



Welcome address by Mr. Sam Daibo Executive Director, PIND Foundation

PROTOCOL

His Excellency Comrade Adams Oshiomole, Executive Governor of Edo State,

Hon. Abdul Oroh, Edo State Commissioner of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

All Heads of Ministries, Departments, Agencies and, Special Advisers of Government here present,

Chairpersons of Local Government Councils here present,

Directors of international organizations here present,

Members of Business Membership Organizations,

Members of the business community in Edo State,

Members of Edo State-based civil society here present,

Gentlemen of the press,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you to the second edition of the Niger Delta Development Forum (NDDF) organized by the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND).

PIND works to **establish and encourage innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships** that support programs and activities, which empower communities to achieve a **peaceful and enabling environment for equitable economic growth** in the Niger Delta.

The theme of this year's forum is "**Promoting new approaches for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises development in the Niger Delta**". This forum is a part of our work in stimulating policy debate and creating opportunities to support development in the region. We at PIND believe strongly in the power of partnership; that is why we are linking up with partners from the public and private sector to bring together multi-stakeholder audiences and development actors both within and outside the Niger Delta region.



There is an increasing recognition of the pivotal role of MSMEs in employment generation, income redistribution and wealth creation in many developing nations. Therefore, by promoting new approaches for MSMEs development in the Niger Delta, these new approaches ultimately contribute to the broader economic development of the country at large. Research undertaken by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2010 estimated the number of micro enterprises to be 17.26 million with a minimum total employment generation of 32.41 million. It is important to note that, these figures are for registered businesses, and a vast majority of our enterprises in Nigeria are indeed not, registered. That's a significant chunk of our economy, which is much closer and beneficial to the rural communities than many large corporations.

In the last two years at PIND, we have commissioned a number of studies and held consultative meetings with a broad range of stakeholders on opportunities for economic growth in the Niger Delta, and systemic constraints preventing sustainable/equitable economic growth. While MSMEs in this business environment have many constraints, there are a few common problems, some of which include:

- low market access and land access, as often a product of regulation as it is an access to credit and capital for MSMEs to grow their businesses;
- Poor access to land which limits the scale of operations of MSMEs, compounded by poor market access which implies relatively low market share compared to large corporations
- Poor information flow that often means regulators and MSMEs are not on the same page, and you can also see this communication gap in issues of multiple taxation and levies;
- Communication gaps also occur as weak business linkages among different segments of the operations in the real sector;
- High lending interest rates which acts as dis-incentives for MSMEs to borrow and expand the scale of their operations;
- Discriminatory legislation and inconsistencies in government policies;
- Weak operating capacities amongst many MSMEs in terms of skills, technology, knowledge and attitudes, as well as poor infrastructure;
- Access to appropriate production and processing technology and inadequate energy and support amongst others.



If the real sector is to live up to its potential, there is urgent need to take proactive measures that can revamp operations of value chain actors. Nigerians are an entrepreneurial people, so truly half the necessary work is already done. What we now have to do, as government, as international organizations, as policymakers and influencers and thinkers, is to find a way for our enterprises to thrive.

PIND and her partners are organizing the 2013 NDDF because we believe that the only way to address the major constraints and common problems facing MSMEs and economic development is by working together.

A business environment in which large multi-national corporations *and* MSMEs can thrive is the product of a symbiotic relationship between all relevant stakeholders – public sector agencies, business membership organizations, large corporations, multi- and bi-lateral organizations, financial institutions and MSMEs themselves. Access to finance and business support must be assured for organizations, large and small. The government must act as an enabler of development for the good of all as well as promoting policies and incentives that can create access to existing and new markets both domestic and international. Additionally, Business Membership Organizations must be seen as promoting or protecting their own interest but must see the need and urgency in positioning themselves as advocates for change in the market place.

With NDDF, our aim is to provide a joint platform and an opportunity for like-minded organizations and individuals across the Niger Delta and beyond; to inform knowledge and influence policies, attitudes, and behaviors and leverage resources that will re-position the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Niger Delta on the path of economic growth and competitiveness. For this to occur, there must be sustainable peace in the region as MSMEs will not thrive in an environment characterized by conflict and tension. It is therefore our collective responsibility and benefit to ensure that the current fragile peace in the region is sustained.

In our midst today, we have development practitioners, MSMEs/members of BMOs, private sector/market development practitioners, think tanks, academia in our universities in the Niger Delta and students who want to learn new ideas about their work from the experience of others. In addition, we also have stakeholders including banks/financial institutions, multilateral/bilateral, private organizations that want to contribute towards repositioning and



strengthening MSMEs in the Niger Delta, but don't have the experience or understanding of the models and approaches needed to promote equitable economic growth. Thirdly we have representatives from Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies interested in establishing an enabling business environment for MSMEs and they will like to listen to both MSME operators and those who supply support services to shape their interventions.

From the robust discussions, debates and networking opportunity we are providing at this forum, we hope to see strategic decisions made by financial institutions to fund and support MSMEs, and resource allocation and investment from private and public institutions will be leveraged and increased. We also hope that the Forum would boost partnership and shared learning and collective action among MSME operators, and support for promoting evidence and research-based policies by policy-makers by the end of this forum and in the coming months ahead.

We can have high expectations of these two days because we know that we have gathered here the real business men and women who are working hard day-in-day-out producing goods and services that we all depend on despite the difficult business environment that surrounds them. Whether you are here from government or private sector, from think tank to financial institutions, your presence signifies a desire to work for solutions to our most pressing problems. This common goal, this common desire, is the best place to start from.

Thank you once again for coming, and I wish us all fruitful discussions.