

Basic Income Grant

Otjivero, Namibia - 10 years later



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Contributors

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Introduction

Why a publication - ten years later?

One might ask, why a publication ten years after the BIG pilot project? A scientific evaluation of the project and its results has been carried out (see next section) and this publication does not aim to repeat the results. Instead, its objective is to revisit the situation of Otjivero and to give a voice to the people living there regarding the changes they experienced since the BIG pilot project ended.

At the time of implementation, the BIG pilot project had triggered a lot of national and international attention and solidarity. Despite the end of the project, the interest in Otjivero has continued and this is a clear indication that the debate around a BIG is here to stay, nationally and internationally. Otjivero represents an important experience regarding poverty eradication, social and economic inclusion and the creation of a local labour market.

Within Namibia, there are many questions about what has happened to Otjivero and the BIG in general. People in Otjivero are often asked whether they still receive a BIG and when a national roll-out will come. Rudolphine Eigowas stated: “The people think that we still receive BIG. I hear this even over the radio. They say Otjivero is so lucky, they get BIG and Harambee.” Stephanus Eigowab added: “They say, ‘we are neighbours, so since the BIG has come to Otjivero we thought it would also come to us?’”

At an international level, much has been written about the BIG in Otjivero. Interviews in print, radio and TV have been published and a continuous stream of journalists from all over the world still frequent Otjivero to this day with the aim to get first-hand information about what the BIG has achieved.

At the same time, Bishop Kameeta’s recent attendance at the German church gathering (“Kirchentag”) on 21 June 2019 filled a huge hall under the title: “If I was not poor, you would not be rich”. For many the Namibian BIG project

INTRODUCTION

constitutes a practical application of faith in action. At the gathering, Kameeta announced “I am so happy that probably from next year, we will be able to pay a Basic Income Grant in Namibia.”

The question remains, how does Kameeta’s comment at the Kirchentag relate to the concrete situation in Namibia four years after the inception of the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare. The current policy debate and what is necessary for a national BIG is outlined in the final section.

This publication aims to give a voice to the people at the centre of the BIG pilot project who experienced what changed and what remained after the BIG ended and how their current lives look like. We want to ensure that their voices and opinions are heard.

The interviews were recorded in January and February 2019. After translation and compilation, the interviews were again given to the interviewees for final validation in August 2019. Local translators assisted throughout the interviews and validation.

Dirk Haarmann and Engelhardt Unaeb interviewed the residents; Claudia and Dirk Haarmann wrote the introductory sections, edited the interviews for publication, and did the lay-out of the booklet. Herbert Jauch wrote the final section on the outlook. Dirk Haarmann took all photos.

Our special thanks to Charles Stewart for copy editing the publication.

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The BIG pilot project in 2008-2009

In January 2008, the Basic Income Grant (BIG) pilot project commenced in Otjivero, about 100 kilometres east of Windhoek. All residents below the age of 60 years received a Basic Income Grant of N\$100 per person per month, without any conditions attached.

The Namibian Basic Income Grant Coalition designed and implemented this first unconditional universal cash transfer pilot project in the world. The BIG Coalition's practical aim was to pilot the Namibian Government's NAMTAX (Namibian Tax Consortium) recommendation for a BIG for Namibia. Thus the BIG Coalition regarded this project as the first step towards a BIG for all. The Coalition consisted of four big umbrella bodies in Namibia, namely, the Council of Churches (CCN), the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), the Namibian NGO Forum (NANGOF) and the Namibian Network of AIDS Service Organisations (NANASO). The BIG Coalition raised funds

from supporters of the idea from all sections of Namibia's society, including individuals, churches, organisations and donors in other countries. The BIG pilot project ran for a period of 24 months up to December 2009.

**“BIG is a little project with a large aim. The aim is to UPLIFT the 'life' of Omitara, then Namibia, then Africa and at last the world”
(BIG Committee, 2007)**

The effects of the BIG pilot project were scientifically evaluated for the first year. The research used four complementary methods: a baseline survey in November 2007, subsequent panel surveys in July and November 2008, continuous key informant interviews and detailed case studies of individuals living in Otjivero. An international team of experts guided and evaluated the research throughout. After one year, the local and international researchers decided to stop the quantitative

data collection due to the effects of in-migration into the community. The in-migration proved that the BIG had made rural life attractive, even for people who did not

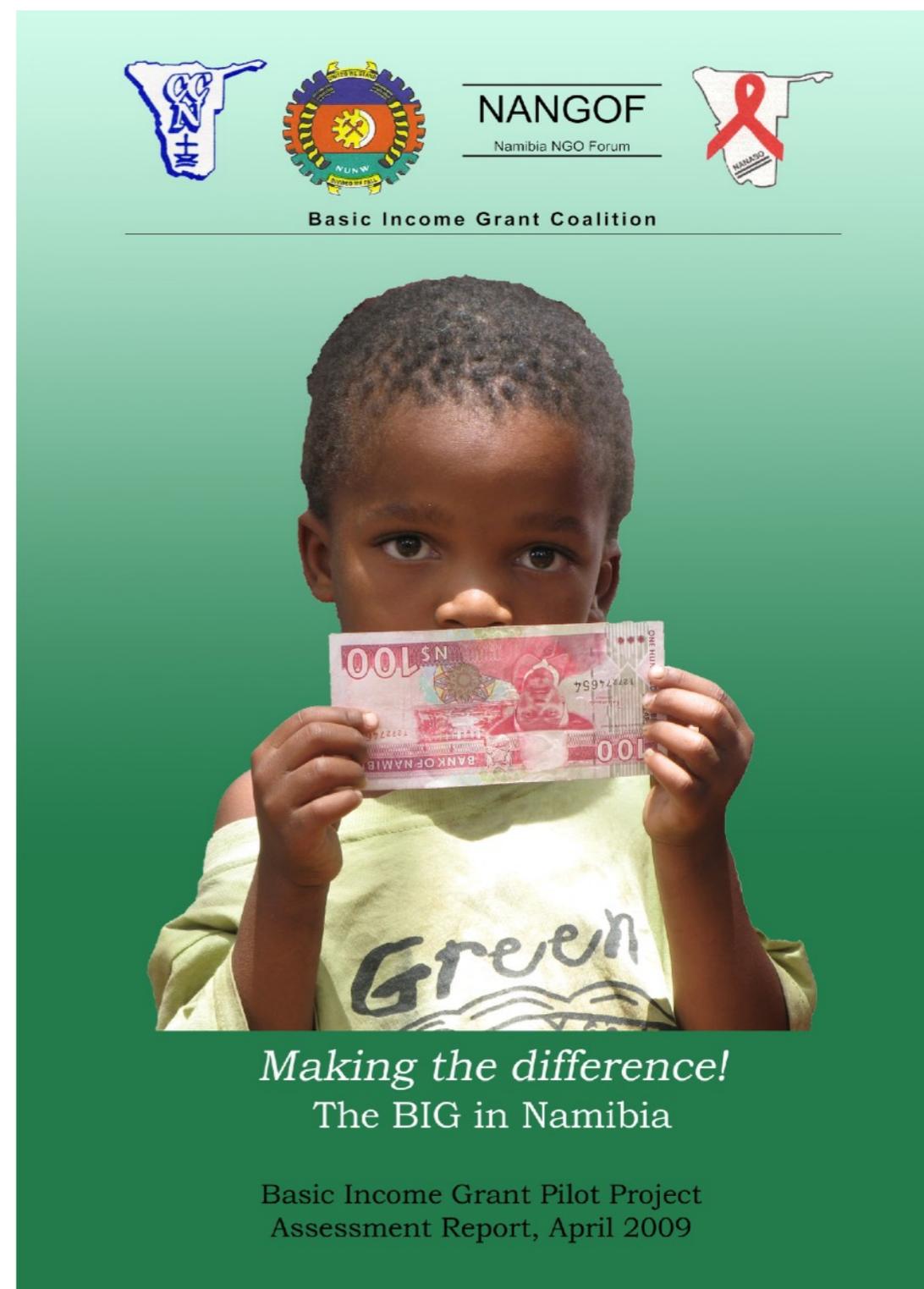
receive the BIG themselves, but it posed a statistical problem for a time-series analysis.

