[Speech: Country Director of DFID Ghana’s speech at EDGECon 2017]

Honourable Minister of State for Business Development Mr. Chair – Chief Executive Officer of the Private Enterprise Foundation Country Director of TechnoServe Distinguished representatives of Government Chief Executive Officers and other representatives of private sector institutions Members of the Press Corps, Ladies and Gentlemen.

A very good morning to you all. It is a pleasure to deliver the opening remarks to launch the 2017 Enhancing Development of Ghanaian Entrepreneurs conference series – EDGECon 2017.

As the recently appointed Country Director for the UK’s Department for International Development in Ghana, I am honoured to be joining you to attend an event with such a well-chosen focus – Enterprise Growth and Jobs.

EDGECon was conceptualised by the UK Government and Technoserve in 2015 as part of the Enhancing Growth in New Enterprises (or ENGINE) programme.

EDGECon has the objective of bringing together a network of entrepreneurs, Government, financial institutions and business development service providers to find common solutions to entrepreneurship development challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen, This morning we will hear positive stories of how entrepreneurs have grown their businesses. These stories will highlight the real opportunity that exists to transform Ghana’s economy.

I arrived in Ghana only 2 months ago, but I’ve been struck by the sheer entrepreneurial spirit in evidence here. In my travels around Ghana, whether in Accra or Tamale, I have come across many hard working Ghanaians operating small corner shops, table top businesses and small enterprises. Ghana is in fact one of the top ten countries in Africa in terms of the likelihood of young people starting a business.

Despite this, we know small businesses in Ghana face many challenges and often fail to grow their businesses. The entrepreneurs who will speak this morning will highlight some of these challenges: the high cost of energy, regulatory challenges, business acumen and, unsurprisingly, the high cost of finance.

These challenges are contributing factors to why enterprises in Ghana are failing to grow and scale their business ideas. In this regard the theme of the conference Scaling Businesses in Ghana: Finding needles in the haystack is apt.

In Ghana, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) make up the bulk – around 70% – of the private sector. SMEs are critical to Ghana’s sustainable economic development story. SMEs have the potential to create the jobs that could transform the lives of the growing number of young people in Ghana entering the job market with limited employment opportunities. It’s also in the broader development interest of Ghana for these enterprises to be successful so they can contribute to government’s domestic tax resources for development.

And whilst Ghana has achieved good growth over the last decade, this growth has been skewed towards extractives and related services. Manufacturing is declining as a proportion of the economy. Ghana’s economy is characterised by a few successful very large companies, and lots of very small firms stuck mainly in small scale ventures. It is this low success rate of transformation from micro firms to larger scale companies that concerns the conference today.

Honourable Minister, We are appreciative that the Government is actively addressing these challenges. We note the ambitious plans your government has outlined for SME development, industrialisation for jobs initiatives and improving the enabling environment through rapid regulatory reforms.

We are also keenly following ongoing reforms in the energy sector as well as steps taken to stabilise the economy which will in the long-term help reduce the cost of finance and energy in Ghana.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Before I hand over to the Honourable Minister who will further outline Government’s plans for SME development, I would like to talk briefly about the UK’s partnership with Ghana on private sector development.

Advancing economic development is a hallmark of building Global Britain. DFID’s Economic Development Strategy, published at the beginning of the year, recognises the critical role of the private sector in creating jobs, supporting economic transformation and contributing to income growth and therefore poverty reduction.

In Ghana, DFID is focussed on supporting Ghana to stimulate investment, improve the ease of doing business, mobilise Ghana’s own domestic resources and move beyond aid.

Our ENGINE programme, delivered by TechnoServe, and launched in 2014 is helping small businesses to scale. Our support has helped 421 small businesses to develop and implement their business ideas resulting in over 250% revenue growth of these firms who in turn have created 1,203 new jobs.

Many of the ENGINE entrepreneurs are now exporting products – ranging from indigenous beauty products like Black Soap and Shea butter based cosmetics, to environmentally friendly bamboo bicycle frames – across Africa and into Europe and North America.

To help achieve these successes, ENGINE has partnered a range of institutions including the Private Enterprise Federation, Barclays Bank, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Business School, Fidelity Bank, Ghana Food and Drugs Authority and the Young Leaders Africa Initiative.

