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**2010 AGOA FORUM:  
AGOA AT 10: NEW STRATEGIES FOR A CHANGING WORLD**

**PLENARY SESSION 8:  
INTEGRATING AFRICA'S WOMEN INTO THE GLOBAL  
ECONOMY**

**REMARKS DELIVERED BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, MRS.  
TSWELOPELE MOREMI, AT THE 2010 AGOA FORUM**

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Co-chair Person Ambassador Melanne Verveer  
Mrs. Florie Liser, Assistant United States Trade Representative for Africa  
Honourable Ministers  
Representatives of the Business Community  
Ladies and Gentleman

I would like express my deep appreciation to the USTR for the opportunity and honour to co-chair this very important session with the esteemed Ambassador Verveer.

At the outset, let me express my support for this important initiative to strengthening efforts to promote Women entrepreneurship. This discussion comes at a critical time when issues relating to women's full access to, and control over productive resources (such as land, livestock, markets, credit, modern technology and employment) are receiving increasing attention of the governments in Africa. This is evident by the several legislations being brought before the national parliaments of most African countries, including the countries of the Southern African Customs Union. For your information, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) consist of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland and South Africa and is the oldest customs union in the world having been established in 1910. SACU has recently launched the centenary celebrations on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2010 in Windhoek, Namibia. An important development during the centenary celebrations was the launch by the Heads of State and Government of the SACU countries of a new vision and mission of SACU. The trust of the new vision and mission is to transform SACU into deeper integration beyond the Customs Union to an Economic and Monetary Union.

Co-chair person I am sure that you agree with me that entrepreneurship offers tremendous opportunities for women across the world by opening doors to greater self-sufficiency, self-esteem, education, and growth - not only for the women themselves, but also for their families, their communities and their countries. In Africa, and Southern Africa in particular, the importance of women entrepreneurship in enhancing socio-economic development has long been recognised.

In most African countries, and particularly in the countries of the Southern African Customs Union, the demographic structure is such that at least half of the population in these countries are female. This often results in a large number of female-headed households which have been historically further exacerbated by migrant labour practises and other factors. Consequently, in order to support their families, more and more women have historically entered the informal sector and started their own enterprises - mostly microenterprises. This has created an entrepreneurial spirit amongst African women that has gained momentum and established itself as an important feature of the African landscape.

Given this reality African governments have come to the realisation that economic development can only be achieved through the active involvement of women in economic activities. From the 1990's the African governments have participated in the UN and other programs to promote gender equality and thereby creating an environment which allows women equal opportunities to participate in the

mainstream economic activities. As a result, governments have embarked on administrative, economic policies and legislative reforms to enhance the role of women in society.

The challenges that most African women entrepreneurs face include:

- Inadequate business management;
- Inadequate education and training;
- Lack of access to credit as a result in the shortage of collateral;
- Competition from foreign products that arise as a result of trade liberalization or from government support to their exporters;
- Technological limitations; and
- Lack of competitiveness in terms of quality, costs and on-time delivery.

Given these challenges and the history of African women entrepreneurship as outlined above, I would like to suggest that the issue is not so much about integrating women into the global economy but rather doubling efforts to create a conducive environment at both national and regional levels to enable women entrepreneurs to succeed and take full advantage of the national and regional markets. If these conditions are met at national and regional level, it will make it easier to assist the integration of African business women into the global economy. However, this further necessitates increased government involvement through appropriate policy interventions, such as changes to trade, investment and tax policies to take women entrepreneurs into account.

Co-chair person, to achieve the integration of women entrepreneurs into the global economy, we still require the active support of all stakeholders including our international cooperating partners. Some of the initiatives that could be considered include but are not limited to the following:

- Financial assistance;
- Technology provision;
- Training and exposure in international trade and negotiations;
- Creation of international linkages through trade fairs and trade missions;
- Assisting development of business plans;
- Providing information on industry trends and market intelligence;
- Business skill development and mentoring in operations, management, and marketing, and
- The development of partnerships between stakeholders (government, private sector, trading partners and civil society).

Co-chairperson it is therefore heartening to bear witness to the efforts by the US government to support African women entrepreneurs represented here today. Even more encouraging is the fact that as confirmed by Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton the meeting of the women entrepreneurs will not be a once of event but will be followed up by various initiatives to ensure the sustainability of women entrepreneurship in Africa. It is my hope that these initiatives can be sustained if we are to reach our long term objective of integrating women into the global economy.

In pursuit of the overall objective of enhancing and promoting the status of women in economic development, the SACU Member States have initiated a number of programmes to assist women entrepreneurs. These range from economic reforms, the implementation of policies and legislation in support of women, the creation of women business forums for the promotion and advancement of women entrepreneurs. The 2002 SACU agreement provide a valuable platform for women entrepreneurs in the SACU region to integrate into the regional economy and to gain experience in cross border trade prior to confronting the challenges of the global market. This provides women entrepreneurs in SACU access to a market that consist of 55 million people. Efforts are continuing to facilitate intra-regional trade by reducing the transaction costs associated with cross border. In this regard, a comprehensive customs reform program has been initiated covering customs policy, legislative reform and ease of goods traffic by establishing One Stop Border Post and a single administrative document.

In addition, SACU Member States have also made significant progress in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) especially the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women through education and training. I believe that this will further unleash the enormous potential that exists in SACU, for women entrepreneurs to play a significant role in economic development.

Therefore co-chairperson, against all odds African women entrepreneurs have continued to apply their creativity and innovation to establish enterprises to support and uphold their families. Furthermore, African women entrepreneurs have continued to pursue economic empowerment and meaningful participation in economic development.

Given these developments, it is my hope that this session will propose meaningful solutions to the challenges that we confront in ensuring that African women entrepreneurs are supported in a sustainable manner to take full advantage of the national and regional markets. In this way African women entrepreneurs can also begin to play a role in enhancing intra-African trade.

Finally, on a more personal note, in 2002 while I was serving as a permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in my own country Botswana, I had the distinct honour and privilege to accompany the then Ministry of Trade and Industry of Namibia, to Washington with the objective to lobby for Botswana and Namibia to be granted LDC status for purposes of benefitting from third country fabric provisions under AGOA. We spent a week of intense lobbying in Capitol Hill supported off course by our Washington based Ambassadors and other stakeholders. The negotiations were successfully concluded with the two countries granted its request. For me the lesson from this experience was that if we work together in the spirit of win-win partnership between the US and African countries we can overcome many the challenges that we are currently facing. It is my hope that as we move forward we will always strive to achieve the best possible outcome to benefit of all involved, most importantly African women entrepreneurs and their American counterparts.

I thank you