Remarks by Joan LaRosa, Director USAID
Tshipidi Mentoring Program Official Launch
University of Botswana Library Auditorium, September 26, 2013 (1730-1830)

As prepared for delivery

Acknowledgements

• Director of Youth, Mrs Tapologo Ndzinge
• Director Of Internship Program, Dr Bathsheba Mbongwe
• Deputy Director, Gender Affairs Department, Mrs Thapelo Phuthego
• Ministry of Education and Skills Development Representative, Mr Zulu
• Deputy Dean of Business School, University of Botswana, Prof Othata
• All development partners represented here
• Mentors
• Mentees
• Ladies and Gentlemen

Remarks

• I feel honored and very happy to be here with you this evening as we officially launch the Tshipidi Workplace Mentoring Program, a program that aims to develop the potential of youth through mentoring.

• This program addresses one of the three priority areas of the U.S Mission to Botswana---YOUTH.

• We have all heard statistics several times reminding us that in Botswana, youth make over 40% of the population---that is a lot of youth!

• We do know that youth in Botswana face many challenges. While we have always known some of these challenges, for us in the U.S Mission to Botswana, these became even more real in 2011 when the Mission conducted focus group discussions with youth from all corners of the country to better understand the challenges they face.

• The issues that came up at the top were poverty and unemployment, alcohol abuse, crime, gender based violence, teenage pregnancy and HIV. Nothing new came up.
• It is in this light that currently my Government has intensified its efforts to assist the Government and people of Botswana to address the challenges facing youth. One way we are doing so, is through support of the Tshipidi Mentoring Program we are launching today.

• Mentoring is one of the proven ways of empowering youth and building their capacity to become independent, responsible and self-sufficient adults and leaders. I am confident that in the near future this program will produce very positive results that will benefit this country for many years to come.

• I have been informed that what we are launching today is a pilot phase of this program where youth are offered an opportunity to have workplace experience in order to help them understand what their degrees or training translates into in a place of work.

• I understand that based on the lessons learnt from this phase, the project might enroll more youth and engage with more companies and community members for job readiness training and in depth exposure to various professions.

• What I particularly like about this program is the link it has with the different institutions of learning in the country and the private sector. That to me is a clear indication that the program will be sustainable. It is using the resources that are already available.

• I would like to encourage prospective mentees sitting in the audience to consider taking advantage of this unique learning opportunity. I would also like to caution that mentoring is a journey that does not offer a magic bullet. The mentee needs to be committed to the program and also needs to work hard in order to reap the benefits.

• The program offers the mentees the opportunity to network, learn about the realities of work and embrace the giant step into adulthood and economic participation.

• I am pleased to note that some of the mentors in this program own companies. They are well placed to share their rich and relevant experience and guide youth who are interested in venturing into business on what it takes to start and grow a business in Botswana as a Motswana youth.
• I would like to take this opportunity to appreciate and thank all those who have accepted the responsibility of being a mentor in this program. You are making great strides in helping Botswana achieve vision 2016. I appreciate that you are doing this as way of giving back to the community. Do not underestimate the value of guiding and training one young person at a time. Your contribution is priceless!

• And what I would really like to see is some of your mentees becoming mentors! If that happens, you would know that you have not built one person, but too many to count! And once we get there, we will know that we have all worked together to build a sustainable program. That is my ultimate wish.

• Lastly I would like to appreciate The African Women Leadership Academy. Firstly, for inviting me to speak at this event and secondly for taking on this exciting initiative. As I said before, I see a lot of youth benefiting from this program. I wish you well and truly believe that we will see amazing results in a few years time.

• With those few remarks I declare the Tshipidi Workplace Mentoring Program Officially launched.

Thank you.