



Attendees pose at the 2017 AGOA Forum in Lome, Togo, February 8, 2017. Department of State

FOCUS

AGOA: Helping Women Entrepreneurs Succeed

Even now in the 21st Century, many women still lack access to capital, credit, markets, and training to enter the economic lives of countries across the globe. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, women traders outnumber male traders where cross-border trade is a source of income for 43 percent of the African population. However, African women's limited representation among trade regulators and customs officials, as well as other gender-based barriers, hinder their ability to engage in trade on an equal footing with their male counterparts.

In May of 2000, the United States enacted the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a trade preference program available to the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, to spur trade and investment opportunities in Africa, while advancing development goals and increasing U.S.-Africa economic ties. To explicitly support greater economic enfranchisement for women, the 2015 AGOA reauthorization included a bipartisan amendment that strengthens the trade capacity of smallholder women farmers and entrepreneurs. Supporting economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa is both a domestic and foreign policy priority for the United States, and studies show that investing in women is one of the greatest ways to achieve positive economic, financial, and social impact.

In the 16th annual AGOA Forum on August 8-10, 2017, cohosted by the U.S. Government and the Government

of Togo, women entrepreneurs were featured in a panel discussion called "The Power of Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth through Textiles and Agribusiness." The discussion, which included panelists from one of America's healthiest grocery stores and women business leaders from Togo and Benin, highlighted the impact and success women entrepreneurs have had under AGOA, while also addressing the continued need to reduce and eliminate barriers. The panel also centered around an American-Togolese company that creates women cooperatives to alleviate poverty and empower communities in West Africa through the fair trade of shea butter and other indigenous resources from Togo. These entrepreneurs have used their success to not only enable other entrepreneurial women to gain income to support their families, but also to create opportunities within their communities.

From the United States perspective, the case for advancing women's full participation in the global economy is clear. Advancing women in the labor force is good for companies' bottom lines, good for countries' economic growth, and good for global security, prosperity, and stability. AGOA provides the United States a tool to support these goals. Engaging women to foster economic growth will create mutual opportunities and benefits for the United States and sub-Saharan Africa for years to come.