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DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

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### Expert Working Group on ENTERPRISE AFRICA NETWORK to design and implement SMEs Online Platforms through Public Private Partnership



**Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire – 15 December 2017.** The Department of Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission organized the Expert Working Group Meeting on Enterprise Africa Network under the theme: “Designing and Implementing SMEs Online Platforms through Public Private Partnership”. The main objective of the event is to propose a Roadmap with priority issues for the establishment of the African Entrepreneurial Network Flagship Project. The Meeting was attended by Senior Government Officials from Regional Economic Communities (RECs), AU Member States and EU Commission, Heads of entities responsible for accounting and insurance oversight and regulation, Senior Representatives of standard setting bodies, International

Development Agencies, professional bodies and associations, academia and the private sector, civil society and multilateral organizations.

Enterprise Africa Network is a flagship initiative aiming at implementing the Business Development pillar of the Master Plan 2017-2021. The main services which will be provided are related to International Partnerships including with European Private Sector, Advice for international growth and Support for Business Innovation.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Khebour Ghenna, Executive Director of the Pan African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PACCI) pointed out that SMEs in Africa stimulate domestic demand through job creation, innovation, and competition and thus, they are a driving force behind a resilient national economy. According to him in addition, SMEs involved in global supply chains promote international trade. “Prioritizing SME development is therefore critical for promoting economic growth. Through digitalisation, SMEs are able to reach new customers anywhere in the world. Even the smallest company is able to access overseas markets through e-commerce, and attract new customers online”, he underscored. He called upon African Union Member States to step up their support to SMEs on their effort to access finance and their digitalisation journey. Before he concluded, he highlighted the fact that Economic integration initiatives, such as the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) will encourage the liberalization of trade and investment across borders. “This requires new financing solutions for SMEs to survive and grow. Supply chain finance and trade finance have potential to support SMEs participation in global value chains” he concluded.

Addressing the Meeting, Mr. Jules Touka, a Representative from the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), pointed out on behalf of the Regional Economic Communities that he is now pleased that African Union pays more attention on Value Chains and Small and Medium Enterprises which he said, are the engine of job creation in Africa. According to him, to address wide unemployment Africa needs to encourage SME programmes across the continent. “Promoting youth entrepreneurship is critical in addressing the challenges. Opportunities provided by new technology through digital economy should be leveraged for a wider benefit for all”, he underlined. He urged the Meeting to make sure that issues of inclusion are adequately featured in their endeavours. “The African Union Commission should encourage territorial and sectoral professional organizations to develop their internal capacities for economic animation, particularly towards women and young people”, he mentioned.

In his Opening Speech, Mr. Hussein Hassan, Head of Industry Division, Department of Trade and Industry of the African Union Commission recalled the objectives of the Meeting and pointed out that communication on the continent through the growth of SMEs needs to be equipped with the skills needed to trade internationally in digital economic environment. According to the Head of Industry Division, access to finance coupled with a nuanced understanding of the unequal power dynamics that exist amongst women and others in their access to finance of innovation, is a critical issue that needs to be addressed in the core of the Roadmap. Mr. Hussein also underscored the importance of

SMEs in the context of the creation of one African Market through the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). “The CFTA will create an enabling environment for the establishment of the Enterprise Africa Network Roadmap. This is important for promoting Intra-African Trade and increasing intra-regional, Sub-Regional and African-Global Trade rapidly”, he emphasized. He concluded by urging the Meeting to consider the establishment of Youth and Women Networks in e-Commerce and Capacity Building as an essential component of the Roadmap.

The Meeting recommended, among others, that Enterprise Africa Network should enrich regional value chains, clearly identify its competitive advantages and its strategic priorities. It was also recommended that Enterprise Africa Network serves as a platform where SME’s can have access to customers, where they can generate sales and have information on how to build capacity in management skills. The Network should serve as a focal point for linkages on existing platforms of relevance to SMEs.



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