The key findings of the assessment report 2009

Before the introduction of the BIG, unemployment, hunger and poverty characterised life in Otjivero. Most residents had settled there because they had nowhere else to go, deprivation shaped their lives and they had little hope for the future.

The introduction of the BIG ignited hope and the community responded by establishing its own 18-member committee to mobilise the community and to advise residents on how to spend the BIG money wisely. This suggests that the introduction of a BIG can effectively assist with community mobilisation and empowerment.

As the BIG was only introduced in one particular location, there was significant migration towards Otjivero. Impoverished family members moved into Otjivero, attracted by the BIG, even if the new residents themselves did not receive the grant. This points to the need to introduce the BIG



The half year and the final report are available at: www.bignam.org

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as a universal national grant in order to avoid migration to particular regions, towns or households.

The migration to Otjivero affected the data obtained for this study. Per capita income from the BIG dropped from N\$89 per month in January 2008 to N\$67 in November 2008. We thus analysed the impact of the BIG, taking the influence of migration into consideration.

The introduction of the BIG dropped household poverty significantly. Using the food poverty line, 76% of residents fell below this line in November 2007. This was reduced to 37% within one year of the BIG. Amongst households that were not affected by in-migration, only 16% fell below this poverty line. This shows the dramatic impact of a national BIG on food poverty levels in Namibia.

Furthermore, the BIG led to an increase in economic activity. The rate of those engaged in income-generating activities increased from 44% to 55% (counting those above the age of 15). Thus the BIG enabled recipients to increase their work either for pay, profit or family gain as well as self-employment. The grant enabled recipients to increase their productive income earned, particularly

through small business entrepreneurship, including brick-making, baking of bread and dress-making. The BIG contributed to the creation of a local market as a result of increased household buying power. This finding contradicts critics claiming a BIG would lead to laziness and dependency.

The BIG resulted in a huge reduction of child malnutrition. Using a WHO measurement technique, the data shows a significant improvement in children's weight-for-age in just six months from 42% of underweight children in November 2007 to 17% in June 2008 and 10% in November 2008.

Poverty and a lack of transport before the BIG severely hampered access to ARVs by people from HIV positive residents'. The BIG enabled them to afford nutritious food and gain access to the medication. This was further enhanced by government's decision to make ARVs available in Otjivero, freeing residents from the need to travel to Gobabis.

Before the introduction of the BIG, almost half of the school-going children did not attend school regularly. Pass

rates stood at about 40% and drop-out rates were high. Many parents were unable to pay school fees. After the introduction of the BIG, more than double the number of parents paid school fees (90%) and most of the children bought school uniforms. Non-attendance due to financial reasons dropped by 42% and this rate would have been even higher without the effects of migration into Otjivero. Drop-out rates at the school fell from almost 40% in November 2007 to 5% in June 2008 and further to nearly 0% in November 2008.

The residents visited the settlement's health clinic much more regularly since the introduction of the BIG. Residents paid a fee of N\$4 for each visit and the income of the clinic increased fivefold from N\$ 250 per month to about N\$1,300.

The BIG led to the reduction of household debt with the average debt falling from N\$1,215 to N\$772 between November 2007 and November 2008. Savings increased during that period, which was reflected in the increasing ownership of large livestock, small livestock and poultry.

The BIG contributed to a significant reduction in crime. Overall crime rates – as reported to the local police station – fell by 42% while stock theft fell by 43% and other theft by nearly 20%.

The introduction of the Basic Income Grant reduced the dependency of women on men for their survival. The BIG also gave women a measure of control over their own sexuality, freeing them to some extent from the pressure to engage in transactional sex.

Critical claims that the BIG leads to increasing alcoholism is not supported by empirical evidence. The community committee tried to curb alcoholism and reached an agreement with local shebeen owners not to sell alcohol on the day of the pay-out of the grants.

The BIG is a form of social protection, which reduces poverty and supports pro-poor economic growth. As a national policy it would greatly assist Namibia in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals to which the country has committed itself.

The cost of a national BIG in Namibia would be substantial, a net amount in the range between N\$1.2 – 1.6 billion per

year, equivalent to 2.2 - 3% of Namibia's GDP or 5-6% of the national budget. There are various options to finance such a national grant. A moderate adjustment of VAT combined with an increase in income taxes is one option. Other financing options include a re-prioritisation of the national budget and the introduction of a special levy on natural resources.

An econometric analysis revealed that Namibia's tax capacity exceeds 30% of the national income. The current collection rate is below 25% and thus Namibia's excess capacity to raise tax revenue significantly exceeds the net costs of a Basic Income Grant. This makes the BIG affordable in Namibia.

A national BIG would have several medium to long-term benefits. The developments in Otjivero indicate that the BIG will reduce poverty and unemployment, increase economic activities and productivity, and improve both the educational outcomes and health status of most Namibians.

Ten years later - the political context

In early 2015 Hage Geingob became the third Namibian president with an overwhelming electoral majority. He asked Bishop Zephania Kameeta, then chairperson of the BIG Coalition, to join his government as the first Minister of a new Ministry for Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare.

Kameeta assured the BIG Coalition there would be a roll-out of a national BIG within six months. To that purpose he requested that the BIG team prepare an updated financial model with a concrete financing and implementation plan for submission to the Cabinet.

The BIG Coalition welcomed the move and prepared the BIG proposal including the financing model for implementation. Kameeta believed that his appointment meant the imminent introduction of the BIG nationally. In his inaugural speech President Geingob



Claudia & Dirk Haarmann, Zephania Kameeta, Herbert Jauch, Wilfred Diergaardt - after the appointment of Kameeta as Minister for Poverty Eradication - preparing the Cabinet submission for the national implementation of the Basic Income Grant (2015)

declared a 'war on poverty' with the aim of eradicating, not just reducing, poverty. Comparing the Namibian nation with a house he said that under his rule: "Nobody in this house must be left out" (Geingob, 2015). There was

TEN YEARS LATER - THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

widespread expectation of a national BIG as the key instrument to achieve this goal. However, despite these high hopes for the introduction of a BIG, nothing much has changed in terms of concrete policies. Rather than adopting a radical new approach, government spending increased, but not on a BIG. Instead, the Namibian bureaucracy expanded to accommodate an increase in the number of ministers and deputy ministers from 23 to 27 and 21 to 35 respectively. Likewise, the military spending ballooned, becoming one of the highest shares of government spending in the world (Smit, 2017). Government's discourse about redistribution and economic empowerment of the masses increasingly appeared to be little more than lip service. Kameeta at the helm of the Ministry for Poverty Eradication is now in charge of pension and social grant pay-outs that were previously the responsibility of other ministries. He seems to have withdrawn from the public debate on the BIG. The only new programme currently implemented by the Ministry is a food bank, an idea Geingob had come across in Britain. The idea was for the public to donate to the food bank and for unemployed youth to identify worthy recipients. Unlike the BIG, the programme is not geared

towards mass poverty eradication, instead giving food parcels to a few poor in urban centres.

