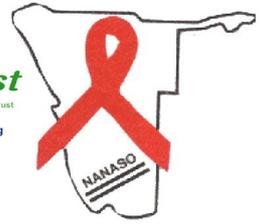




NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF NAMIBIA
(NYC)



Basic Income Grant Coalition

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The Basic Income Grant (BIG) is Government's Responsibility!

Press Release by the Basic Income Grant Coalition, 1 March 2012

For several years, the various organisations that make up Namibia's Basic Income Grant Coalition have been engaging the Namibian government on the introduction of a national BIG. These discussions started as early as 2004 and only when government was unsure about the effectiveness of the proposed grant, did the BIG coalition decide to introduce the pilot project in Otjivero to demonstrate the effects of the grant in practice. The BIG was then introduced in 2008 and comprehensive impact assessment studies were carried out in 2008 and 2009. They have shown how even a very limited BIG of N\$ 100 per person per month had a positive impact. The radical fall of child malnutrition, the improved school attendance and performance, the reduced crime rates and increased economic activities are just some of visible results. Perhaps most importantly, the BIG also contributed to people regaining their dignity and self-belief. The about 1000 people living in Otjivero, who received the grant, are a living testimony that it is indeed possible to address poverty.

Despite the positive results, the Namibian government has still not committed itself to the introduction of a BIG in Namibia. Instead, senior government leaders have raised concerns that the grant would make people lazy and dependent on hand-outs. Such perceptions are rooted in prejudices rather than being based on the evidence provided by Otjivero! We wish to point out that the BIG Coalition arranged for many Namibians, including Members of Parliament (MPs), to visit Otjivero and to witness the developments there first-hand. The honourable MPs were free to assess the impact of the BIG themselves and they were impressed with the results achieved in Otjivero. However, they preferred to express their views in private instead of speaking out publicly in support of a national BIG.

Perhaps it is necessary to once again remind the Namibian government about the poverty still experienced by far too many of our citizens. Since independence, Namibia has rolled out several social grants, including old age pensions, veterans subventions, grant for orphans and vulnerable children etc. These grants have helped to alleviate the plight of some Namibians but far too many have remained desperately poor in the face of rampant unemployment that now affects more than half of our population. Just a few months ago, the media showed shocking pictures of people sifting their way through rubbish dumps in search of food. This drives home the stark reality for many Namibians: Opulence and desperation co-exist side by side and very little is being done to eradicate poverty.

The BIG is certainly not the only measure to be taken but it is an important starting point. During the many discussions with government and civil society organisations across the country, the Coalition always said that if there were better and more effective ways to fight poverty then

the Coalition would support such measures. However, those who criticised the BIG have thus far not been able to present an alternative that would deal with poverty more comprehensively and swiftly than the BIG! The question thus is: why is the Namibian government still reluctant to implement a BIG when it is affordable, has very low administrative costs and will reach all Namibians immediately? For how long do we still want to debate poverty instead of taking action to eradicate it?

Extensive debates and different viewpoints on the BIG are certainly legitimate and also a necessary ingredient of any democracy. However, after debating the BIG for several years, it is no longer acceptable to just lament about poverty when there are possible ways to redress it. The time for action has come as we cannot expect thousands to continue suffering while policy makers cannot make up their minds what should be done! As long as many Namibians are relegated to a life in misery, the fruits of independence and liberation are only enjoyed by some. As long as over 50% of Namibians are unemployed and destitute, we cannot claim to have achieved our goals. Are we merely content with the status quo or are we willing to make more fundamental changes to build a different society, characterised by equality and social justice? The answer to this fundamental question will determine which way our country will go.

For hundreds of thousands of Namibians who are still trapped in poverty, the question of redistribution, social justice and the BIG is an existential question. Soon they will demand answers from their leaders who are reluctant to introduce a BIG. One thing is for sure: with a BIG, nobody in Namibia would be forced to scrape through rubbish dumps in search of food. As a broad coalition, we therefore appeal to the Namibian government once more to tackle poverty head-on and to introduce a national BIG now!

Government's intransigence on the BIG does not only perpetuate poverty in Namibia but has also put the survival of the community of Otjivero at risk. After raising funds for the pilot phase in 2008 – 2009, the BIG Coalition managed to still secure a bridging allowance for 2010 and 2011. However, our resources are now depleted and the residents of Otjivero are faced with the prospects of sliding back to the worst forms of poverty they experienced before the BIG was introduced. As a sign of human solidarity and support for the idea of a BIG, we therefore appeal for national and international support for the people living in Otjivero. We especially want to reach our compatriots here in Namibia. We appeal to you all to publicly support the idea of a national BIG and to make a donation towards the survival of Otjivero. The time has come to take a stand and to be counted. We need your support now!

Thank you!

Bishop Dr. Z. Kameeta

Chairperson: BIG Coalition