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Craft Markets opened at three archaeological sites

For the first time craft vendors at three of the nine archaeological sites in Belize can display their products at designated areas. This as three new craft markets were today opened at the archaeological sites of Nim Li Punit, Lubaantun and Blue Creek in the Toledo District. The infrastructural developments are the results of work being done under the Making Tourism Benefit Communities Adjacent to Archaeological Sites (M-T-B-CAAS) project. The project which is funded under the EU supported Belize Rural Development Programme (BRDP) is being implemented by the Belize Tourism Board and the National Institute of Culture and History. Today's handover marks the completion of works at three of a total of nine sites which are being enhanced under the project.

In addition to the construction of the craft markets, other infrastructural upgrades aimed at providing better services and access to visitors have also been put in place. At Nim Li Punit, 250 feet gravel trail and steps were installed. At Lubaantun, a concrete and gravel stairway with safety rails leading to the visitor centre. Other improvements at all three sites was the installation of directional, interpretative, warning and notice signs, and benches in designated rest areas.

Addressing beneficiaries and other stakeholders in the tourism industry at this morning's ceremony held at Nim Li Punit, EU Head of Delegation to Belize, Ambassador Paola Amadei explained that the project has a multidimensional approach which goes beyond tangible improvements but is geared also at improving the economic benefits of those residents in the communities where each site is located. ***"In addition to the provision of infrastructure that is provided, the project is also created new avenues of financial benefit to the community by ensuring that residents in these communities are trained in the different craft skills. Some residents are also being trained for positions of local tour guides. So every effort is being made to make sure that communities are in a position to seize the economic opportunities which will come as a result of other improvements taking place at these sites. "***

Since its inception, the MTBCAAS project has also implemented other improvements across all nine sites. These include: new bathroom facilities, the establishment of Visitor's Centres with audio-visual equipment to enhance the tourist experience; the project also has a data collection component which focuses on Visitor Satisfaction Surveys and Trend Reports and improved health and safety standards. The project has also facilitated the training of artisans as well as local tour guides from the community.

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