Josef Ganeb

BRICKLAYER

"I started the brick-making business in 2006 but had to stop it due to a lack of finances. After the BIG was introduced (...) I started again with it. From one cement bag I make 250 bricks. The bricks are standard and I sell them for one dollar. I get the sand for the bricks from the river. It is still a family business which I plan to expand in the future if I get more finances. Bricks are in demand so I will need more manpower in order to serve the interests of the people here at Otjivero. I am very optimistic that this project will expand with the BIG and employ more people" (Josef Ganeb:2008)



Ten years later

After 10 years Josef Ganeb still has his business, but he explains that since the BIG stopped, the cash-flow problem hampers his business drastically. His financial situation has become increasingly difficult. Now he has to use his pension mainly for food for the grandchildren. He says: "People always need money, for school uniforms etc."

Ganeb relates that the reduction from N\$100 (BIG) to N\$80 (bridging allowance), was actually not so bad. "Not so much changed, when the amount was reduced..." "The amount is not so important, but that

everybody, also the children get some money every month." But now, without the BIG, there is too little for the family. He relates that "currently only a little millie meal is left, and as I sit here, I did not drink tea since yesterday...Hunger has returned, but not as bad as before".

Yet, he says, when people ask him, whether Otjivero still receives the basic income, he has to think for a moment. He explains how the basic income has fundamentally changed the community and brought people together in good and bad times. As an example he cites the story of the new hostel in Otjivero which was built by the German Embassy as a response to the good development of the local school after the introduction of the BIG. After the completion, the regional government only wanted to employ people from elsewhere. The community got together and demanded that at least some people from Otjivero should be employed there. It came to a stand off. Police were called in, armed with tear gas and weapons but "who do they think they are, they had to leave again, they could not scare us".



The regional council once had supported Ganeb with moulds for his brick making. But when the BIG had ended, the demand had dropped and the regional council took the moulds away again. Ganeb looks at the stone houses in Otjivero, for which he had supplied the bricks, and says: "If the BIG had continued, I could now also live in one of those brick houses myself."

Ganeb has a difficult choice to make. His brick-making business was flourishing while the basic income was around. He was able to buy cement when he needed to, the bricks were so good that word spread fast, and people in Otjivero as well as the farmers bought the bricks from him rather than in Windhoek. Now he is struggling.

Ganeb explains the offer of one farmer. He now wants to buy his



"If the BIG had continued, I could now also live in one of those brick houses myself."

business and wants an answer from him soon. The farmer says he would employ Ganeb and not much would

change. Then the farmer would supply the cement and Ganeb would make the bricks again. He continues to explain that when the farmer is the owner and sells the bricks on his terms, he will get the profit. Ganeb says: "The farmer will then pay me what he thinks is right."

Ganeb explains, what in his opinion, led to the downfall of the BIG. The farmers, he says, were always opposed and lobbied that the people not be given money but food instead. The farmers claimed that money would lead to the Otjivero people having more children and becoming lazy. Ganeb wonders what effect this had on the wider BIG programme and the lack of its national implementation. After a while he says: "Most probably the farmers' reasoning got to Bishop Kameeta's thinking and he believes more what they said than what he experienced in Otjivero with us." He continues to explain that this is also why Bishop Kameeta now introduces "Harambee" instead of the basic income. "Harambee, is how people here refer to the food bank. Originally Harambee was the vision set-out by Hage Geingob in 2015



"Kameeta believes more what the farmers said than what he experienced in Otjivero with us."

promising prosperity for all. "If "Harambee", comes here and Kameeta gives us food, maybe we

should also take it," says Ganeb, "because BIG is not coming. But then again, if we choose the Harambee food, with what can we pay our water debt? I know that if the BIG was still here I would never have accrued debt for water, I could have paid directly."

Rudolphine Eigowas

DRESSMAKER

“We started the project last year [2007] we had to stop due to a lack of funds and materials. We resumed full force in



January 2008

after we received the BIG money. We are six women who are involved in the project... We make dresses, especially Nama cultural dresses because most of our clients are looking for them. We have clients from as far as Gobabis, Witvlei, Windhoek and from the surrounding farms. When there are occasions like weddings and funerals, we make good sales... One dress is about N\$ 150 and we make about N\$1,500 – 2,000 per month. We have opened a bank account in Windhoek where we do our savings.” (Rudolphine Eigowas:2008).



Ten years later

“The people think that we still receive BIG. I hear this even over the radio. They say Otjivero is so lucky, they get BIG and Harambee. But we no longer get the BIG nor do we get food.” Asked about the impact of the BIG Eigowas explains: “The community spirit is still there, people help each other, even yesterday six

“The BIG has really helped us, Otjivero has changed, it has changed for good.”

people came to me, two asked for millie meal, two for tea and two for sugar. And I gave it away, even though it was my last. I do not know, where I will get it from, but I trust in the LORD and he provides." Her husband Stephanus Eigowab adds, "we have learned that when we share we always get something back in return in one way or the other." Eigowas stresses: "The BIG has really helped us, Otjivero has changed, it has changed for good."

Despite this, she is not painting a rosy picture about the current situation. She relates how hardship has come back and how the community is severely affected.

Eigowas and the women involved stopped their dressmaking project. After the BIG ended people did no longer have money to pay them for



[But] "for a business to work you need to maintain the sewing machines and you need to buy material."

the products and the project suffered from cash-flow shortages. She

explains: "For a business to work you need to maintain the sewing machines and you need to buy material. But the people are all in debt. And when you are in debt, they say they want to pay in tranches, but they cannot. And this is why I thought, let me rather stop. But I still work, if somebody comes and makes an offer, for example if somebody

asks me to make a dress, I do that, but no longer on a larger scale. I do not want to ruin people or send them to jail for debt. People avoid you, when they are indebted to you, and you cannot keep on running after them.”

When her husband suggests, that maybe another programme, even if it is not cash, should help Otjivero further, Eigowas interrupts him and says “I do not think it would help. Something like Harambee would not help Otjivero, people need to be able to buy things, they need to buy shoes, a t-shirt, they need material for their production, and if you give them food they will sell it, in order to buy those things. It was the same with the millie meal we got for drought relief, people had to sell it in order to buy soap.”



“Something like Harambee would not help Otjivero, people need to be able to buy things, they need to buy shoes, a t-shirt, they need material for their production, and if you give them food they will sell it, in order to buy those things.”

