

Moderator address “Creating a Vibrant Entrepreneurial Innovative Ecosystem”

By Eugene Cornelius, Deputy Associate Administrator for International Trade

INTRODUCTION:

Thank you, Fred, Annette, the AGOA Civil Society Network, Distinguished Guests, and Nigeria's Ambassador to the U.S., H.E. Sylvanus Adiewere Nsofor (*and insert any other AMBASSADORIAL VIPS in audience/Organizers to assist*).

I am deeply honored to join you today on behalf of the U.S. Small Business Administration and our Administrator Linda McMahon. As stated, my name is Eugene Cornelius, and I serve as the Deputy Associate Administrator for International Trade. We at SBA assist small businesses in a number of areas including access to capital, counseling, contracting, disaster relief, and of course selling internationally.

OIT:

SBA’s Office of International Trade is charged by statute to aid and assist small businesses in enhancing their ability to export, as well as, to help ensure that the interests of small business are adequately represented in bilateral and multilateral negotiations. SBA’s Office of International Trade executes our mission by **DE-RISKING U.S. SMALL BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL GROWTH**. We do this by: 1) Connecting small businesses with international buyers; 2) Ensuring access to international finance; and 3) Facilitating international customs and release.

Strong, thriving, entrepreneurial networks between U.S. and African businesses is win-win for the global community. The 54 countries of Africa represent important growth markets for U.S. small businesses. AGOA remains an important platform for businesses to use to do trade.

In this afternoon session, we will explore “Civil Society’s Contribution to the Expansion of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises”. By Civil Society, we mean an *entire ecosystem* that affirms the start up, growth and expansion of small businesses that transform and add value.

We all know small businesses *power* our economies. Small business growth and entrepreneurial success is *always* a key ingredient for effective public policy.

OPENING THOUGHTS

Before I introduce our panel so that we may all dialog with you on what is an ideal ecosystem, I want to share a few insights from my own experience.

First, I wish to highlight the importance of *institutionalizing* a culture of governance with small businesses in mind. And I mean we must prioritize small business policy at **ALL** levels of government and we need **ADVOCATES**.

Second, a successful ecosystem provides **meaningful access** to credit, training, and counseling to **empower diverse voices**. *All complete ecosystems will support and include women, youth, and under-privileged groups.* At SBA, this means counseling with loans, micro-lending, and even Women's Business Centers.

And third, we must embrace how disruptive technologies can build a digital economy that uplifts and levels the playing field for small businesses.

Transparency and de-regulation are central to ensuring that complex and unnecessary regulations do not stand in the way of progress. In addition, wider participation and deliberations will lead to finding new, intelligent, and more flexible regulatory alternatives.

The best SME ecosystems are broad, inclusive and welcome new ideas. On this note, I'd like to introduce our panelists who have been selected for their leadership and contributions on this very topic.

(After each introduction, the panelist has 5-7 minutes to provide feedback and thoughts on what is important in creating a successful ecosystem for small and micro businesses)

CONCLUSION:

Insert closing thoughts wrapping up conclusions of panelists/panel.

To conclude, I would like to thank the organizers of the AGOA CSO Network Spring Conference, Fred and Annette Oladeinde and this distinguished panel of Experts. Your thoughts, ideas, and comments help drive the SME development towards a stronger ecosystem in Africa nations.

Regardless of which country you represent here today, I hope that our discussions today will lead us all to share in a common purpose – creating SME ecosystem that will be global in perspective, empower women entrepreneurs, and drive innovation and the digital economy.

Let us continue advancing this purpose together as it strengthens each economy in the global community.

Thank you!