

5th Annual AGOA CSO Network Spring Conference
April 10-11, 2019
Communique and Recommendations

April 15, 2019
Washington, DC 20005

The 5th annual AGOA Civil Society Organization Spring Conference took place April 10-11 2019, under the theme “*AGOA: Advancing Mutual Prosperity through Trade and Economic Cooperation.*” Day one of the conference was held at the Embassy of the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire’s conference facility, and day two took place at the Rayburn Office Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, USA.

The conference launched the planning for the annual CSO/AWEP Session of the 18th U.S. -Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum (also known as the AGOA Forum), slated for 3-6 August 2019 in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. The event focused on the current Administration’s signature policies and initiatives, and how they affect trade under AGOA in particular and US-Africa trade and economic cooperation, in general. The spring conference brought together more than 100 delegates from the United States and AGOA eligible countries from throughout Sub-Saharan Africa to address the following topics:

- Nuts and Bolts of U.S. – Africa Policy on AGOA: The Administration’s Signature Programs and Initiatives
- Good Governance and Prosper Africa
- Expansion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)
- Civil Society; AWEP & YALI: A Discussion on the Agenda for the Civil Society Session of the 18th AGOA Forum in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire
- Congressional Exchanges on U.S.-Africa Trade, Investment, Economic Cooperation and Cultural Ties
- Expanding the AGOA Eligibility List and the 2019 AGOA Forum

The event also afforded members the opportunity to make courtesy calls on US Congressman’s offices to advocate for support for AGOA and to tour the Capitol Building.

Delegates also participated in a Congressional Exchange on U.S. –Africa trade, investment, economic cooperation, and cultural ties. The following experts were on hand for the discussion Alexandra Whittaker, Trade Counsel to the Chairman and Democratic Members of the Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives; Angela Ellard, Ways & Means Committee Republican Chief Trade Counsel and Trade Subcommittee Staff Director, U.S. House of Representatives; and Joshua Snead, Trade Counsel to the Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives.

During the panel on *Expanding the AGOA Eligibility List and the 2019 AGOA Forum*, Monseigneur Milenge Mwenelwata, 2nd Vice President, Englise Church of Christ Du Congo



(ECC) gave the opening remarks titled *Using Trade to Foster Reconciliation and Economic Development in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*” And Patrick Tyrell, Research Coordinator, Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, The Heritage Foundation made a presentation on the Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom.

Discussion Highlights:

Mr. Fred Oladeinde, Chairman, AGOA Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network opened the 5th Annual AGOA Spring Conference by welcoming delegates, speakers, and partners. He called on members of the Network to come up with innovative approaches for inclusion in the agenda and discussions during the forthcoming 18th AGOA Forum, particularly on the topic of “how to” use the remaining six years of AGOA benefits to diversify and increase AGOA exports from ALL of the AGOA eligible countries, better implementation of existing programs, i.e., Trade Africa, and Prosper Africa’s initiatives in making AGOA a robust success by 2025. He reminded the gathering that by 2050, based on population estimates of 2.8 billion, African countries will be well positioned to provide the talent and youthful workforce essential to driving global development, and making Africa the center of global commerce and trade, and strategic partners with the United States. Mr. Oladeinde, expressed the Secretariat’s gratitude to the Government and people of the Republic of Côte d’ Ivoire for hosting the 5th annual AGOA Spring Conference and congratulated the Government and people of the Republic of Côte d’ Ivoire for having been selected to host the 18th AGOA Forum from 3-6 August 2019. In Abidjan. He thanked H.E. E Mohammed Haidara, and the Honorable Mrs. Nialé Kaba, Minister of Planning and Development, The Republic of Côte d’ Ivoire for their participation in the Spring Conference, and then presented Ms. Jeannine B. Scott, Member, AGOA CSO Advisory Board who in turn introduced H.E. E. Mohamed Haidara, Ambassador, the Republic of Côte d’ Ivoire to the United States.

Ms. Scott welcomed participants, introduced Ambassador Haidara, and then invited the Ambassador to the podium to give his remarks.

During his remarks, H.E. Mohamed Haidara expressed his country’s support for the AGOA CSO Network and commended the organization for focusing on increasing the volume and quality of African exports, the education of stakeholders in both Africa and United States regarding AGOA trade policy and its benefits to African counties' economies.

The Honorable Minister of Planning and Development of the Republic of Côte d’ Ivoire provided opening remarks. In the course of her remarks, Minister Kaba reiterated her country’s commitment to making the 18th AGOA Forum in Abidjan a success and invited all the participants to attend the event in order to be collectively continue to make the structural transformation and build a strong commercial partnership with the United States. Minister Kaba, also, introduced members of Côte d’ Ivoire’s Technical Organization Committee that is tasked with working with all partners in preparing for the upcoming AGOA Forum.