Tomorrow the British High Commissioner will be handing out awards to 82 competitively selected entrepreneurs who will receive business development support under the ENGINE programme in 2017.

We anticipate that by the time ENGINE ends in 2018, 500 SMEs will have been helped to overcome barriers to growth and build competitive businesses in Ghana with firms supported growing by 400% and creating 1,770 new jobs.

DFID is also working with the Government of Ghana to improve the business enabling environment for businesses here in Ghana through the Business Enabling Environment Programme (BEEP), recognising that the policy and regulatory environment for doing business is also important for business growth.

BEEP is helping Government streamline business regulation making it easier and less costly for businesses to comply with these. For example the programme is helping Government undertake tax, customs, business registration and licensing reforms.

A third DFID programme focuses on the North. Ghana’s growing economy, and rapid urbanisation in the south, has led to a significant reduction in poverty, however there is high level of poverty in the Northern Region. The three northern regions combined account for more than half of those living in extreme poverty (52.7%). Through our Market Development in Northern Ghana (MADE) programme we are working to link smallholder farmers to markets in sectors like rice, groundnuts and vegetables.

And we want to do more. DFID is currently developing a new Economic Development programme to support job creation in line with the Government’s ambitious industrialisation strategy. More details will be announced over the next few months.

To conclude …. The size of the challenge – and the opportunity to support budding entrepreneurs in Ghana – is huge. The UK Government can help, by supporting events like EDGECon and programmes like ENGINE – but it’s not our role to do this alone. We believe that the core role of entrepreneurship development lies with the private sector – through the banks, business development networks, with the Government providing a sound enabling environment and the regulatory framework for businesses to operate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you all the best in your deliberations during the next two days and I hope together we can identify innovative solutions to the challenges that entrepreneurs face in increasing investment and jobs and catalysing economic transformation in Ghana.

Thank you.

News story: Thousands more children on track to become fluent readers

Figures out today show 155,000 more six-year-old children are on track to become fluent readers compared to 2012.

The Phonics Screening Check, is taken by all Year 1 pupils across the country in June. As part of the check, pupils are asked to read as many of 40 simple words as they can to their teacher.

By encouraging teachers to use phonics – where pupils are taught to read by breaking words down into their component sounds – the government is getting closer to a time when all pupils are reading fluently and accurately by the age of six.

Today’s figures show that for 2017, 81 per cent of pupils met the expected standard at the end of Year 1 – up from 58 per cent in 2012.

Those who did not reach the standard in Year 1 took the Phonics Check again in Year 2, with 92% of seven-year-olds then reaching the standard.

Alongside the results of the Phonics Screening Check, the department has also published national data for Key Stage 1 (KS1), showing that the proportion of 7 year olds reaching the expected standard has increased across reading, writing and maths.

This year, 76 per cent of pupils reached the KS1 expected standard in reading, 68 per cent of pupils in writing and 75 per cent of pupils in maths as government reforms continue to bring higher standards to primary education.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

> We want every child to reach their potential and this means ensuring all pupils can read fluently by the time they leave primary school.
>
> Thanks to the hard work of teachers across the country, and this Government’s continued focus on raising standards and increased emphasis on phonics, 6 year olds are reading better than ever before. Today’s results show there are now an additional 155,000 six-year-olds on track to becoming fluent readers. This is a huge achievement, improving the lives and education of hundreds of thousands of children.

But there is more to do for the youngest children which is why, as we said in our manifesto, we will strengthen the teaching of literacy and numeracy in the early years. We are determined that all children, whatever their background, should have the rich vocabulary needed to fulfil their potential at school.

News story: Government extends suspension of minimum wage enforcement in the social care sector

The government today (28 September 2017) announced a further one-month suspension of minimum wage enforcement concerning sleep-in shifts in the social care sector to minimise disruption to the sector and seek to ensure workers receive the wages they are owed.

This follows July's decision to waive all historic penalties in the sector where employers incorrectly paid workers a flat-rate for sleep-in shifts instead of hourly rates. This was in response to concerns over the combined impact which financial penalties and arrears of wages could have on the stability and long-term viability of providers.

