Promoting African Business Women: The African Women's Entrepreneurship Program

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"Women are doers and achievers and thinkers and innovators, leaders, and problem-solvers. And we need each and every one of you to lend your entrepreneurial skill and energy to meeting the global challenges of this new century."

– Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton

The African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP) is taking place in Washington, D.C., July 26 - August 3, and Kansas City, Missouri, August 4 - 6, in conjunction with the 2010 United States/sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum (AGOA Forum). The AWEP was created in coordination with the Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program.

African Growth and Opportunity Act

The African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) was enacted in May 2000 to expand U.S./sub-Saharan African trade and investment, stimulate economic growth, promote a high-level dialogue on trade and investment-related issues, encourage economic integration, and facilitate sub-Saharan Africa's integration into the global economy. The AGOA Forum brings together senior U.S. administration officials, African government ministers, as well as U.S. and African business and civil society stakeholders from AGOA eligible countries. The AGOA Ministerial Forum will take place from August 2-3 in Washington DC, and August 4-6 in Kansas City, Missouri.

African Women's Entrepreneurship Program

The women in the AWEP are accomplished entrepreneurs, and the owners and leaders of small and medium–sized businesses in Africa. Many of their companies engage in exporting under the terms of AGOA, while others are working to increase their export capacity and establish business relationships with U.S. partners. All are leaders in their communities and many are members or leaders of women's business organizations in their countries.

Opportunities for the Participants

AWEP will include meetings and networking opportunities with U.S. policy makers, companies and industry associations, U.S. and African civil society, non-profit organizations advocating for women's economic opportunities, multi-lateral development organizations, and business alliances. The women will have the opportunity to interact with ministers of trade, finance, and agriculture when participating in an AGOA Forum plenary session in Washington entitled "Integrating Africa's Women into the Global Economy." Events and lunches will be sponsored by the Corporate Council on Africa, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, the non-profit organization, ONE, and others.

Empowering Women Entrepreneurs

AWEP aims to empower African women entrepreneurs to become part of their national and global business network by:

- Increasing opportunities for women to use the AGOA program.
- Expanding opportunities for exports and U.S. investment in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Recognizing and expanding the roles women play as advocates for changes in laws, regulations, customs, and incentives that support women in businesses in their countries.
- Instituting a follow-up program so that participants, in their role as community leaders, can pass on what they learn.

Activities are expected to continue in Africa after the U.S.-based program concludes. The follow-up activities, some sponsored by the private sector such as ExxonMobil, will include opportunities such as training and mentoring programs for the businesswomen in their communities, as well as advocacy efforts to promote changes to discriminatory systems against women in business and to put in place greater systems of opportunities and support for Africa's businesswomen.