Panel I: Nuts and Bolts of U.S.-Africa Policy on AGOA: The Administration's Signature Programs and Initiatives

The main points of discussions for this session focused on the practical aspects of the current Administration’s signature policies and programs, i.e., Prosper Africa, the Woman’s Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative, the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (Build Act). The advantage of establishing free trade agreements (FTAs)

between the U.S. and individual African countries was also discussed. Discussion points that are of note, are as follows:

Presidential Senior Advisor, Ivanka Trump is currently in Africa for the purpose of launching the Administration's Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative; the first-ever whole-of-government approach focused on advancing women's full and free participation in the global economy. Through the W-GDP Initiative, the Administration will seize on the significant opportunity that promoting women in the economy represents for boosting global gross domestic product.

Panelists and participants observed that AGOA two-way trade volume continues to decrease. In the past 10 years, AGOA two-way trade volume went down by 3% to as low as .1%. Of the 39 AGOA eligible countries, only 7 countries have developed their AGOA National Utilization Strategies. And of the 7 countries with national utilization strategies, only 4 - Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, and South Africa are effectively utilizing the benefits of AGOA for non-crude oil exports. Not having utilization strategies in place limits a country's prospects for success, and makes it difficult to monitor a country's trade capabilities and performance.

Both panelists and participants expressed the concern that when oil import data is included in AGOA trade statistics it does not give an accurate picture of a country's non-oil performance under AGOA. Therefore, it was recommended that oil export data be excluded from AGOA trade statistics.

Panelists and participants agreed that supporting women and youth entrepreneurship through education should continue to be one of the Administration priorities in all major U.S. trade initiatives with Africa in order to support African talent and innovation.

The discussions for this session ended with panelists underscoring the fact that AGOA's criteria remains the same regarding a country's eligibility requirements. In this sense, panelists and participants welcomed proposed changes and economic reforms by the new political leadership in Congo DRC and believe that the appropriate U.S. agencies will make recommendations to the Trump Administration concerning reconsidering the eligibility of DRC after the country's annual review.

Panel II: Good Governance and Prosper Africa

Panelists and participants focused their discussions on good governance as one of the key factors to attracting U.S. investments in Africa and noted the following:

The United States has policies and programs that are beneficial to Africa's development, such as, Prosper Africa, AGOA, W-GDP, the Build Act, however, these US economic initiatives will not produce the expected or anticipated results without African countries' commitment to good governance.

It was noted by both the panelists and participants that countries, such as, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Côte d'Ivoire have made noticeable progress regarding good governance as shown in The Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom, and in reports by other think tanks.

However, if the continent is to be viewed as one block, the best approach may be for the U.S. to focus on helping countries whose governance records require improvement to help improve Africa's investment climate.

Prosper Africa aims at supporting U.S. policies through American private sector investment across the continent. The initiative will support open markets for American businesses, promote youth employment opportunities, and improve the business climate. For instance, the Proper Africa would make sure that when doing business in Africa, US companies source needed commodities from Africa, where they are available in an effort to increase intra Africa trade and economic cooperation.

Adopting Prosper Africa is a choice that each African country has to make for its respective economic and financial independence.

Panel III: Expansion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Panel III discussed the significant role that micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play in Africa's economic development and the importance of helping these enterprises expand.

Panelists raised the following points:

Tracing the growth of MSMEs in Africa, MSMEs have made considerable strides; they contribute to employment and wealth creation, and poverty alleviation and income generation. However, MSMEs in Africa face a number of impediments to their growth and economic development, namely, access to finance, markets, and information; lack of capacity building programs, poor infrastructure; corruption; political instability; and the absence of enabling environment for doing business.

Panelist also noted that the participation of women owned MSMEs in Africa cannot be overlooked. Africa is the only region in the world where more women than men choose to become entrepreneurs. From social to financial, women-owned businesses face challenges that are unique to them and that limit their potential, including barriers, such as restrictions regarding ownership and usage of land, and access to finance. To alleviate these hurdles, panelists suggested that African governments introduce policies that address land ownership and create conducive environments for the growth of MSMEs. And they also urged the AGOA CSO Network to develop innovative programs that ensure the sustainable development of women- owned MSMEs.

Realizing the importance of Fintech schemes on the growth of MSMEs in Africa, panelists proposed that CSOs disseminate success stories regarding the use of mobile banking in Africa and advocate for the placement of similar approaches by MSMEs in their communities. To assist with the proliferation of Fintech among MSMEs, panelists proposed the creation of frameworks for collaboration with Fintech companies; the provision of technical support by development partners, and the introduction of awareness campaigns by AGOA CSO Network. In conclusion, it was observed that the success of MSMEs requires the collaboration of all stakeholders to achieve the stated objectives.

Panel IV: Civil Society: AWEP & YALI: A Discussion on the Agenda for the Civil Society Session of the 18th AGOA Forum in Abidjan

The session began with panelists and participants introducing themselves, and their organizational affiliations.

Mr. Gerald Amangoua, Deputy CEO, Agency for Promotion of Côte d' Ivoire Exports (APEX-CI) and Chairman of the Technical Organization Committee of the AGOA Forum 2019, Office of the Prime Minister, briefed participants regarding the planning for the 18th AGOA Forum. The AGOA Forum will take place August 3-6, 2019 in Abidjan, Côte d' Ivoire under the theme *"AGOA and the Future: Developing a New Trade Paradigm to Guide U.S.-Africa Trade and Investment."*

The Technical Organization Committee is led by Mr. Guy M'Bengue, CEO, Agency for Promotion of Côte d' Ivoire Exports (APEX-CI), and President of the Technical Organization Committee of the AGOA Forum 2019. Mr. Amangoua brought greetings from Mr. M'Bengue, and conveyed that he was looking forward to working with the Secretariat in organizing a highly successful Forum including the strong participation of Civil Society, AWEP, YALI and other stakeholders.