Besides the decreasing business opportunities in Otjivero, a new problem keeps people sleepless at night. Household debt has become a big issue. Eigowas elaborates, “the so-called development” which has followed the BIG money. “When they saw that we receive the BIG, they brought in the so-called development, like toilets and the potable water, all the things we need to pay for. The government thought, the people in Otjivero are comfortable, they receive money, let us bring development to them, so that we can charge them. They were late, and brought in this development only after the BIG stopped. Now we need to pay this water every month, and the water costs are increasing all the time.”

“We say thank you to the government, that they brought in the



“The government thought, the people in Otjivero are comfortable, they receive money, let us bring development to them, so that we can charge them.”

toilets - now we do not need to go into the bushes anymore. But we did not think, that when they said you need to pay, that there should be a problem.” However, at the moment households pay water bills between N\$ 30.00 (minimum payment) to N\$600.00 per month. “For people without income the debt went up to thousands.”

RUDOLPHINE EIGOWAS

They tried to speak to the authorities like the constituency councillor, but “they tell us that we have asked for it. But this is not true,” Eigowas exclaims, “our request was to install prepaid meters”. Her husband adds, “If they had listened, they might have understood our reasoning and installed prepaid meters.”

When asked, whether the water is cut, if people cannot pay. Eigowas explains that “this is not the case. The people could deal with that. But worse, they are told that if households get in arrears, their plot will be taken away and sold. And where do you go from here? All over in Otjivero people are afraid of this, that their small plots and their belongings, which they acquired with BIG are taken away because of the debt for drinking water.” Eigowas concludes “people are trapped in debt and the hunger is here.”

Eigowas says that the youth has no future and some have resorted to steal and sell the taps and in return “are given those pills, drugs, which make them high. This, the illegal hunting and prostitution - I just want that they bring back the BIG, the whole Namibia must get the BIG - the problems are not only here - the whole Namibia must get it!”



“In fact they could just put up a coffin factory here, which can produce the coffins right here. Since we are dying here, every week or at least every second week we bury here. Let me be very honest, after the BIG was stopped, the young women returned to the shebeens and streets. Prostitution came back, the women need money. And if there is somebody, who has money he takes them along and, he does with them what he wants. They get sick and are too afraid to go to the clinic for medicine, they stay at home and are dying of HIV/AIDS.”

Eigowas suggests to go to a woman who lives close by and who is sick. “So that you can see, what the hunger does to people,” she says. In a one-room shack, we meet an elderly mother, who looks after her daughter, whom the hospital has just



Eigowas clearly links the suffering of the dying woman to the inaction of government to take up a national basic income.

left with her, since they say, they cannot do anything for her anymore. The mother shows a picture, of how her daughter looked like, when she was healthy. She had come to Otjivero after the introduction of the BIG, hoping that she could benefit from the improved economic situation of the village. Now she is hardly able to speak and her body is

covered with open wounds. She died two days later.

Eigowas clearly links the suffering of the dying woman to the inaction of government to take up a national basic income. “The truth of the matter is”, she says, “I honestly do not know where the money of the government has gone to. This is at the heart of the problem. They claim that there is no money, but their employees are paid at the end of the month. Where do they get this money from? To me it seems to be a tale, there are more than 60,000 government employees, they get their salary every month. So the government should just bring back the BIG, even if it is at first only N\$50 a month and then increased by N\$50 every year.”



Bishop Kameeta at a Friedrich Ebert Foundation Conference in 2011

“They claim that there is no money, but [government] employees are paid at the end of month. Where do they get this money from? To me it seems to be a tale, there are more than 60,000 government employees, they get their salary every month. So the government should just bring back the BIG”

Regarding the position of Bishop Kameeta, Eigowas explains, "if you talk on the outside, if you talk critically about government, then you are brought close by, so that you keep your mouth shut. This is what they did to Bishop Kameeta. This is what I think, they have done with him. He used to talk to us nicely, and now - even if he has a tight schedule - he should have come back to us to inform us.

"if you talk on the outside, if you talk critically about government, then you are brought close by, so that you keep your mouth shut. This is what they did to Bishop Kameeta."

Poverty in Namibia is a scandal, says Kameeta

• NANGULA SHEJAVALI

BISHOP Zephania Kameeta has made a special call on Government to implement the Basic Income Grant (BIG) nationally, instead of allowing "some people to pay themselves BIGs of 100 million, 30 million and 120 million... without bringing them to book".

Kameeta was speaking at a mass gathering in Katutura on Wednesday night, when he said corruption - in this case alluding to the ODC, Avid Investment and Teko Trading cases - as one of the problems preventing the State from effectively tackling poverty.

"If you want to win elections, you must be fair to the poor!" Kameeta said, describing Namibians as paupers in a rich country.

"When you read the



Photo: Nangula Shejavali

Bishop Zephania Kameeta of the ELCRN Church, President of the Council of Churches in Namibia, which is also a member of the BIG.

mained poor, we will never reach Vision 2030."

Stating that food aid grants had failed in addressing poverty, Kameeta also stressed the universal application of the grant - giving everyone the grant, and then recouping from the rich through the tax system.

SHARE A LITTLE

"We appreciate what Government is doing with the food distribution for example, especially after the floods. But the problem is that I can't buy school shoes for my children with food. You can't pay the N\$4 clinic fee with food, and you can't pay for school fees with food. Give the people the BIG so that they can buy their own food, but can also be able to pay for school fees, etc."

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“If I had been here the day he came to visit, I would have asked him. He also had promised that before he retires [as Bishop], he would build a Lutheran church here. But we are still gathering in the class rooms here and the people mock us. (...) These are the two questions I would ask him, about the Lutheran church and the BIG. Sometimes I try to call him, but he never picks up, since he is now a high-ranking person. You have to go through the channels. I also call his private number, but there is always somebody else answering who says, the Minister is busy. I even tried to call in the evenings. Then people ask, ‘Who are you? What do you want? Why are you looking for him?’”

Christian Swartbooi

SHOE REPAIRS

“The people pay a little better, now that they get some income through the BIG project. I am frail but I am passionate about this



work. It is my earnest desire to always sit under the tree and to continue doing this work. I will help them if the people bring the work. I now want to put up a sign so that the people can see that shoes are repaired at this place here. I want to move forward with this small business I can see that the income will increase. I will also get a small booklet in which I would list the prices or costs for the repair of the shoes.” (Christian Swartbooi:2008)



Ten years later

“I can no longer fix shoes, since my eyesight is not good anymore.” Swartbooi explains that his family needs the BIG to come back, in order to buy food to provide for the grandchildren. He says: “BIG was working”. His wife, Crecia, continues: “With the BIG we never had to suffer, but now we are suffering.”

**“BIG was working.
With the BIG we never had to
suffer, but now we are
suffering.”**

Swartbooi explains that besides the expenses on food, clothes etc. they now also have to pay for water. Their meagre pension is used for this competing with the expenses for food for the grandchildren in the house.

Josef Ganeb adds: "This is like with all of us, we have not paid for the past months." Wherever one goes, one hears about people fearing that their plot will be sold, because of outstanding debt on water.

Swartbooi concludes: "We are suffering, because the BIG is gone. It needs to be reintroduced especially in order to assist with the school going children. As I am sitting here, I do not have any food, I am suffering from hunger. When the BIG was

"We are now old people, we believe that Bishop will remember us, and bring back the BIG."

here, I never suffered from hunger. We are now old people, we believe that Bishop will remember us, and bring back the BIG".