Today's announcement will allow the government to establish how providers' back pay bills will affect vulnerable people's care. The evidence base will also ensure any intervention is proportionate and necessary and could be required to satisfy EU State aid rules on government funding for private organisations.

During this temporary pause, the government will develop a new enforcement scheme for the sector to encourage and support social care providers to identify back pay owed to their staff. This will help to minimise the impact of future minimum wage enforcement in the sector while seeking to ensure workers receive the arrears they are owed.

Exceptional measures announced in July will remain in place until guidelines on this new approach are outlined next month.

It remains the government's expectations that all employers pay their workers according to the law, including for sleep-in shifts, as set out in guidance entitled 'Calculating the National Minimum Wage'.

News story: Burial of 19 unknown British WW1 Soldiers in Ypres, Belgium

19 unknown British comrades in arms who lost their lives on the battlefield during World War 1 (WW1) have finally been laid to rest in the New Irish Farm Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Cemetery in Ypres, Belgium on Thursday 28 September.

Unusually for a single service the ceremony involved casualties from English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh Regiments. The service itself was organised by the MOD’s Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), part of Defence Business Services and was conducted by The Reverend Iori Price CF, Chaplain to the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment.

Local piper, Pierre Dervaux, leads the procession into the cemetery – Crown Copyright, All Rights Reserved

Sue Raftree, JCCC said:

> It is very unusual for there to be 19 First World War soldiers from English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh Regiments buried in one ceremony. It has been a privilege for the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre to organise this service.

The soldiers were found following ground work at an industrial development at Briekestraat, Ypres in Belgium. The location, thought to be the original Irish Farm site, is an original war time cemetery created by the army under war conditions. It was believed that all those buried there had been transferred to the New Irish Farm Cemetery, some 300 meters away, but this discovery has proved that they hadn’t.

Local children from the Peace Village lay wreaths for the 19 unknown soldiers – Crown Copyright, All Rights Reserved

Investigations undertaken by the JCCC established that of the 19 soldiers:

- 4 served with the Essex Regiment
- one with the Monmouthshire Regiment
- one with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders
- one with the Northumberland Regiment
- one with the Royal Irish Regiment

As no regimental artefacts were found, the remaining 11 will be buried as ‘Known Unto God’. During the burial service all the coffins were in the burial plots with the exception of 1, which was carried in as the focus of the ceremony by the Essex Regiment, now the Anglians.

A bearer party prepare coffin to be lowered into the ground – Crown

Reverend Iori Price CF said:

> We are always mindful of the costs of conflict and the need we have to persue peace for all. At such a moment as this, when we have gathered to bury those fallen in conflicts, we reflect on the great price paid by our service personnel then and the motivation that encouraged them.

The headstones were provided by the CWGC and Liz Sweet, CWGC’s Director of External Relations in Western Europe said:

> We, at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, are delighted that the sacrifice of these 19 soldiers has been recognised by today’s event and will now be cared for in perpetuity by the Commission.

News story: Infected blood scheme reform

The government announced reforms to payments supporting people who received infected blood during NHS treatment in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Department of Health published its response to the recent consultation on infected blood support and the special category mechanism on 28 September.

As part of this response, the government announced new payment ‘uplifts’ and a new special category mechanism (SCM) to improve financial support for those affected by the infected blood tragedy of the 1970s and 1980s.

At least 2,400 people died and thousands more were exposed to Hepatitis C and HIV, with life-changing consequences, as a result of receiving infected blood.

The following measures will now be introduced:

- a new SCM will be introduced so more people with hepatitis C stage 1 can claim financial support with no distinction between severities of illness suffered
- the SCM will consider any significant and sustained adverse impact of

Hepatitis C infection or its treatment on the ability of an individual to carry out routine day-to-day activities

- administration of the current 5 payments schemes will be given to a single body – the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA). The NHSBSA will start on 1 November 2017
- ‘uplifts’ to annual payments from 2018 to 2019 and increasing the amount of discretionary funding available
- adding membranoproliferative glomerulonephritis (MPGN) to the list of stage 2 Hepatitis C conditions.

The discretionary payment scheme has been changed so that all groups can get the support they need quickly, both financial and otherwise

The department has increased annual spend on support payments to record levels since 2015, committing an additional £125 million in funding for support.

The changes concern people who were infected in England.