

**Public Affairs Section**

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**Press Release**

**U.S. Embassy Chargé d’Affaires Michael J. Murphy Launches  
Three Conservation Projects in Visit to Maun**

United States Chargé d’Affaires Michael Murphy will visit Maun on March 7 – 8 for a series of official events, focusing on conservation-related projects and other U.S.-supported activities in the area. Chargé Murphy will present keynote remarks at a ceremony to celebrate the launch of three rural development and conservation grants in the Ngamiland Region. The event will take place at the **Maun Lodge** on March 8 at 9:30 am. The press is invited to attend.

The three grants, funded by USAID under the Southern Africa Regional Environmental Program (SAREP), will improve food security, minimize human-wildlife conflict, and generate income in rural communities. Grantees will include the Pabalelo Trust, EcoStars, and the Trust for Okavango Cultural and Development Initiatives (TOCaDI) - all local organizations whose mandates include protecting natural resources and promoting conservation-oriented development.

The Pabalelo Trust, with U.S. grant support of BWP140,170, will promote conservation agriculture in the Okavango panhandle by conducting workshops on conservation agriculture and sustainable farming. Pabalelo Trust will promote practices that bolster food security, minimize harm to the environment, reduce land clearing, and address ecological challenges such as vulnerable soil conditions and unsustainable tilling and planting.

EcoStars, with U.S. grant support of BWP212,304, will also implement conservation agriculture activities, but will focus more broadly on minimizing human-elephant conflict, a major problem to communities in the eastern portion of the Panhandle region of the Okavango Delta through wildlife sensitive land allocation, small-scale solar fencing, and the use of chili peppers. Communities will receive training in the cultivation and harvesting of chili peppers, a plant known to be a major irritant to elephants when crushed, mixed with elephant dung, and burnt. The chili powder deters elephants from raiding communities' crops, enhancing food security and personal safety in vulnerable communities.

Combining sustainable natural resources management and traditional artistry, the Trust for Okavango Cultural and Development Initiatives, with U.S. grant support of BWP124,983, will refurbish a craft center for local craft makers to create and market their products. The center will serve as a venue for tourists to purchase Okavango crafts, as well as a training ground for artists to learn sustainable techniques in harvesting native plants for craft production.

All three grant activities support the United States' objectives to assist in improving rural livelihoods and promoting sustainable natural resources management. According to Steven Johnson, Chief of Party of the SAREP program, "Our grants program is designed to support projects that improve and diversify livelihoods beyond traditional agriculture. By promoting broader income opportunities, including tourism and small enterprise development, we not only contribute to improving peoples' nutrition and health, we also build new skills that contribute to follow-on enterprises."

U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Michael Murphy said, "Today's Botswana should have no doubt that the nation's wildlife resources are just as important to the country's future as diamonds pulled from the ground. Botswana's rich biodiversity and its abundant wildlife have been central to the country's prosperity. The steps we are jointly taking today will mitigate human-wildlife conflict and ensure that Botswana's communities have a greater say in managing their natural resources. We know that when communities have a greater stake in and benefit from wildlife resources, the wildlife is protected and the communities themselves prosper. The benefits - in supporting the growth of the nation's tourism industry, preserving this country's unique natural heritage, and protecting the country from the insidious influences of wildlife traffickers - are immense. I am proud that America continues to stand side-by-side with Botswana in working to preserve its natural resources."

While in Maun, in addition to the launching the conservation projects, Chargé Murphy will also call on the District Commissioner and visit U.S. supported organizations, including Women Against Rape, Bana Ba Letsatsi, Thuso Rehabilitation Center, Botswana Christian AIDS Intervention Program, and the Condom Distribution Project at the Maun Taxi/Bus Rank.

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