Crecia Swartbooi, 2019

Stephanus Eigowab

Stephanus Eigowab had been the director of the local school in Otjivero for many years and was highly regarded as the community



leader at the time of the introduction of the BIG. He played a crucial role in the establishment of the Basic Income Committee in Otjivero, which assisted people with advice and with the practicalities of the BIG payouts. He also became a vocal proponent of the BIG in newspaper interviews and at national events (Photo 2009 - Eigowab speaking at a rally against poverty in Katutura)



Ten years later

“What people have bought [with the BIG] is still there. And some still have small shops, where they sell food, those sort of businesses continue to work on a smaller scale. Other small businesses had to stop, since people do no longer have money to buy.”

“BIG has brought in a good spirit into the community. This is the spirit of working together.”

“BIG has brought a good spirit into the community. This is the spirit of working together. This came automatically, we were doing better as a community than the other places and farms. But when BIG stopped we slipped back in the development. The spirit is still there, and if people are in problems e.g. when somebody dies we make plans together.”

“The people come to us and ask - even yesterday people from Witvlei came to ask: They say, ‘we are neighbours, so since the BIG has come to Otjivero we thought it would also come to us?’ And then I ask them, ‘so what does government say?’ ‘Oh’, they answer, ‘government says, that they do not have money.’”
Eigowab looks at us: “That is an old excuse, isn’t it? And this is why people come now to us to ask for the BIG.”



The parliamentarians said: ‘[...] money vanished for things, which were not budgeted for. And those people are so strong and influential that they cannot be arrested’.

Eigowab explains, what happened politically after the BIG stopped: “A group of eight parliamentarians came twice. The last time was in

2017. They apparently wanted to see, how things are and they asked, how we were. We told them, that things are not well, and we explained:

'Because you [the government] have promised to take over the BIG programme and you did not'. And we asked them: 'Why can you not take over?' And they said: 'No, we cannot take over BIG since this government has become more bankrupt than the one before. The previous people in government have squandered the money unnecessarily, on projects, which were actually no projects, money vanished for things,

which were not budgeted for. And those people are so strong and influential that they cannot be arrested'. This is what they told me, they said: 'Now you know.

What do you think, if we had to bring in the BIG,

how should this work? That would be much more in the open and in public, different than money which can be brought in for a certain project.' But I told them, let them bring back the big guys, all the ministers and then we can talk, not about us alone, but about the whole of Namibia. BIG has been proven successful, it is tried and tested also during the drought relief in the North."

The parliamentarians said: 'Now you know. What do you think, if we had to bring in the BIG, how should this work? That would be much more in the open and in public, different than money which can be brought in for a certain project.'

"To be honest, I have to tell the truth, Kameeta is no longer the Bishop, whom we had before. There are always people around him, maybe bodyguards, people are trying to contact him, but are told to make an appointment, they are told to talk to the secretary and then to the Permanent Secretary and that is where it stops. The people one is referred to, do not know BIG. In my opinion the church

needs to intervene, that the Bishop comes down, where he was, then he might listen again. Then he will understand and can take the plans ahead. I want to see the BIG go ahead. Yes, Harambee is good, but the private sector can cater for that.

But the BIG must be taken up by government maybe they cannot introduce it immediately to all three million Namibians, if this is how they feel, but then again, one can see the aeroplanes they hire, the Mercedes Benzes, which are delivered every January. Cost cutting must start in parliament. And then you hear they buy on higher purchases and have debts for those cars of over 200

million - these are government cars, this is not us! These are the things, which lets you wonder, how is the system within government? Even we know, where we have to stop and how we can advance, but they don't."

"When the initial idea of BIG came, people thought theoretically about it, and thought this is a joke but BIG had an enormous influence on the people in Otjivero. The problem I see currently is, we need to give people a chance to remain rightful people. But the people say: 'It is good what you are telling us, but there is hunger, there is no soap at home, we have not eaten this morning, what should we do?' And this is why I say: "We cannot only pray, the LORD wants us to make plans for the future. We have to start with the Basic Income again."



"We cannot only pray, the LORD wants us to make plans for the future. We have to start with the Basic Income again."

Johannes Goagoseb

LIVING POSITIVELY WITH HIV

In 2007 Johannes had been living with HIV for three years. One of his children and his partner had died as a result of AIDS. He was unemployed and the only breadwinner in the family with frail parents. He was imprisoned for illegal hunting, since he needed



travel money to go to the hospital for his life saving medicines. He developed TB in prison, but the family managed with the BIG to bail him out. In 2008 he was living a healthy life, since he could afford proper food and could get his medicine regularly. He built his home with BIG money.



Ten years later

We meet Clemens Goagoseb, the brother of Johannes, in the yard. He tells us, that his brother has passed on.

Despite taking the ARV medicine regularly Johannes died after the BIG stopped. His brother explains: "it had to do with the food. He did not have enough to eat."

He recalls: "Johannes was fine. He had recovered with

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the BIG". "With the BIG he bought food, and then had something left which he could spend on what he felt was needed. This is how he lived."

But after the BIG stopped: "The illness weakened Johannes again. He still received his medicine and he took them regularly, but I think", says Clemens, "it had to do with the food. He did not have enough to eat and then he went to the places where they sell the self-brewed beer." The self-brewed beer is cheaper than bread and makes people feel satisfied, but the ARVs can only be taken with food and require a nutritious diet to work. "This is when his sickness became worse." Clemens says.

"When my brother died, my sister was taking care of the children at home, but she also got sick and died



Clemens Goagoseb, 2019

"My responsibility now is to put food on the table for the children. Sometimes it is so hard that we sleep without eating anything, even now there is nothing in this house, I have to make a plan."

followed by my grandfather. They left behind five siblings and I am the only one to look after these children."

When asked, whether the children get child grants, he says: "I do not know about the grants, because my sister who died had handed in those

papers, but in-between she passed on, so I do not know whether they qualify for the money and so far I could not find out.”

“My responsibility now is to put food on the table for the children. Sometimes it is so hard that we sleep without eating anything, even now there is nothing in this house, I have to make a plan. The only way for me is to go poaching and sell that meat to buy porridge and send the children to school. The life is very difficult for us to survive without BIG.”

“Our hope is that the BIG comes back, if there is farm work that is also good, but at the moment I am forced into poaching. People like me are known in the area for poaching, so the farmers do not give work to us. And the farmers talk to each other, if I get work on one farm, then the other



“I am staying with two small children now, so I cannot go and work, and I do not have firewood, so I need to steal firewood from the farms, to prepare at least something.”

is saying: ‘But this is one who steals, why are you giving him work?’ Then I am chased away.”

Clemens continues: “My other problem is, that I am staying with two small children now, so I cannot go and work, and I do not have

firewood, so I need to steal firewood from the farms, to prepare at least something.”

Clemens Goagoseb concludes: “During BIG tenure we never felt the hardship we experience now. Otjivero was developing. We did not pay for water, but now we have to pay for it. With the BIG, we could buy food, but now everything is difficult, there is no income and no money for food, not even for the children.”



“With the BIG, we could buy food, but now everything is difficult, there is no income and no money for food, not even for the children.”

