FORMER US President George W. Bush will visit Botswana next week to launch a programme that will expand an important initiative related to women's health.

"The United States Government and President Bush are pleased to join together to announce a $3 million (about P22m) project in Botswana to scale up an innovative program that will dramatically decrease the time needed for examination, diagnosis, and treatment of cervical cancer," reads a statement from the American Embassy.

Funded by the American people through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and supported by the Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon partnership, which includes many public and private sector organizations, this new effort will expand and maximize the impact of the "See and Treat" program for cervical cancer, which has already served hundreds of women in Botswana.

The "See and Treat" programme, which includes visual examination and, if necessary, immediate treatment, was initiated by the Ministry of Health with U.S. Government support in 2009.

This innovative programme is distinct from the more common cervical cytology procedure, otherwise known as a Pap smear, which involves more extensive laboratory work that frequently results in delays in diagnosis and difficulty in follow-up with patients who require treatment. The "See and Treat" procedure is much simpler and avoids delays in treatment.

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in Botswana and is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths for women in the country.