

# BIG concludes N\$100 grant

By Wezi Tjaronda

**WINDHOEK** – The Basic Income Grant Coalition will pay the Otjivero residents, who have been participating in the BIG pilot project, a bridging allowance of N\$80 a month until a time when the Government introduces the grant nationwide.

The last N\$100 grant, which has been paid out to about 1 000 residents of the settlement, comes to an end this month.

The coalition says it will not allow the residents of the area to go back into their dehumanising conditions that they experienced before the grant was introduced in January 2007.

“Thus, while demanding the national implementation of BIG nationwide, we will use a ‘bridging allowance’ to tie over the households for the time being,” Reverend Petrus #Khariseb of the BIG Secretariat told the press yesterday.

Two years on, the Government has maintained that a N\$100 grant is not the best way of helping the poor.

BIG Coalition Chairperson Bishop Zephania Kameeta said extraordinary levels of poverty should also be addressed by extraordinary measures and not ordinary ones.

Despite pronouncements that the Government will not be able to implement the grant because of the costs involved, the coalition expects the Government to implement the project at a national scale nonetheless to ease the plight of many suffering Namibians.

“During the next one or two years, we expect the Government to introduce the BIG nationwide, which will make the bridging allow-



*BIG Coalition Chairperson Bishop Zephania Kameeta speaks to the press on the conclusion of the N\$100 grant to the Otjivero community. Behind him is one of the posters showing a child holding a N\$100 bill, which have been designed to raise awareness on the grant.*

*Photo: Wezi Tjaronda.*

ance superfluous,” said #Khariseb.

About 1 000 residents of the Otjivero settlement in Omitara have been receiving N\$100 grant every month for the last two years. The BIG Coalition introduced the pilot project to demonstrate mainly to opponents of the grant that a BIG would work and would lift people out of abject poverty and prevent destitution.

#Khariseb said the coalition was disappointed that despite the impressive results of the pilot project, the Government has not yet committed itself to the introduction of a countrywide BIG.

An assessment report compiled in April this year found that the levels of malnutrition have dropped, crime has reduced and school attendance has gone up. Before,

the area was characterised by unemployment, hunger and poverty.

“Based on these findings in Omitara, the coalition is convinced that a national BIG will benefit Namibians in all regions of the country. It is both beneficial and affordable and its implementation is thus a question of political will,” added #Khariseb.

The coalition said since the Government has been given another mandate to govern for the next five years, a BIG is needed more than ever as a means of alleviating the plight of the poor and to enable them to work themselves out of poverty.

With the regional and local authority elections next year, the coalition is creating awareness among the Namibian populace for them to demand a BIG. The issue

might also feature on the governors’ and mayors’ forums.

“We hope the awareness will translate in local people demanding BIG and the Government implementing the BIG,” said Uhuru Dempers, also of the BIG Coalition Secretariat.

The secretariat has had awareness raising meetings with communities in Windhoek, Otjiwarongo and some parts of the north, including Omuthiya and Engela.

Some members of the National Assembly and governors visited Otjivero this year to witness the changes that have taken place since the introduction of BIG.

According to Reverend Dirk Haarmann of the BIG Coalition Secretariat, “Otjivero is a window of what Namibia could look like, six months after implementing BIG.”