

REGIONAL CONSULTATION FOR AFRICA IN PREPARATION FOR
AFRICA IN PREPARATION FOR THE ECOSOC ANNUAL
MINISTERIAL REVIEW, 25TH MARCH 2012, ADDIS ABABA

Theme: Small and Medium Enterprises as Drivers of Productive
Capacity and Job Creation

A Youth Perspective

Presentation by Helena Okiring, Youth Leader from Uganda

The Vice President of the UN Economic Social Council representing Africa, Your Excellencies and Ministers present, distinguished members of the AU presiding ladies and gentlemen, protocols observed I greet you all.

My name is Helena Okirio from Uganda and I am 25 years young. As a Youth leader I worked with Uganda Youth Network till January this year. I am a founding member of the Young leaders think Tank for policy alternatives by Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and a member of the Youth Advisors programme to Washington by USAID. I am also the editor in chief of the Green light magazine space I created for young people to share their insights and views on mainstream issues and lastly I am also a volunteer with the Uganda National NGO Forum, a platform for sharing and reflection of NGOs in Uganda where I find the space to learn and unlearn different mainstream aspects about civil society engagement with different aspects.

Worse still, the bureaucratic processes that are involved in registering a business, for example, many of which are unnecessary, only enable corruption to thrive.

This is only exacerbated by the fact that there are challenges in as far as protecting small businesses in Africa is concerned. Often time, Global National Companies, especially retail supermarket chains, displace our Young entrepreneurs by setting up stores that sell imported goods that can be produced locally.

Why don't Governments here put in place the necessary framework to protect Cottage industries for example and seriously check the activities of Multinational companies?

I find it very disturbing, for example, that Congo imports Bread and Water from Uganda!!!! Bread and Water!! Can't Youth in Congo bake bread?

It is also sad that fish die in the DRC Rivers while millions of tones are imported for consumption the people of Congo. Why should you permit the importation of fish while fish in your own rivers grow and die before they are caught? This is unacceptable! Why do we import Fruits and vegetables like oranges and juice to our countries knowing this creates unnecessary, costly and disabling competition for our goods and services? The saddest bit is that many of our own public makers are paid in corrupt bribes to deliberately fail local efforts at enterprise. That is another impediment to the growth of SME's in Africa.

Further still, if people have to pay their way through a process, then the quality of goods and

the continent. They are a golden promise waiting to be fulfilled. Let us look at each of ourselves as stewards of the people these faces represent; Stewards of these gold mines. The temptation is to stack and steal the gold or to hide it so that nobody can find it.

Your duty as leaders is to ensure that this gold is purified and refined through World Class Education, Dependable ITc 0.323 T9olhe

This meeting can very easily be just another Ministerial review pre-event or it could be the start of an era where African leaders say what they mean and mean what they say. It is an opportunity to actually transcend from commitment rhetoric to action.

Young people are more than able to transform Africa for Africa's Good: To turn Africa into a hub of investment and employment and endless opportunity not just for themselves but for the whole world. The question is "Will you let them?"

I thank You All