



**Remarks by
USAID Africa Bureau Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator Michael Curtis
“The Africa Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index: A Comparative Analysis of
Government/Civil Society Relations”**

September 20, 2012, Woodrow Wilson International Center

Thank you all for joining us today for the launch of USAID’s latest Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa and what will surely be an interesting discussion of the relationship between civil society and government across Africa.

On behalf of USAID, I would like to thank the Woodrow Wilson Center’s Africa Program for hosting this event and gathering this panel of experts on civil society in Africa.

I also would like to thank our implementing partner, Management Systems International (MSI), for organizing the event with the Wilson Center. MSI, along with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, has produced the Index for Africa over the past three years.

MSI has also produced editions of the Sustainability Index for the Europe & Eurasia and Middle East & North Africa regions, as well as for Afghanistan and Pakistan—each of which you can find online at www.usaid.gov.

And, finally, thanks to the Aga Khan Foundation, whose financial support has allowed us to maintain country coverage in the Index, which is now at 23 countries

in Africa. In 2011, four countries— Botswana, the Gambia, Malawi and Zambia— were added, and we hope to add more in future years.

Local civil society organizations play a critical role in their countries' development and accountable governance.

However, despite their importance, pernicious restrictions continue to be imposed on them, forcing African civil society organizations into more and more circumscribed political and operating space.

And when African civil society organizations attempt to fill service delivery gaps or humanitarian needs left by weak governments, they often must do so with seriously challenged management and financial capacities.

As USAID is called to help African civil society overcome these obstacles, the Sustainability Index helps us assess, in a reliable way over time, the viability of civil society organizations writ large and fine-tune our programming to more effectively support them.

USAID works in numerous African countries to build the capacity of civil society organizations and to support the enabling environment and legal frameworks that can empower them to amplify citizen voices, conduct dialogue on important policy issues, demand accountability and effectiveness of government, and represent the disadvantaged and marginalized.

From health to humanitarian assistance, we also strengthen the ability of civil society organizations to better operate and govern themselves internally so that they can fulfill their missions, deliver services, and innovate and grow.

President Obama's *U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*, released in June, reinforces the objectives of the Sustainability Index to support African-led development and amplify voices calling for respect for human rights, the rule of law, accountability, and civil society and independent media.

This policy specifically commits the U.S. to hold African governments accountable for their obligations to uphold democratic principles and universal human rights and to bolster positive governance models.

In addition, Secretary Clinton's launch of the *Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society* in 2011 has served to underscore the USG's ongoing commitment to listening to and promoting civil society around the world.

As USAID moves ahead with important Presidential Initiatives to feed the hungry, improve health, and tackle climate change in Africa, the Sustainability Index helps us to identify what roles civil society organizations may play.

This edition of the Sustainability Index offers the third year of data for Africa. It is still relatively new, so we look forward to your feedback today and to future opportunities to discuss and work with civil society. We hope that the Index becomes a useful tool for engaging governments and stakeholders in the important business of empowering and supporting civil society.