

U.S.-Africa Business Conference Summary

Overview

The State Department, in collaboration with several co-sponsors and other US government agencies, hosted the U.S.-Africa Business Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, June 21-22, at the Westin Cincinnati Hotel. The conference followed the annual African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) Forum in Washington, DC, held June 14-15. The AGOA Forum is the U.S. Government's premier event with sub-Saharan African countries that provides an opportunity to advance U.S. trade and economic policy goals. The conference attracted approximately 400 AGOA Forum participants, including African ministers of trade, infrastructure, and energy, as well as relevant African business leaders, diplomats, policy advisors, and entrepreneurs. Representatives from the U.S. private sector, government, and the African Women Entrepreneurial Program also attended.

The conference showcased U.S. business expertise to potential African clients, and highlighted trade and investment opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa to U.S. exporters and investors. Cincinnati was selected as the conference location for its potential to increase commercial partnerships with Africa at local, state, and regional levels, as well as the redevelopment and revitalization of its downtown area. Additionally, Cincinnati has become a hotspot for the advancement of water and aviation technologies that places like sub-Saharan Africa are in need of, as companies like General Electric Co. (GE) and Proctor and Gamble, and government agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are working towards a cleaner, more sustainable future.

Program Agenda

The U.S.-Africa Business Conference included following events and opportunities:

- Structured networking opportunities for African government officials and business leaders with U.S. state and local government officials, and business leaders
- Informational sessions on U.S. government opportunities and services from various federal agencies
- Site visits to companies, organizations, and government facilities.

Echoing the theme of the AGOA Forum, the two-day event focused broadly on infrastructure development, including energy, transportation, and water sanitation. Discussions on the different funding mechanisms available for doing business in Africa were also held. Ambassador Johnnie Carson, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs for the U.S. Department of State, was present to give one of the opening remarks on the importance of doing business in Africa. According to a brookings.edu research report, when AGOA was being developed by small congressional groups in 1995, the per capita growth rate in sub-Saharan Africa was at -1.1 percent. In 2001, the first year AGOA was in effect, that number reached 2.9 percent, and has since averaged just below 5 percent with a projection of 5.5 percent in 2012. Additionally, capital flow to the region reached \$48.2 billion in 2011, just short of the pre-global recession peak of nearly \$50 billion in 2007. The big news is that more than 75 percent of that money comes from direct, foreign investment.

Participating agencies included:

- The U.S. Departments of State, Transportation, Energy, and Agriculture
- The U.S. Agency for International Development (AID)
- The Millennium Challenge Corporation

- The Export-Import Bank of the United States
- The U.S. Trade and Development Agency
- The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
- The U.S. Commercial Service Bureau of the Department of Commerce (USCS Bureau)
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The U.S. EPA's Involvement

In 2011, the EPA Cincinnati water cluster team held a meeting with the USCS Bureau about possible collaborations in promoting the regional water cluster activity of the EPA. The meeting, coordinated by Julius Enriquez, U.S. EPA, raised the USCS Bureau's awareness of the tremendous water research that EPA is conducting in Cincinnati. Julius has been the main EPA contact for the USCS Bureau in Cincinnati, which has since invited him to sit in on their Environmental Team's monthly conference calls. Through these connections, the planning team from the U.S. State Department asked Julius to represent EPA at the U.S.-Africa Business Conference in Cincinnati.

The State Department asked EPA to coordinate a panel to develop an awareness and appreciation of the potential roles that the public and private sectors can play in meeting the water challenges of sub-Saharan Africa through technological advancement. So, in collaboration with Confluence, the cluster organization formed a year and a half ago to foster water technology innovation and business development in the Ohio River Valley region, the EPA facilitated a panel session: WATER & SANITATION II: "Leveraging Public-Private Partnerships to Support Innovations in Water Technology," which ran on June 22, 2011. The panel was moderated by Sally Gutierrez of the U.S. EPA, and featured Nick Ashbolt of the U.S. EPA, Alan Vicory of the Confluence Water Technology Innovation Cluster, Mark Hogg of EDGEOutreach, and Keith Zook from the P&G Children's Safe Drinking Water Program as speakers. The session was attended by about 50 people, and attendees asked many questions about the commercialization of technologies for use in Africa, like P&G's water purifier or EDGEOutreach's Chlorine Generator System, and possibilities for collaborative business ventures. The session was lively and ended before all had a chance to voice their comments and offers of cooperation. Also, a recent debriefing from the State Department mentioned the excellence of this panel, citing EPA participation as a subject matter expert in water technology as a credibility boost. Some of the participants in the briefing suggested that this model of using local experts in panels be replicated at other upcoming conferences.

The State Department also asked the EPA to host a June 22 tour of its Testing and Evaluation facility, where much of its pilot scale water technology research takes place. Some of the expected attendees for the tour were Ambassadors from Nigeria, Mozambique and the African ministers from the different government agencies, such as trade, science, and commerce. There were approximately 10-15 people from sub-Saharan Africa, and 5-10 staff members from the State Department that participated in the tour. One of the attendees from the State Department was Amy Holman, the Director of the Office of Economic Policy Staff of the Bureau of African Affairs, who commended the tour during the State Department debriefing. On the tour, three EPA researchers' and EDGEOutreach's technologies were showcased. The EPA presented its research on Distribution System Simulators, "Drum Sand Filters" for Drinking Water Treatment in Small Communities, and Small Systems Treatments, while EDGEOutreach showed their Chlorine Generator System for small flows.

In addition to the tour and panel, EPA had a table where information on some of the EPA International Projects in Africa, such as water distribution systems, cookstoves research, and water safety plans, was displayed. The items from the table were very popular and needed to be replenished more frequently than expected.

Outcomes and Closing

In addition to the potential collaborative relationships fostered during the conference between the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa, there may be similar partnerships forming within the U.S. Other U.S. government agencies, like USAID, expressed interest in learning more about the EPA's water research. These types of relationships are crucial to awareness and eventual usage of EPA research and technology.

The closing ceremony for the conference was held at Cincinnati's National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. Holding the ceremony here was symbolic and powerful, as the museum invokes the dark history between the U.S. and Africa, while the conference represents the forging of a bright future. The next AGOA Forum and Conference will be held in Ethiopia in 2013.

For more information, please contact:
Julius M. Enriquez, (enriquez.julius@epa.gov)
USEPA, Office of Research and Development
513 569 7285