Sella and Alfred !Nuseb

SMALL BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS

"The introduction of the BIG made it possible for me to start my tuck shop. It is a very small business but people support it a lot... I mostly sell sugar, tea, maize meal, sweets and popcorn. We make about N\$ 800 - 1000 per month. I also sell



self-made materials for donkey carts. I buy my stock in Gobabis, travelling on the train" (Alfred !Nuseb 2008)



Ten years later

"Currently things are not well, we want the BIG to come back. Without the BIG, it is difficult to do things." says Sella !Nuses.

"Currently things are not well, we want the BIG to come back. Without the BIG, it is difficult to do things."

Sella and Alfred !Nuseb walk through their yard and show what has changed with the BIG. "So you can

"This is BIG's money!"

see, we moved and built the house and bought furniture", Sella !Nuses says while pointing to the furniture: "This is BIG's money!"

With the tuck shop Alfred !Nuseb explains, that it has become difficult: "Sometimes we try and buy something in Gobabis and try to sell, but it is difficult for businesses. Currently we do not have anything, but we aim to buy stock next week again. But it takes long to sell, while the BIG was here, we continuously sold things and always kept stock. We do not have regular customers any longer, the problem is that now



people do not have money to buy things. Currently it is only the pensioners, who occasionally come to buy something to eat."

Sella !Nuses: "So business really took a downward trend, when the BIG stopped. And this is not what we want, we want to build up something."

"BIG has opened up business opportunities for new projects. So anybody could start his own project and try what works. And this is what people did"

SELLA AND ALFRED !NUSEB

Alfred !Nuseb explains: "BIG has opened up business opportunities for new projects. So anybody could start his own project and try what works. And this is what people did, so you have several people here and there, people who opened their own business projects. But since the BIG stopped those businesses have a hard time. That is why we say BIG needs to come back."

When asked about the Harambee programme Sella !Nuses

"No, we will not get far with Harambee. We need to get money, to be independent, to do own things and projects."



immediately says: "No, we will not get far with Harambee. We need to get money, to be independent, to do own things and projects."

Alfred !Nuseb continues: "You need to get money, then you can do things, everything is about money. It is about what you have in your pocket. If you go anywhere, people

ask you where is your money? So if I

"It is about what you have in your pocket...With food I am stranded here. With the BIG I can go."

go to the road [to go to Gobabis], the driver asks money, but with food I do not get anywhere. With food I am stranded here. With the BIG I can go, the moment I come to the road."

"And petrol prices are rising all the time, so if we get a food donation, we cannot do anything with it, we might as well leave it at home. Just think about it, our children go to school in Gobabis, if we get a food donation what are we going to do?"

"Our children cannot pay for transport with a food donation. But with the BIG, the children can actually go to school. That is the difference!"



Our children cannot pay for transport with a food donation. But with the BIG, the children can actually go to school. That is the difference! Just to get transport to the main road is now N\$50, so we walk our son there. From there it is another N\$30 to Gobabis." As a security guard at the clinic, Alfred !Nuseb says, he cannot progress: "At the clinic I just earn the

same what the elderly get as a pension."

"There are many projects, but one needs money, BIG has made that difference."

Alfred !Nuseb shows a store room
“Here I keep my tools to work on
reins for donkeys and horses. But I
cannot build the quality, I cannot buy
the material I need. I am struggling
to buy strong ropes; with the BIG, I
knew a place in Windhoek where to
get good ropes. And I am also
working on these chairs, but I
need proper wood, that is
what I need the BIG money
for. There are many projects,
but one needs money, BIG
has made that difference.”

“With the BIG, we were able to
save money and we helped
each other by lending each other. It
works like this: When somebody
wants to do something, he links up
with some people, one person here
and one there, each contributes and
lends for this month. And then you
have money to do something. Next

month then the next person collects
money to do something enough to
build his project and move forward.
BIG was a very good concept. Other
people should also get BIG to see
what it can do.”

**With the BIG each person
contributes... “Next month then the
next person collects money to do
something enough to build his project
and move forward. BIG was a very
good concept.”**

Emilia Garises

DRESSMAKER

"I bought new zinc sheets for my house. I still have to put them up. [...] I also bought new blankets and rest well now. [...] We



planted a few vegetables in our garden, such as potatoes and sweet potatoes. We also keep some chicken now and two goats. So far I have sold 18 dresses that I made for N\$ 150 each. I now have a few cents. My sewing machine broke and I will now have to get a new one. I save some money for that. One of my children now attends the Hage Geingob High School in Windhoek and all the other small children in my house attend school now. Things are better now with the money we get here. I have settled all my debt." (Emilia Garises: 2008)



Ten years later

"My business got stuck", Garises explains, "I used to make dresses, which I could sell easily here." But when the local demand dropped, due to the BIG no longer

"I used to make dresses, which I could sell easily here [...] Now I need to put these pieces of cloth together and people from outside buy from me."

being paid, she could not carry on like before. "Now I need to put these pieces of cloth together and people from outside buy from me. They like these quilts made of different pieces." While she tells about how her life has become more difficult, Garises works on a quilt sitting on the bare ground and says: "I still have a lot of work with this quilt, this takes months. I have to carefully work on it, so that I can sell it. But I am going to sell it. If I am only sitting here, what will I get. And at least for this quilt I will get N\$800 for a double bed and N\$200 for a single. Now I am struggling, because the BIG is no longer. So with the quilt I am struggling to buy pap for my children or save something for when I need travel money."

"My question is: How am I going to pay for the water? There is no regular



"Young people have nothing they can do, the ministers are not listening. My house is full of young people, who have no chance to earn an income."

income. I owe already N\$1,000." Garises has built up this debt, since everybody needs to pay for water now in Otjivero. "This is why I am putting these pieces together for this quilt, so that I can contribute something. But it is only me. All the young people are idling, there is no job creation for young people in Otjivero. When government creates

jobs, then these are jobs for people who come from other places, but nothing for Otjivero. Young people have nothing they can do, the ministers are not listening. My house is full of young people who have no chance to earn an income. They all depend on me. I have to provide food for the house, and there are grandchildren as well."

Garises explains what bothers her. Hage Geingob "says that he will remove all corrugated iron houses in Namibia." She points to her corrugated iron house: "Look at my house. I built it with BIG money. The one before, one could not even call it a house, it was only a sleeping place." Now she is afraid that government in a rushed action might destroy her home. "And those brick houses, government builds, with what can we pay for those houses?"



Hage Geingob "says that he will remove all corrugated iron houses in Namibia." She points to her corrugated iron house: "Look at my house. I built it with BIG money."

Garises explains that they were promised to receive Harambee, but so far they do not. And anyway she says, it will not be a solution: "Food is something nice it is something which makes the stomach full, it feels nice, but as an old person, I need to pay also for the clinic. And the children need to go to school, so I need to pay transport money. Like today, they

are about to arrive. So I have to take care that they can go back on Sunday. If I now choose food, where do I get money? Food is nice, but money is better. I choose money."

"Food is nice, but money is better. I choose money."

This is why Garises wants the BIG to come back: "When the BIG was there, there was life. Even my estranged husband came back, when the BIG was there, but now he left again."

Garises, explains that with the BIG money she bought a sewing machine, which is still working. However, she is afraid to move it around, as she is afraid that it might break, since it is old now and so she stitches pieces together by hand.



