

**2012 AGOA Forum:
Civil Society Working Group Planning Meeting Notes
U.S. Department of State – 9:30-10:45 a.m.
Friday, February 17, 2012**

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Overview

The working group charged with managing the planning for the civil society component of the 2012 AGOA Forum met at the U.S. Department of State, Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to discuss planning for the event. The group discussed content, timeline, a work plan, and the scope of participation. Chaired by Fred Oladeinde, the meeting was coordinated and hosted by the U.S. Department of State via Tijen Aybar, Country Desk Officer, Bureau of African Affairs

Next Steps/Key Decisions

- Meetings will be held once a month between now and the event in June, with the exception of May where there will be 2 meetings.
- The next planning meeting will be held at the same location at the Africa Bureau on Friday, March 16 at 10:00 a.m. The agenda and content of the meeting is to be determined but the main output will be a discussion of panel and event content and possible speakers.
- A parallel-track working group is being set up (list of participants attached) to address substantive issues regarding concerns about improvements to AGOA and a critical analysis of its successes and failures. This group will not only address these civil society inputs into the Ministerial, but also the broader legislative process prior to 2015 possible renewal of AGOA in the U.S. Congress. The first meeting for this group will be Wednesday, February 22 at 3:00 p.m. at Manchester Trade's offices. Frequency of meetings as well as scope of work to be handled by this group is to be determined.
- The likely date for the Civil Society event will be Friday, June 15, 2012 and likely location will be the Woodrow Wilson Center at the Ronald Reagan Building. Tony Carroll of KSA/Manchester Trade will be the liaison for these contacts. The Brookings Institution and the School of Advanced International Studies may be alternative venues. The maximum number of participants is not likely to exceed 200 people (even with overflow room space) with principal rooms accommodating closer to 120 people in all potential locations.

Meeting Highlights

Timing for the Forum/Second City Event – Jonathan Nellis, Senior Trade and Investment Officer, State Department Office of Economic Policy Staff Bureau of African Affairs, briefed the group on the timing for the Ministerial Forum. The dates will be June 18th and 19th, 2012. Other details are still being finalized such as the pre-Forum ministerial meeting and exact location of the Forum itself (currently it looks like it will be hosted at the Department of State but this is to be determined).

The selection of dates in June is to ensure as much distance as possible from election year events such as the Democratic and Republican conventions. The theme of the Ministerial is “Enhancing Africa’s Infrastructure for Trade.” Following a travel day on June 20, the second city event will be handled as a separate event from the Forum and will take place in Cincinnati, OH with special emphasis on infrastructure and energy in particular.

African Women Entrepreneur Program (AWEP)/Youth Participation – The AWEP Program will return to what was done in 2010 and it will be a smaller group than in Lusaka (which was 200-250 women largely Zambian). It will be a two-week international visitors program and may go to a number of different locations around the United States. The AWEP planners are still working out how they will integrate into the Ministerial events as well as second city events in Cincinnati. Tijen Aybar’s office is exploring opportunities to involve AWEP participants in the civil society program. There is a separate Young Entrepreneurs program also being planned but details and timelines on that are not clear. The desire to include AWEP and youth representatives in the Friday civil society event is strong, but the specific role of any potential speakers or panel topics is yet to be determined.

Other Events – The Brookings Institution is putting together an event for Thursday, June 14, 2012 that will cover a lot of the substantive issues about AGOA prior to the Ministerial Forum. There is some discussion as to whether private sector participation could also be encouraged to overlap with that event but nothing firm has been resolved or moved forward at this stage.

The Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) is staging its own Infrastructure Forum on Tuesday the 19th and Wednesday the 20th with a one-day overlap with the Ministerial. It remains to be determined how this will and will not be integrated with AGOA activities otherwise.

Draft Statement/Remote Participation of U.S. Embassies in Civil Society Event – Since the Ministerial is on a Monday and Tuesday and the Civil Society Forum is looking like it will be the Friday prior, there is some concern about the need to make sure that U.S. Embassy staff participating remotely can be available – particularly in the morning for a potential direct video conference. Additionally, everyone agrees that some advance work should go into drafting the communiqué well prior so that it can be delivered at the Ministerial with maximum impact. Details and process are to be determined.

Number of Sponsored Civil Society Participants – Currently USAID through its Knowledge Sharing and Analysis (KSA) project has funds to support approximately 40 civil society participants for 3 days. If the events require a longer stay, this number could be reduced. There is also a small amount of money for USAID sponsored speakers at the Ministerial component of the Forum to be administered separately. Per the recommendations noted in the 2011 Communique, civil society is requesting that The Department of State encourages African Governments (via a cable) to include civil society in their official delegations if that will be possible - but that is not final and confirmed.

Substantive Issues Affecting AGOA Extension or Enhancement/Improvement – Many participants in the meeting expressed concern that a blanket extension of AGOA in 2015 is insufficient. Most believe that many of the core concerns that have been expressed about implementing AGOA on the ground be addressed as well as any inherent flaws in the legislation itself. Issues such as regional integration, cross-border concerns, the quantity and breadth of participation in meaningful exports to the United States by a relatively small number of AGOA eligible countries are among the things that will be addressed in the parallel working group slated to meet on February 22. It is also clear that the focus needs to remain focused on trade and trade development and any issues that feed into that need to be seen through that narrower scope. The working group will use the communiqué from the Lusaka Forum in 2011 as a jumping off point. There was also a call for a clearer analysis of AGOA's successes and failures in clear statistical as well as anecdotal form – Brookings is doing this analysis to dovetail with their event on the 14th.