



**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
EVANGELIES LUTHERSE KERK IN DIE REPUBLIEK VAN NAMIBIË**

!Gâi=hôa Kerkib Lutheri dîb Namibiab Ina - Ongerki jEvangeli ja Luther mu Namibia

Office of the Bishop

* 5069 Windhoek — (+264 (61) 224531/2/3 — 7 +264 (61) 226775 — E-mail: bishop@elcmam.org

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Pilot Project Otjivero-Omitara, 15 February 2008*

**“I am now convinced that the time is right to
address poverty head on – AND GIVE US
TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD”**

Dear Otjivero and Omitara community, dear honourable Dr. Hage Geingob, dear brothers and sisters, all protocol observed,

It is indeed my great honour to deliver this address in the name of Bishop Dr. Z. Kameeta to you today. Bishop's good wishes and prayers are with us at this joyful occasion, but unfortunately he had to be in Batam, Indonesia, and therefore has asked me to deliver this message to you on his behalf:

It has indeed been a long way, truly the Basic Income Grant Coalition and this pilot project have come a long way! As tall as this tree is high - from the roots to the top of the tree. When you look at this picture, you see the same picture, which is printed on the front of the smart cards given out for the Basic Income Grant payout today.

For the benefit of all the invited guest, who are not yet 100% familiar with the Basic Income Grant pilot project. Let me shortly summarize:

The proposal for a Basic Income Grant in Namibia was made in 2002 by the government appointed Namibian Tax Consortium (NAMTAX). The consortium made the proposal for a Basic Income Grant in light of the high poverty levels and the unequal distribution of income in Namibia. This policy proposal calls for the introduction of a monthly cash grant of not less than N\$100, which should be paid to every Namibian citizen as a citizen's right. Every Namibian should receive such a grant until pension age from where onwards he/she is eligible to the existing universal State Old Age Pension of N\$370. The money of people not in need or not in poverty will be recuperated through adjustments in the tax system.

We in Basic Income Grant Coalition, which comprises all Churches in the Council of Churches, the umbrella body of the NGOs (NANGOF), the umbrella body of the AIDS organisations (NANASO), the Union Federation (NUNW), the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) and the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) have joined forces to advocate for the introduction of the Basic Income

Grant in Namibia.

We are so much convinced that the Basic Income Grant will work that we initiated this Pilot Project together with the community of Otjivero-Omitara. This pilot project is accompanied by ongoing academic research to precisely show and document the effects of a Basic Income Grant towards poverty alleviation and economic empowerment. We are proud to say that this is worldwide the first ever Pilot Project of a Basic Income.

The social background to this initiative is one, which needs not many words - look around you and meet the people here in Otjivero. I just would like to draw our attention to some facts and figures, which we should be aware of, if we say we want to “uproot poverty”. Those figures show how strong the roots of poverty and inequality are not only here but in our whole society:

- | From 2000, the official unemployment rate has increased from 33.8% to 36.7% in 2004. For young women of 15-19 years of age, the national average unemployment rate is as high as 70.2% (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 2005).
- | The latest UNICEF report finds: *“24% of the country's under-five-year-olds were stunted (had low weight for height ratio) in 2000. In 2006, this figure increased to 30 %, meaning that about one in three children [sic!] in this age group were not getting adequate nutrition and care to ensure proper growth and development”* UNICEF concludes: *“In Namibia, child survival is a critical issue as many developmental gains made in the first decade since the country's independence are being reversed.”* (UNICEF, 2008)
- | Namibia holds the sad record of being among the most unequal country in the world (UNDP, 2004). So there is extreme wealth next to extreme poverty.

We all know, where this inequality is coming from, it is a legacy of years of colonialism and apartheid. Mass poverty is not a phenomenon, which people endure out of their free will and out of their own making! Human beings living under bridges, searching in dumps for their daily bread, or hunting with their bare hands are not doing so by choice, but are forced to resort to such actions by an unjust economic order that prevents them from making a living in a dignified way. A solution must thus address the structural injustices, which perpetuate the ever-increasing unemployment and poverty rates. The trend throughout the years shows that unemployment is rising, inequality is increasing and poverty is worsening.

What do we have to say, against this background? I want to tell you today that **I am convinced that the time is right to address poverty head on now!** And since I am a church person allow me to do this with the few but all inclusive words of our LORD'S Prayer: AND GIVE US TODAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

AND GIVE – This is not a beggar asking and it does not make you a beggar to ask for the means of your daily bread! But it lifts up the person who says it, who asks and knows it is his or her right. It is your right, it is our right to have what is necessary to live on. It is a right to have a Basic Income.

GIVE US – It is **“us”** NOT **“me”** or **“you”**, it is the community, it is all inclusive, therefore it has to be a universal Basic Income Grant, meant for all.

TODAY – The 'Today' humbles all those of us, who are storing their wealth in store houses, banks etc. it should humble to share, which the Basic Income Grant will do, through redistributing justly from the rich to the poor.