She asks: "Whereto did you take the BIG, please bring it back. BIG was the best of all. BIG was actually not only N\$100. If you are five people in the household, then that amounts to N\$500. And if there was little money, we gave to the person who urgently needed something. After that we bought food. There was always enough food in the house."

With regards to opposition to BIG, Garises says that many people support BIG, even though they never got it. But she also knows about the arguments against it. "Some people are afraid, BIG would make us lazy, but how can income make you lazy? It is the other way around: BIG pushes you forward but now there is nothing. Bishop Kameeta needs to

bring back the BIG. This was the best.”



“Some people are afraid, BIG would make us lazy, but how can income make you lazy? It is the other way around: BIG pushes you forward but now there is nothing. Bishop Kameeta needs to bring back the BIG. This was the best.”

Aaron and Maria Swartz

LIFE WITH A BIG FAMILY

In 2007 Aaron Swartz and his family of 18 people had been living in a tent in Otjivero, after he was unfairly dismissed as a farm worker.



With the BIG they were able to at build several

corrugated iron houses to life in.



Ten years later

"Thank you, I am fine. We are alive," says Aaron Swartz. The yard looks tidy and there are four extended huts, where the family of 19 people are living currently.

But Maria Swartz explains: "Yes, we are fine, but I really want the BIG to come back. We are all living only from

Maria Swartz says that they now suffer from hunger. "We are all living only from the old-age pension."

the old-age pension". She explains that the children do not get child support grants, as they are struggling to apply for the grants. "During the time of the BIG, I received my BIG money and those of my children and we were able to buy things. The BIG had eradicated poverty!"

"The BIG had eradicated poverty!"

But she says: "Now we even need to pay for water. We appeal to Bishop Kameeta and all pastors to take up the course of BIG again, so that it can come back. BIG needs to bring back our life!"

Maria Swartz stands next to a pile of wood. She openly says that they have to trespass onto the surrounding farms and steal the fire wood.



Maria Swartz, 2019

"When we are caught, we are punished and then the farmer takes us to the police station where we need to clean the yard and then they let us go."

Otherwise they cannot cook. When asked, what happens, when they are caught, she points to a security guard with a whip, who guards the fence on

the adjacent farm. "When we are caught, we are punished and then the farmer takes us to the police

station where we need to clean the
yard and then they let us go.”

Frieda Nembwaya

BAKER AND SHOP OWNER

"After the introduction of the BIG I started my business. I bake traditional bread every day. I bake 100 rolls per day and sell each for one dollar... I



make a profit of about N\$ 400 per month. My business is good and I believe that it will grow. The only problem that I have is the lack of fire wood. It is often hard to get wood. But I made an application for additional help to the government in order to expand my business." (Frieda Nembwaya:2008)



Ten years later

Nembwaya is busy in her bakery. She has built a stone house, which hosts the bakery and a small but well-stocked shop. The bakery is equipped with professional electrical appliances, like two industrial bakery ovens, a kneading machine and racks to store bread and rolls. She buys her stock in Windhoek in bulk, but it is expensive to pay for transport. Nembwaya says: "Somedays the business goes better, somedays slower.

"Today I sold 100 loaves of bread each for N\$10 and about 300 rolls."

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Today I sold 100 loaves of bread each for N\$10 and about 300 rolls." She still sells the rolls for N\$ 1, like ten years ago. She explains that otherwise it would be too expensive for the people of Otjivero to buy rolls, so she rather takes a lower profit share.

Her three oldest children are all studying at the university in Windhoek. "I do not get a pension or have a grandmother who does, so I have to try something myself. My children would also still be in Otjivero, if it was not for the BIG. But with the BIG I got that chance. I am not sleeping much, today I woke up at two in the morning to think and start work. Today I was late with the baking, because the power was out. I am trying, I am not the best person, but I nevertheless try my best. This is what I teach my children as well."



"The BIG was good, this is why I am where I am now. If you have nothing, where can you start?"

"The BIG was good, this is why I am where I am now. If you have nothing, where can you start? Even if you want

to apply for government support for your business, you first need to have something before they even consider your application."

"The BIG must be paid in the whole country, this will change Namibia, we will move out of poverty."

“But now government tells the people they should start something without anything. How can anybody start? What can you do without money in this country? You can do nothing. The BIG is the only solution for a way out of poverty! People need money for water, transport etc. not just food. With the N\$100 you can put up a budget and you can make a plan.”

“The BIG is the only solution for a way out of poverty!”

With reference to the Food Bank, she says: “How can somebody decide for you, what you need. With food, you cannot take a bath, you cannot pay the rent.”



She continues: “We expected from our Minister, that the BIG would be

“We expected from our Minister, that the BIG would be the first thing on the agenda”

the first thing on the agenda, since Kameeta knows all about it.”

“Bishop had promised us not to let us down. But now come and look at the children, you will cry. The children who managed because of the BIG money to complete secondary schools, they have come

back and are sitting here, some have already babies."

"The children who managed because of the BIG money to complete secondary schools, they have come back and are sitting here, some have already babies."

"Nowadays kids are only going to school until Grade 8 then they come back. And you can see, that if the children are here for the weekend, then they only can go back on a Tuesday, because this is the day, when the grandmothers gets her pension."

"Bishop Kameeta has left the people of Otjivero in a bad way. You cannot



"It is like when you promise your children to take them to Gobabis, and instead you dump them in the middle of the road."

leave people in despair. At least you need to say, this is the end. It is like when you promise your children to take them to Gobabis, and instead you dump them in the middle of the road. And then the children wonder, where are our parents now, are they back or are they ahead? Where is our leader, we do not know anymore?

We do not hear anything about BIG anymore.”

Nembwaya says she tried to contact Bishop Kameeta several times: “but, if you try, you are always told he is in a meeting, and you cannot reach him. And it is the same with the BIG Coalition, they only come when there are visitors from a foreign country. Otherwise we do not hear from them anymore. And I am really trying to find out, what is going on,” Nembwaya says.

Nembwaya explains that the people of Otjivero have tried many different approaches in order to get out of poverty. She says: “Do you remember the time when we were given goats by the Germany Embassy. Immediately the press was here and reported how people slaughter the goats, without even



Frieda Nembwaya's bakery, 2019

“People in Otjivero are poor and this is why we are still trampled upon! There is discrimination against poor people from rural areas.”

knowing the background, why people needed to slaughter.”

“Do you know, how difficult it is for me now, since I kept my goats and did not slaughter?” She explains that there is no grazing, since all the farms are fenced off. She had to take her goats more than 100km further

to the other side of Gobabis, to have other people look after them. "And the goats might as well die there. I will not bring them back, because it really did not help anything."

Nembwaya also relates the story about the school hostel, which was built by the German Embassy as well. "It was meant as a community project", she explains, "and the people had hoped that it would create some employment at least for some of the community. But now you have people from outside working there, even the cleaners are sourced from outside." There are many other examples Nembwaya mentions, the water installation, which was contracted to an outside company, or with the allocation for resettlement or even of university bursaries. She sees how people from Otjivero are overlooked. She concludes: "People



"Don't think the government does not know what the BIG can do. The problem is, government does not want people to get up. That is why they shut it down."

in Otjivero are poor and this is why we are still trampled upon! There is discrimination against poor people from rural areas. While they always tell you, one should get up and do

something, but if one does that, one is pushed down again."