Furthermore, the Civil Society Organization (CSO)/AWEP/YALI Session of the 18th AGOA Forum will be coordinated by the AGOA CSO Network Secretariat in partnership with APEX-CI and stakeholders from across Côte d' Ivoire. The CSO/AWEP/YALI Session will take place August 3-4, 2019, and the Ministerial will be held from 5-6 August 2019.

Fred Oladeinde, Chairman of the AGOA CSO Network Secretariat underscored the fact that the CSO Session will be organized in full collaboration with AWEP, YALI and other stakeholders with the primary objective of delivering a robust and inclusive event in Abidjan.

Following the introductory remarks by panelist and participants, rapporteurs from the AGOA CSO Network Secretariat presented the highlights and recommendations from the day's panels for discussion and ratification by participants.

The panel then adopted the recommendations below for presentation to members for discussion and agreement in preparation for the CSO/AWEP/YALI Session of the 18th AGOA Forum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The AGOA Civil Society Organization (CSO) Network recognizes the contribution of the AGOA program as a tool for economic growth and job creation. As the program is set to expire in 6 years, the AGOA CSO encourages AGOA eligible countries to envision innovative ways to capitalize on the remaining time.
2. The new US Administration's policy towards Africa under "Prosper Africa," is one way to potentially strengthen economic gains achieved under AGOA and also help lead Africa to financial independence.
3. The AGOA CSO Network will continue to advocate for and implement programs that meet eligibility requirements set forth under AGOA, and are conducive to fostering a competitive business environment. Specifically, the CSO Network will work with Sub Saharan countries in strengthening good governance, peace and security, rule of law,

human rights, and the rest. US investors evaluate such factors when deciding to invest in Africa and elsewhere.

4. The AGOA CSO Network welcomes members from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the 5th Annual AGOA Spring Conference, commend the people of DRC on the recent peaceful elections and transfer of power to a democratically elected government, and stand committed to work with the Government and people of DRC for the reinstatement of AGOA benefits.
5. The AGOA CSO Network members at the 5th Annual AGOA Spring Conference, after a discussion regarding Prosper Africa with presenters during the question and answer segment, conclude that Prosper Africa is in the best and mutual interests of the US and African countries. Members agree that effective coordination of the program can create opportunities that expand:
 - US exports to Africa
 - African exports to the US
 - US investments in Africa
 - African investments in the US
6. The AGOA CSO Network underscores the need for political support and investment in new digital technology to support MSMEs through e-commerce platforms, such as, the Africandomall.com and others to increase access to markets and opportunities for integration into the global supply-chain.
7. The AGOA CSO Network recommends that agencies responsible for MSMEs in the US and AGOA eligible countries work together to provide additional training and technical assistance to MSMEs in the areas of:
 - Mobile banking
 - Data collection and sharing
 - E-commerce
 - Export readiness
 - Financing
 - Marketing
8. The AGOA CSO Network commends the African Union for its support of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and reaffirms that support. Network members urge the US Government, the private sector and civil society to support AfCFTA. Members also implore all African Union Member States to ratify the agreement so that it becomes law.
9. The AGOA CSO Network recognizes the role that US Trade and Investment Hubs play in AGOA implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly, regarding trade facilitation, value addition, and market access.



10. AGOA CSO Network members on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean must work closely to:
 - Share resources and information flow
 - Distribute information to end-users
 - Define key performance indicators more effectively in order to determine what AGOA eligible countries are really achieving, including, excluding crude oil exports from AGOA trade data
 - Coordinate practical “match making” opportunities and
 - Generate and disseminate more success stories
11. The AGOA CSO Network must expand its outreach to women entrepreneurship groups, such as, AWEF, AFP, and others, and mobilize women in different countries in Africa and the United States to make the 18th AGOA Forum in Abidjan a resounding success.
12. The AGOA CSO Network needs to deepen its efforts with Member States regarding developing, publishing and implementing AGOA Country Utilization Strategy Plans for AGOA eligible countries.
13. The AGOA CSO Network should expand its outreach to the Diaspora across the globe in support of the African Union Sixth Region Initiative.
14. The AGOA CSO Network Secretariat should publish a list of accomplishments from the past 5 years.
15. The AGOA CSO Network Secretariat thanks and congratulates the Government and people of Côte d’Ivoire for hosting the 5th annual AGOA Forum. And commends the Honorable Nailé Kaba, Minister of Planning and Development for her Opening Remarks during the spring conference; and Ambassador Mahmoud Haidara, his staff and the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, and APEX-CI for their collaboration and support during the Secretariat’s advance mission to Côte d’Ivoire in March of this year to plan for the CSO/AWEF Session of 2019 AGOA Forum.