

# 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 different [election] manifestos, they do not address the question of how they will make sure Namibian children eat something every day. Meanwhile, the voters will be standing in long lines to vote – many of them with an empty stomach, and some may even faint because of hunger while standing in those lines," Kameeta said.

He also said that addressing these issues needed to be real, and not simply election promises.

"I was an MP, and I've participated in elections. And I know that when the campaigning starts, politicians are thinking of the salaries they could earn if they get so many votes," instead of on the policies and laws they would implement to address real issues.

He said political parties had to directly address issues of poverty. "The poor are not concerned about capitalism, or socialism, or what-ism. They are concerned about food insecurity!"

Kameeta didn't stop at the parties; he also hit out



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.

at Government for failing the poor.

"Poverty is a scandal in Namibia – this beautiful land of the brave, in which we boast we are rich, and where the population is only two million. It is a scandal for Namibia and humanity, that many people – and even some who are sitting here tonight – will go to bed without eating," he said.

## FUTILE EXERCISE

He questioned why Namibians should go to bed on a hungry stomach, while millions of dollars are being produced from Namibia's mineral resources, and then being shipped out the country.

"With so many mineral resources, how much monetary value is being removed? I believe that even one uranium mine can pay the cost of the BIG. We can dedicate one uranium mine in the country towards paying off the BIG, instead of taking huge profits," he said.

He also said poverty had

to be dealt with head-on.

"If you have three houses – A, B, and C – and House C is on fire, and when the fire brigade arrives it tries to extinguish the fire from House A, what would you think of this fire brigade? I think that the first thought would be to send them to a mental hospital! I mean, if they're going to extinguish the fire, they need to stand directly in front of it."

In this vein, he said that Government could not expect poverty to be addressed through the pockets of investors, here to make a profit.

"If you are thinking that investors from outside will address poverty, it is a futile exercise because they are money-makers, not social workers," he said.

He added that while Namibia was aspiring to be like certain rich countries, it was missing the point that "those countries are rich because they make sure that the overwhelming majority of their people have enough".

"As long as almost 80 per cent of Namibians re-

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."

Kameeta said the only thing lacking in addressing Namibia's high poverty rates was the political will. "The budget will not run out!" he stated, noting that the implementation of the BIG would cost around five per cent of the national budget with a multiplier effect in terms of people doing for themselves.

"Bring the budget here and I will show you, because that budget in my hands will multiply," Kameeta said to roaring applause, while juxtaposing this statement with the Biblical story of the feeding of the 5 000.

He said that the problem in Namibia is selfishness and greed, and called for "a change of heart, mind and attitude", as well as the immediate implementation of the grant.

"If the whole of Namibia just stopped to embrace the spirit of sharing, no one would go poor. It's not just about sharing that N\$100, but about sharing what we have," he concluded.

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Vol 24  
NO. 220