. Because of the varying degrees of poverty and its debilitating manifestations, the MDGs have a special resonance for our continent in that they offer an entry point into a comprehensive social development agenda; achieving these goals will allow African communities to raise productivity and compete successfully in world markets to increase economic growth. Investing in the MDGs and reducing poverty are critical steps in chartering

a course towards stability that will build capital, attract foreign investment and overcome Africa's dependence on external resources.

The stark reality however is that very few African countries south of the Sahara are on track to meet all the MDG goals; while many African countries are making real progress in the fight against poverty, the challenge of achieving the MDGs and other development objectives in sub-Saharan Africa is particularly acute, where only some countries are progressing sufficiently to achieve some of the Goals.

Today, worldwide, more than one billion people still lack access to safe drinking water; 6,000 people die of HIV and AIDS each day; and more than 750 million adults cannot read - half a billion of them women. In many countries the GDP per capita income is less than \$200 per day with the majority of the population living on less. This situation is further exacerbated by the recent volatility of global financial trends, While we are yet to see the full impact of the global financial crisis on developing countries, it's clear that together with high and volatile food and fuel prices, current global economic conditions threaten the gains that have been made to reduce poverty and advance development for large numbers of people.

Like many African Countries south of the Sahara, Nigeria is burdened by high poverty levels that are deeply rooted and paradoxical in nature. Our reality is characterized by a population of 140 million among which five out of ten Nigerians live below the poverty line as well as poor prevailing human development indices. Our progress in some areas has been remarkable: net enrolment rates in primary education rose from 81.1% in 2004 to 89.6% in 2007, HIV prevalence among 15-24 year old pregnant women fell from 5.8% in 2002 to

4.3% in 2007, and the costs of debt service fell dramatically from 12.7% of exports in 2001 to 1.2% in 2007.

Yet, in other areas the indicators show that our progress is too slow, or even that we are moving in the wrong direction: maternal mortality has risen from 704 per 100,000 in 2002 to 800 per 100,000 in 2007; the number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS has increased from 1.8m in 2004 to 1.9m in 2007; and access to safe drinking water has fallen from 66% in 2003 to 49% in 2007.

With challenges such as these that threaten our national development, our response has to be swift and robust. Nigeria's development strategy contains time bound objectives which is for the first time coupled with a clear strategy for implementation and monitoring creating the accountability and social engagement necessary to deliver timely and sustainable results; Vision 20;2020 which will propel Nigeria to become one of the world leading emerging economies by the year 2020 maps a comprehensive agenda for economic growth is coupled with the President's 7 point agenda that outlines a clear strategy for investment and expansion in our social sector whilst providing the infrastructure necessary to support growth. To further boost our efforts, the 2005 debt deal that resulted in freeing Nigeria from the bulk of its debt burden has created a saving of \$1billion annually from debt servicing. These savings have been channeled into a Virtual Poverty Fund, created to give priority attention to MDG-related projects which has been implemented through national budgets since 2006.

However we understand that for this ambitious development agenda to succeed, we need to address several critical cross-cutting challenges. These include the need for effective intergovernmental collaboration among the three tiers of government, particularly to strengthen capacity and provide the skills necessary to deliver

service through state and local governments. Other challenges are availability of reliable data and statistics from credible sources, institutional and human resource capacity, genuine partnerships for development and ensuring that gains of our macroeconomic growth makes real impact in the lives of the poor.

Ladies and gentlemen the primary responsibility for the achievement of the MDGs remains with African Governments who have shown tremendous leadership in recent years and are putting in place ambitious and bankable programmes. We must continue to ensure sound public policies and continued investments in the social sector. I would like to take this opportunity to enjoin our development partners to scale up their existing efforts for interventions on education, health, water and sanitation and other critical areas with particular attention to children and women. Their support in bridging the funding gap is crucial.

At this juncture I would like to congratulate the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the Federal Ministry of Finance as well as the other organizers for bearing the responsibility of bringing this gathering together for this very important cause. Once again I welcome you to all to this conference; I wish you all a pleasant stay in Nigeria and fruitful deliberations in this meeting.

Thank you all.