Frustrated but defiant Nembwaya says: "This is also what happened

with the 100 dollars of the BIG. If government wanted to, they could teach people what to do with it. But even government knows that this is not the issue. People can handle money and they learn and get used to handling money. Don't think the government does not know what the BIG can do. The problem is, government does not want people to get up. That is why they shut it down."

What next?

At the time of this publication (September 2019), the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare is in the process of finalising Namibia's national social protection policy. The draft policy document in circulation provides a background to social protection in Namibia and an assessment of the current social protection programmes. It outlines the proposed social protection reforms, ranging from a universal maternity grant, universal child and disability grants to employment creation, income security for pensioners, war veterans and people with disabilities, food security, affordable housing etc.

The new draft national social protection policy proposes to introduce a universal child grant (for those between 0 and 17 years of age) and to keep the universal old age pension for those 60 years and older. However, instead of proposing a basic income grant for those between 18 and 59 years of age, the policy envisages an unemployment grant for those between 30 and 59 years of age.

In 2014, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) provided a comprehensive assessment of Namibia's social

protection programmes. It pointed out that the value of child grants is lower than the poverty line and thus will need to be adjusted to have a greater impact on poverty and inequality (2014:93). The Ministry's draft policy states that the universal child grant will be implemented and start with the current value of N\$250 per month. It will then be increased "by about 10% per year to maintain the real value to N\$333 in 2021/22" (SIC) (2019:30).

The ILO further pointed out that Namibia's current universal old age pensions have had the greatest impact on the reduction of poverty and inequality and should be retained as a universal benefit (2014:xiii). The report makes a compelling argument against means-testing as a basis for determining beneficiaries: "Means tests lead to high effective tax rates on the poor and disincentives for retirement savings, as well as to unnecessary and wasteful administrative expenditure because means testing is very difficult to do with any accuracy in a low-income informal environment or becomes very resource-incentive" (ibid:51).

WHAT NEXT?

The ILO regards the monetary values of the old age pension and the disability grant as adequate relative to poverty lines (ibid:93) and this view is shared in the Ministry's draft policy which states that "The universal old age pension in Namibia for all persons aged 60 years and older is a best practice that is rare in the world. The Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey data shows that the old age pension has a significant impact on reducing poverty and its distribution is progressive in absolute terms with more of it going to poorer people than the wealthier ones" (2019:11). The draft policy thus declares that "the universal old age pension and the disability grants should continue in their current forms and the level of adequacy should be sustained" (ibid:4). This is in line with the ILO recommendations and constitutes an important step towards poverty eradication.

The draft policy acknowledges that universal transfers "have the advantage that they are cheaper to administer in a country like Namibia where there is inadequate income and other data as large numbers of people are engaged in informal work or are unemployed. Therefore, this Social Protection Policy takes the approach of universal grant to specific categories of people to address their risks and

vulnerabilities rather than means-testing for income as a qualification criteria. This will eliminate the errors and costs associated with means-testing" (2019:22).

Unfortunately, the draft policy then contradicts itself and proposes a targeted intervention in the form of a so called "Basic income grant for unemployed women and men aged 30 to 59 years old, who shoulder heavy family and child care responsibilities will be implemented to afford them a basic ability to help themselves while restoring their dignity and the impact of the policy will be studied and improved over time" (loc.cit).

This proposal needs to be analysed against the characteristics of the Namibian labour market. The Namibia Statistics Agency's (NSA) Labour Force Survey of 2018 found that the main sectors in terms of employment are agriculture, fishing and forestry (accounting for 23% of the employed), followed by accommodation and food services (11.4%), wholesale and retail trade (11.1%), private households (9.9%), education (6.5%) and construction (6.2%). More than half of all employed persons are employees (55.4%) while 13.9% are own

WHAT NEXT?

account workers and 13% are subsistence farmers (NSA 2019:59-61).

The NSA survey points out that 31.6% of all employed persons are vulnerable and are faced by precarious working conditions. These include the subsistence farmers, own account workers and contributing family workers (ibid: 72). However, vulnerability even reaches a significant part of those classified as employees. Over half of them are on permanent contracts (53.8%) while 32.7% are on “unspecified duration contracts” and 13.5% are on “limited duration employment contracts”. Only 39.3% receive paid annual leave while 36.9% receive paid sick leave (ibid: 64-65).

Formal employment is defined by some form of social protection (pension scheme, medical aid or social security) but in the Namibian case, 57.7% of the employed population are not covered by social protection and are thus in informal employment. The highest levels of informal employment are found in private households (91%), agriculture, forestry and fishing (87.6%), accommodation and food services (68.6%) and construction (65.3%) (ibid:69-71).

The high levels of precariousness in the Namibian labour market are confirmed by a closer analysis of sectors of employment and average monthly incomes. As pointed out above, agriculture, forestry and fishing, accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade, private households and construction combined account for the majority of the employed (61.8%). Employees in these sectors earn far below the national average of N\$ 7935 per month, namely N\$ 3393 in agriculture, forestry and fishing; N\$ 2819 in accommodation and food services; N\$ 4019 in wholesale and retail; N\$ 5441 in construction and N\$ 1387 in private households (ibid:67-68).

Another important aspect to consider is that the average monthly wages are lowest for young employees who have average monthly incomes of only N\$ 1113 when they are between 15 and 19 years of age. Those between 20 and 24 years of age earn N\$ 2507 and those between 25 and 29 years of age earn an average of N\$ 5188 per month (ibid:61).

These figures put the proposed unemployment grant for those in the age group 30-59 years into perspective. Key

WHAT NEXT?

issues to consider are that firstly, vulnerability extends deep into the Namibian labour market and affects even the majority of so-called employed persons in terms of a lack of social protection and a lack of predictability in terms of incomes. Secondly, many employed Namibians experience low wages while at the same time wages are the main source of income in almost half of all Namibian households. Thirdly, unemployment affects young people the most. In the age group 15-19 years it stands at 69.9%; amongst those 20-24 years of age it stands at 57% and amongst those 25-29 years of age it stands at 42.3% compared to the overall unemployment rate of 33.4%. The Ministry's draft policy proposes to exclude the age groups most affected by unemployment from the proposed unemployment benefit which seems arbitrary and without a social justification.

The Ministry's proposed unemployment grant will not close the social protection gap identified in the policy because it relies on targeting and is extremely difficult to implement. Given the nature of employment in Namibia and the resulting difficulties in determining the intended beneficiaries as well as the costly administrative procedures to implement a targeted unemployment grant,

it seems more efficient to introduce a universal basic income grant for those between 18 and 59 years of age. This would avoid targeting and social stigmatisation and possibly tensions amongst those included or excluded.

A universal BIG would close the gaps in Namibia's social protection system and hopefully the voices from Otjivero will remind government about the importance of introducing the BIG now. When Government's NAMTAX commission first proposed the BIG in 2002, it pointed out that the reduction of Namibia's income inequality is not only a justice issue, but a prerequisite for economic growth. Therefore, the introduction of a Basic Income Grant was and still is a matter of urgency.

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Interviews

The interviews were conducted in January and February 2019 in Otjivero ten years after the research on the BIG pilot was completed.

All participants gave written consent to publish the interviews and photos.

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