UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

REMARKS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR, PROF. PETER M.F. MBITHI DURING THE ESDA CONSORTIUM CHAIR AFRICA YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP: AGROBUSINESS INCUBATION NETWORK FORUM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2017 AT 4.00 P.M. IN THE MANU CHANDARIA AUDITORIUM, 6TH FLOOR, UoN TOWERS
Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,
I wish to start by thanking the organizers of this crucial Forum. The promotion of youth agribusiness in Africa is important because the sector plays a pivotal role in a multifaceted way across the socio-economic, and environmental spheres.

Africa’s development Agenda 2063, “The Africa We Want” puts agricultural development at the fore. Delivering on this agenda means that we all stakeholders have to work very closely together to maximize impact. Last year, during the 6th Tokyo International Conference on Africa Development, which
was held in Nairobi in August, the University of Nairobi, United Nations University and the African Development Bank organized a Forum that endorsed the Africa Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative, as part of the TICAD Process.

The Forum came out with three critical recommendations namely;

1) To develop a collaborative network of young African entrepreneurs and researchers to share streams of entrepreneurial innovations and experiences to establish a linked system of
entrepreneurship development;

2) To expand and increase the number of business incubation centers across Africa to enable young entrepreneurs and researchers collaborate in joint entrepreneurial innovations, and

3) To develop and test entrepreneurial training courses and programs to be jointly hosted by African higher education institutions, including, in particular, elaboration of multi-layered training schemes which are field-oriented and reflecting socio-economic and cultural conditions in African countries and which will
be effective in attracting and generating streams of business innovators and industrial leaders who can contribute to the promotion of high growth and sustainable industrialization in Africa (‘African’ MBA).

This new initiative runs on the back of the Education for Sustainable Development in Africa Program, a postgraduate program with 3 masters degree programs namely; Sustainable Integrated Rural Development’, Sustainable Urban Development and Mineral and Mining Resources.
The program is steered by an ESDA Consortium chaired by me, and consisting of the representatives of the African partner universities and UNU which serves as the Secretariat. One major initiative of ESDA is the establishment of a Next Generation Researcher (NGR) team, comprising young researchers nominated by the partner universities, for promoting problem-solving research to generate learning materials to be used in ESDA classes as well as to create needed space for the students’ field work.
The potential for agribusiness and agro-industrial development in Africa is largely linked to the relative abundance of agricultural raw materials and low-cost labor. Agribusiness is a business operation that derives its revenues from agriculture and may involve farming, processing and manufacturing and/or the packaging and distribution of agricultural products.

It should be designed to create adequate environment and enhance the emergence of locally owned agro-processing industries, capable of creating jobs and increasing incomes.
In addition, it should serve as a catalyst for achieving Africa’s inclusive growth and sustainable development. This calls for fostering of agribusiness skills, innovations and capacities of farming population to engage in agriculture value chains, and create new agro-processing industries, grow employment opportunities, raise productivity and competitiveness, and radically transform African agricultural sector to enable the continent to feed itself and be a major player in the global food economy.
A novel direction would have to be elaborated in the development of these skills to nurture agriprenuers. This should be backed by a comprehensive understanding of existing relevant agri-business initiatives, and supported by in-depth research on the present state of the sector and future possibilities for Africa’s sustainable agri-industrialization.

To accomplish the above, universities will have a critical role to play in establishing agribusiness incubation systems to provide skills development, training, and research support.
The envisaged long-term nature of this process, coupled with rapidly changing technological profiles of agri-industrial products and processes and international business pressures, should suggest that the younger generation assume the principal role for driving the process. Through local, regional and global supply and value chains, agribusiness is the force behind integrating smallholders and small agro-entrepreneurs into the economy in Africa. This creates jobs for the youth, brings expertise, technology and innovation and financing capacities to increase agricultural production in a sustainable manner.
As a result, youth agripreneurs stand a better chance of interacting successfully with other value chain actors. They are also in a better position to facilitate the necessary investments by other private sector actors.

Investing in agriculture gives the highest return on poverty reduction. Youth agripreneurs and small farmers are the main actors in agriculture in Africa. There is a need to focus on quality orientation and agribusiness value chain, in the promotion of youth agribusiness for sustainable industrialization in Africa.
In conclusion, therefore, I believe that the youth agribusiness incubation is crucial initiative and fully in line with delivery of the sustainable development goals vision 2030 as well as the Agenda 2063 of the Africa We Want. I am convinced that, it is important to support youth agribusiness incubation development to empower the youth and promote youth agribusiness for sustainable industrialization in Africa. This Forum should aim at developing an attractive proposal to establish a model Africa agribusiness incubation system. The University of Nairobi is committed to promoting this critical initiative and will lead the way
in supporting the development of youth agribusiness incubation system in Africa.

Thank you.

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AND
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