OUR DAILY BREAD – The daily bread is all inclusive: physically – the millie meal, the cooking oil, the vegetables, the clean drinking water; spiritually – the education, the security to speak freely without fear of favour; psychological – the security that there is daily bread, rather than the fear of having to zula for the next day. The right to a God given life includes the right to the means to live a healthy life. The daily bread is not a cherry on the cake for some, who got rich because they were born on the lucky side of life. The daily bread is not a privilege, but it is a God given right!

I am convinced that the time is right to address poverty head on now! The Basic Income Grant Pilot Project is a modest start, but a true sign of the daily bread, to you, to the community, to all of us in Namibia!

I know, that there are people, who do not want to let go of the past and try to justify their vested interests by all means. These are not new people nor is their rhetoric new. I am not surprised that when we address poverty head on, we are confronted with the same old stereotypes. When the bottle store owner has the audacity to complain in the newspapers that the people are drinking the money (just unfortunately for him not at his store) – than this is nothing new but old stereotypes trying to enforce vested business interests.

I am not downplaying the problem of alcohol abuse across all racelines and all income groupings in our society, but it is not a problem confined to poor people. And the reverse to imply that all poor people are drunkards is an insult! Where people are suffering from alcoholism, let us be specific and let us help each other.

Therefore, because we know how easily old stereotypes are repeated, we aim to be specific and academically sound and use the research results in the assessment of the project's success. . Let our level of debate not be dominated by repeating old stereotypes, because this community and this pilot project does not deserve the cynicism nor contempt of such utterances. If anyone has contempt for this programme then start with your contempt with us pastors, because I pray everyday, AND GIVE US AND OUR COMMUNITY OUR BREAD TODAY. And I know that I pray that together with thousands of parents, who are praying that every morning in Namibia with their children, I pray that knowing that my Bishop is praying this now in Indonesia with fellow Christians all over the world. Leave your contempt and join us, you are also part of our community!

I am convinced that the time is right to address poverty head on now! - and if anything ever let me doubt that, the joy of the first payout in January in Otjivero taught me a lesson. It was wonderful to see the dignity in people's eyes, when the people of Otjivero for the first time worldwide were empowered by their first Basic Income Grant ever. You here in Otjivero and Omitara taught me and us, just to name but a few examples

- | You taught us, when you went and bought the millie meal as the first decent meal for the children in a long time,
- | You taught us, when you went to pay the school fees for your children. So much that the principal of the school went on record to say, that for this year there will be enough money to buy toner and paper, since more than double the number of parents paid.
- | You taught us, when you and your committee went around to assist the neighbours in how to wisely use and invest the money.
- | You taught us, when in addition to the 6 shebeens, which have been here and also sell basic food items, two new business saw the light of day, they started their business and

deliberately do not sell any alcohol.

Now, there is no longer a monopoly of one shop in the former white town. **I am convinced that the time is right to address poverty head on now!** It is the right time that the people of Otjivero can make consumer choices with their Basic Income Grant and part take in the economy both through spending money wisely as well as building businesses.

I am convinced that the time is right to address poverty head on now! And I have seen that the people of Otjivero have taken the first step, let the rest of us in Namibia follow! Allow me to read to you invited guest out of the preamble of the Otjivero Basic Income Grant Committee, the goals that were not written by a development organisation , but Mr. Eigowab and his team:

“The BIG project is unique. If we mess up; the whole Namibia will fail and Africa will be seen as a disaster.

The BIG project MUST succeed; not for Omitara only, but as we see it, the world will succeed.

a)This project is tested at Omitara, while the eyes of the world are focussed on it.

b)It 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.”

Namibia is truly different already today, not because of us, but because of you here in the small settlement of Otjivero-Omitara.

I call on the churches, the NGOs, the Unions, yes, the Namibian nation to follow this example and become stake-holders and contribute to this project. Let us take ownership and walk with the Otjivero-Omitara community the way of the logical conclusion of this project. Let our support be shown in the financial contributions to this project. As Dr. Geingob said at the launch of the BIG Pilot Project – Let us walk the talk!

When we look at the tree here, our way ahead is not a pie in the sky, but reachable:

It will depend on you here in Otjivero-Omitara to have the perseverance and don't be discouraged. Sit together, talk to each other, pray and work, for **I am convinced that the time is right to address poverty head on now.** You are spearheading the pilot project and you can make a difference for your life, your children's lives and as you say for the whole of Namibia!

And it depends on us Namibians, to see how long it takes us to get the Basic Income Grant implemented nation wide. It depends on how much we in the other communities support it and speak to the government and implement it together. We have leaders, who led us into independence and who are here with us today in Otjivero! **Let us face poverty head on now!**

For I am convinced that now is the time Martin Luther King said 41 years – and let us make sure, we as Namibian nation do not wait as long, and let me quote this visionary leader now again when he said in 1967

“I am now convinced that the simplest approach will prove the most effective – the solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income (Martin Luther King Jr - 1967)”

I thank you!

delivered by Deputy Bishop P.H. Kisting on behalf of Bishop Dr. Z. Kameeta