

## Remarks by Michael Curtis, Acting DAA, USAID/Africa Bureau

Mr. Oladeinde, Ambassador Amina Ali, Dr. Tillemann, fellow civil society participants. I also want to welcome you to the civil society session of the 2012 AGOA Forum. And I want to extend a special welcome to the civil society leaders sponsored by USAID, representing 25 civil society organizations from 25 countries across the continent. As enshrined in the AGOA legislation, the participation of civil society and the private sector is encouraged to ensure that the intent of the bill is honored in spirit and has the breadth and depth of impact intended. And USAID is honored to be able to support this effort.

I would like to note the diversity of civil society representation in the room today, from organizations that promote democracy to those supporting the economic empowerment of women, advocates for the textile and handicraft industries, leaders for economic justice, investment promotion, conflict resolution, and resource centers for trade. And we recognize you represent more than the title on your business card, providing leadership in more than one sphere—by which I mean to say you hold down multiple jobs outside of your work at home—working at or running a business, serving on community boards, teaching and writing, while advocating for change to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are widely and equitably shared. We are honored that you have made the long trek to Washington to attend the 11th AGOA Forum.

AGOA is a unique piece of trade legislation in that it explicitly involves civil society at three critical junctures: through this session and participation at the Ministerial, support for vital progress made on eligibility criteria, and promoting trade and an open and transparent enabling environment for trade and investment.

And USAID has worked with civil society in all three areas to broaden and deepen the impact of AGOA. For AGOA is not just about trade; it's about economic opportunity, it's about the rule of law and political pluralism, it's about combating corruption, reducing poverty, increasing access to health care and education, and protecting human rights. And on top of that, AGOA is trade legislation—the most generous bilateral trade legislation the United States has ever enacted.

And while traditionally USAID is seen as focusing on civil society through our work in the democracy and governance realm, in fact we're seeing increasing links between the invaluable work that you do and our efforts in agriculture, health, education, infrastructure, environment, trade, and investment. Support for smallholder farmers to produce more and better food is not enough to raise incomes without farmers associations to advocate for their rights and provide a forum for collective marketing and bargaining. Rural families producing handicrafts cannot reach higher value markets without consolidating efforts, a role integral to civil society.

Success stories under AGOA highlight the inextricable link between economic development and democratic institutions. Organizations like the Center for Trade Policy and Development of Zambia [Note: Mr. Savior Mwambwa, a USAID-sponsored participant, is the Center's Executive Director] represent a civil society network promoting participation and advocacy for fair, pro-poor trade and development policies and processes, influencing national trade policy formulation and monitoring implementation. The Borderless Alliance in West Africa engages in evidence-

based advocacy and connects private and public sector stakeholders to make positive changes to increase trade. And from Senegal to Togo, Burkina Faso to Ghana, we are seeing positive results in fewer delays and less bribery. USAID support for civil society in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Togo exposed tens of millions of citizens to the harassment travelers' face when moving within and across the region, spurring the transport industry, government officials, exporters and importers, and public at large to action. And the Center for African Women Economic Empowerment [Note: Mrs. Nigest Haile, a USAID-sponsored participant, is the Center's Founder and Executive Director] is an NGO founded by a former Head of the Women's Affairs Department in the Ethiopian Ministry of Trade and Industry to provide assistance to female exporters. This NGO seeks to bring economies of scale to the traditional craft of weaving, linking rural families with the growing demand for hand-woven textile products in domestic and international markets. In bridging the divide between civil society and private sector interests, these organizations have shown that there truly is no divide; that civil society is critical to achieving the broad benefits expected with increased trade and investment.

As we've seen, together we can increase the benefits to Africa and the U.S. under AGOA. USAID is changing its approach, committing to a new model of partnership with those we work with. We are committed to investing in local non-for-profit institutions, host country systems, and local entrepreneurs. We strive to seek out and work with actors like you who have the ideas, imagination and courage to transform your communities and societies.

With that, I would like to welcome you to the United States and to our nation's capital and I wish you great success both here and back at home. I know that we are united in our commitment to strengthen the U.S.-African economic relationship and for Africa to take fuller advantage of AGOA.