

Rev. Eugene Cho Remarks

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**9th Annual African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Civil Society Organization
Spring Conference, *Timely Re-Authorization and Enhancement of AGOA Beyond 2025***

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Thank you, Fred. It is an honor to be here again at the AGOA Civil Society Forum and with all of you.

As you know, AGOA is the most important legislation that defines trade relationships between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa. Bread was an early supporter of AGOA, advocating beginning in 1998 for its establishment which finally came through in 2000. And we advocated again for its reauthorization that happened most recently in 2015.

One of the reasons Bread supports AGOA is because we advocate for policies that promote long term policy directions that address the root causes of hunger and poverty – which AGOA does.

AGOA is a great example of win/win legislation. It is mutually beneficial. By fostering economic enterprise and relationships, AGOA enables small businesses to stimulate local economies. And it includes a provision specific to women smallholder farmers, who are the main producers of food in Africa; and when you invest in women, the world thrives.

Bread for the World hopes that the next reauthorization of AGOA will happen as soon as possible. We are pleased that Senators Chris Coons and James Risch introduced the AGOA Renewal and Improvement Act of 2024 last week. The bill would reauthorize AGOA for 16 years, until 2041—reflecting the importance of longer-term certainty for businesses.

As AGOA moves forward, Bread is interested to see more on climate-smart agriculture. Our world's climate is changing, so farming practices that once worked in one place may no longer be the best choices. Finding what practices will work to adapt to our changing climate is key to our future. Bread encourages conservation, climate adaptation, and a just energy transition as articulated in the US Strategy Toward Sub Saharan Africa in AGOA. USAID has supported AGOA by investing in infrastructure, including roads, ports, and electricity that enable agricultural productivity and food security, as well as by directly assisting exporters in priority sectors. And climate mainstreaming is a core part of USAID's strategy in its work to address food insecurity and economic empowerment across the globe.

Bread for the World also hopes that AGOA prioritizes investment in fast-growing sectors, such as digital and financial services, and the minerals needed to make electric vehicles. Africa is the major consumption hub of the future. The general population is young and increasing, and the African middle class is growing – and demand for industrial goods is 1.5 times higher than the global average.

Bread hopes we can also address low utilization of AGOA. The 2015 reauthorization included a recommendation for countries to develop utilization strategies. All 18 of the 39 beneficiaries who developed country strategies have higher utilization rates than nations who did not. In particular, Mali, Mozambique, Togo, and Zambia, who had very low utilization rates prior to 2015 but developed country strategies, have experienced an increase in exports of over 90 percent. The non-oil exports from Ghana, who published a utilization strategy in 2016, rose by 91 percent from 2017 to 2020.

The last time I was here with the AGOA Civil Society Network, I talked about how Bread for the World centers our work along seven organizational values that set the foundation for how we engage in public policy. Then, I focused on impact, because AGOA makes a powerful impact in addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty.

Today, I want to call out another one of Bread's values: human flourishing. We believe that every human being, created in the image of God, has inherent dignity that affords an opportunity to be in right relationship with God, self, neighbor, and the environment; and to freely access enough nutritious food for good health. That is what AGOA is about – the opportunity to flourish. AGOA's capacity to offer African businesses the opportunity to expand and generate more income for their families and communities is important. Inclusive economic growth, particularly in the agriculture sector, is the key to lasting solutions to hunger and malnutrition and essential to realizing Bread's value of human flourishing.

It is essential that U.S. trade policies and agreements contribute to the efforts to reduce hunger and poverty.

Thank you for having me here today.