
BY THEIR FRUIT YOU WILL RECOGNIZE THEM (MAT 7:16)

Press release – 15 July 2014

The Basic Income Grant payment in Otjivero continues and the ELCRN calls upon Government to no longer postpone a national implementation of the BIG

At the recent visit of the UN General Secretary to Namibia President Pohamba bemoaned the state of inequality and poverty in Namibia and pleaded for outside assistance: “*The minority communities are extremely rich while the majority are extremely poor. [...] It seems no one understands us, despite the fact that the United Nations has representatives in the country who see the reality on the ground. We have very poor people and I hope one day the United Nations system can assist us.*” (New Era, 25th June 2014)

As the president has further pointed out “*historical apartheid colonialism, which enforced segregation and inequality in our society*” needs to be addressed in order to achieve local economic development. In 2002, the Government appointed NAMTAX commission, recommended the introduction of a universal grant for the same reasons. We would like to call on the President and the Namibian Government to start implementing a national Basic Income Grant and thereby to redistribute income and wealth from the rich to the poor.

Since NAMTAX, the effectiveness of a universal grant has been practically proven in the Namibian context and most recently in India as well. During the two-year BIG pilot project in Otjivero, the social and economic impact was quite impressive, to mention just a few indicators: Malnutrition dropped from 42% to 10% for children under the age of five, food poverty was reduced from 76% to 16%, payment of school and clinic fees increased to nearly 100%, school drop-outs were drastically eliminated, poverty related crime fell by 42% and very interestingly, small businesses in the village developed and earnings from it grew by 300%, indicating the much needed local economic development in rural areas. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights during her visit in October 2012 had singled out the BIG pilot project as “*a positive example for which Namibia is renowned in the international discourse on poverty reduction*”.

In India, the Self-Employed Women’s Association of India (SEWA) in collaboration with UNICEF has implemented a universal cash grant project with similar encouraging results in terms of poverty reduction and economic development. The release of the final report of this project is scheduled for September this year.

Moreover, the drought relief response of the three Lutheran Churches in Namibia (ELCRN; ELCIN & ELCIN-GELC) during the recent devastating drought used the BIG model to introduce an emergency cash grant for the affected communities. The Churches supported nearly 6000 people in four communities across the country with a grant of N\$100,- per person per month (Onanghola in Omusati, Amperbo in Khomas; Ongongo in Kunene and Ncaute in Kavango West). The members of the communities reported that this support changed their life during the drought. People brought food to supplement Government’s maize flour, paid school and clinic fees, brought uniforms and clothes. In addition, people were able to buy seeds for the new ploughing season and fodder to save their remaining livestock throughout the drought.

The ELCRN is now glad to announce that funding from the Waldensian Church enables the payment of the BIG to the inhabitants of Otjivero for another year.

First, the money is meant to support the people in Otjivero. Judging from the first pay-out this is already working. Frieda Nembwaya, an Otjivero resident, said: “Parents with children on secondary schools went early in the morning to the Nampost office to get their BIG in order to pay for the transportation and the schools fees for their children and to ensure to start with the term in time.”

Secondly, the Namibian Government gets a second chance to go, speak to the people and witness what a difference a BIG has made in Otjivero, Onangholo, Amperbo, Ongongo or Ncaute. We call on the President and the Prime Minister to address the plight of our people through a Basic Income, so that Namibia will not be dependent on benevolent international assistance forever.

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