



2015 Communiqué
AGOA Civil Society Forum
Libreville -Gabon
Presented to 14th AGOA Ministerial Session

On

August 26, 2015

Andgondje Friendship Stadium

Libreville, Gabon

The Civil Society Organization (CSO) session of the 2015 African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Forum took place on August 24-25, 2015, under the Theme “AGOA at 15: Civil Society Organizations Working to Chart a Course for Sustainable U.S.-Africa Trade and Investment Partnership.” The session was held at the Andgondje Friendship Stadium, Libreville, Gabon.

The CSO session of the 14th AGOA Forum brought together more than 150 delegates from the United States and AGOA eligible countries to address the following issues:

- AGOA Annual Country Review for Eligibility Compliance, Sec. 105. Monitoring and review of eligibility
- Trade Facilitation, and Transportation Linkages: Vehicles for Enhancing Competitiveness
- AGOA Extension and Enhancement Act of 2015: Opportunities & Challenges
- Textiles and Apparel: Optimizing Third Country Fabric Provision
- Mentoring and Leadership Development for Women and for Young Entrepreneur

- Strengthening Micro Small Medium Enterprise Value Chain

Discussion Highlights:

Civil Society applauds the passage of the AGOA legislation and extension for 10 years and its support for trade capacity building, civil society, and women and youth. This 10-year extension will encourage investment and increased participation in the legislation’s provisions, as well as, help to spur regional integration. Civil Society acknowledges the new aspects of the country eligibility reviews, and hopes these procedures will support positive policy changes in AGOA eligible countries.

AGOA’s goal of promoting export led economic development continues to be limited, and countries are not taking full advantage of AGOA benefits. Most of the AGOA-eligible non-oil firms are micro, small and medium sized enterprises and small holder farmers. Many however, remain inefficient and constrained in their productive capacities due to lack of skills, capacity and other constraints such as finance, access to technology and infrastructure. Technical assistance and capacity building for micro, small and medium size businesses, including programs for women and youth of all genders, will be key to fully realizing the opportunities that AGOA offers. Programs that encourage mentoring and the creation of strategic partners will also be essential, such as, the Doing Business under AGOA Workshop that the AGOA Civil Society Organization Network and AWEP are convening on August 26 and 27. The focus of the workshop is on Trade Assistance and Technical Capacity Building; Financing & Payment Terms, Marketing, Competitiveness & Culture, and Distribution & Logistics; and Regulatory Requirements and Consumer Protection and Fair Marketplace Competition.

Implementation of trade facilitation best practices is critical to optimizing AGOA’s effectiveness and making AGOA inclusive to a more diversified business environment. Doing so will provide new opportunities for African SME’s to enter into global value chains and avoid waste of perishable goods. Data shows that even a moderate improvement in trade facilitation can have a greater impact on GDP than simple tariff reductions. Equally important are improved transportation linkages and connectivity, which are essential for regional economic integration and intra-Africa trade growth.

The AGOA apparel program has been one of AGOA’s foremost success stories; having created more than 300,000 new direct jobs and more than one million indirect jobs in supporting sectors. The benefits of

apparel trade with the United States are spread among 12 AGOA beneficiaries. With the extension of AGOA and third fabric provisions for 10 years, the longest extension ever, the textile and apparel sector has great opportunities to thrive and trade volume to increase, significantly attracting user-friendly foreign and domestic investment to the sector.

Recommendations:

1. AGOA RENEWAL and ELIGIBILITY, EXTENSION AND ENHANCEMENT:

- Realizing the need to chart a sustainable way forward for the US-Africa trade and investment partnership, we acknowledge the AGOA Extension and Enhancement Act of 2015's call for member countries to develop strategies biennially for more effective utilization of AGOA trade benefits. We call on member governments to work with Civil Society to develop these strategies, and to include in those strategies the way forward for a free trade agreement with the United States.
- Member governments should work with their CSO's to initiate early intervention strategies to avoid removal from the list of AGOA eligible countries.

2. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- Call on member countries and the U.S. government to increase technical assistance and capacity building skills training, and its corresponding regulatory and legal frameworks, and include Civil Society for the implementation of those programs. Support opening a Central Africa trade hub.

3. TRADE FACILITATION AND TRANSPORTATION LINKAGES:

- Commend member governments for signing the WTO Bali Trade Facilitation Agreement in order to maximize AGOA effectiveness, increase transparency, reduce transaction costs and increase competitiveness of African businesses. Member governments should work with Civil Society for its immediate ratification and implementation.
- Call on US to support aviation and intraregional transportation programs that provide sharing of best practices, training, and next generation technology to support regional economic integration. Call on AGOA national governments to work together to pool resources and create complementary aviation related services that can provide regional reach.

4. TEXTILE AND APPAREL:

- Call on member governments to create the investment and business environment, including protection for intellectual property rights that will attract foreign direct investment to the textile and apparel sector with a view of increasing production capacity and vertical integration.

5. MENTORING WOMEN AND YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS:

- Encourage member governments to promote policies that encourage "clustering" to grow economies of scale, and strategic partnerships with universities, private sector and government agencies to provide fellowships, internships and skills training.
- Encourage member governments to provide widespread access to digital-age technology, including internet access, mobile technology, e-commerce and new media to promote entrepreneurship amongst youth and women.

6. MICRO SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE VALUE CHAIN:

- Call on member governments to increase their support of trade and technical capacity building programs in their countries to strengthen micro, small, and medium size enterprises so they can better participate in global value chains.
- Encourage member governments to enact policies that will attract foreign direct investment, including that from Diaspora, and partnerships with U.S. multinationals in order to foster inclusion of SMEs in their global value chains.

7. AGOA CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS:

- Call on national governments to support the establishment of national chapters of the AGOA Civil Society Organization Network Secretariat.