

SPEECH AT THE OCCASION OF CAFO JOINING THE BIG

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(Dr Henry G Platt: Executive Director of the Church Alliance for Orphans: CAFO)

The CAFO Board of Trustees, a body that was started by the CCN in 2002, has decided to join the Basic Income Grant. CAFO, an umbrella organization of more than 500 faith-based organizations, provides services to orphans and vulnerable children throughout the country, in all 13 regions. Just this year alone, it has served about 13,000 OVC with different services in difficult situations.

CAFO has decided to join the BIG Coalition, as we believe that poverty is of the root causes of vulnerability.

In a report by the World health organization, it is stated that “Namibia is a lower middle-income country with perennial food deficits, recurring droughts, high rates of malnutrition and the sixth-highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the world.

The income disparity is marked with a Gini coefficient of 0.604. More than half the population lives on less than US\$2 per day.

Even in good years, access to adequate food for marginalized and vulnerable populations remains a constant challenge contributing to the current, unacceptable levels of malnutrition.

The national HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is about 17.7 percent; the pandemic has contributed to a rapidly growing number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC).

In many areas where OVC live, chronic food insecurity is a fact of life. 24% of children under five are underweight, and 9% are wasted.”¹

It speaks for itself that something very seriously should be done nationally to make a difference in the conditions of most of Namibia’s OVCs. We cannot just offer services to a part of Namibia’s OVCs: we need to reach them all, through education, psychosocial support, food and nutrition, to name but a few of core critical services to OVCs.

¹ A Report of the World Health Organization: <http://www.wfp.org/countries/namibia>

We are confident that BIG provides an answer to this national crisis of poverty and unemployment, which in turn, affects the daily lives of orphans and vulnerable children. Indeed, we agree with the BIG Coalition that we need to restore the human dignity of people to become proud members of a society. The BIG project delivered results that proof that people's lives can be changed for the better, addressing unemployment, hunger and poverty.

To be sure, BIG has proved that child malnutrition can be reduced dramatically (in six months from 42% of underweight children in November 2007 to 17% in June 2008 and 10% in November 2008).² Furthermore, the BIG project showed that school attendance has increased, school drop-out rates decreased, increase of school fees, purchasing of school uniforms, to name but a few.

For us, BIG speaks the language of faith; it speaks the language of care and support; it demonstrates the burden to care as a spontaneous response. Indeed, BIG is a modern day portrayal of the Good Samaritan. And the question is: do we have other options that are just as effective as BIG? The answer is undoubtedly NO!

We call on the Government and the citizens of our country, especially to people of faith, to support this initiative.

We have come to join BIG. CAFO speaks on behalf of its membership of more than 500 churches and faith-based organizations.

We believe that this is part of a national solution (plan) to secure a better tomorrow for Namibia's children.

I thank you.

² *Making a Difference! The BIG in Namibia*, Basic income Grant Pilot Project Assessment Report, April 2009, 14-14.