

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



Keynote Address

By

**His Excellency Dr. Hage G. Geingob,
President of the Republic of Namibia**

At

**The Official Launch of Food Distribution in the Erongo Region and
Conclusion of Food Bank roll-out to all Fourteen Regions of
Namibia**

Swakopmund Multipurpose Centre, Erongo Region

21 October 2019

Check against delivery

- **Director of proceedings;**
- **Comrade Nangolo Mbumba, Vice President of the Republic of Namibia;**
- **The Right Honourable Saara Kuugongelwa – Amadhila, Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia;**
- **Bishop Emeritus Zephania Kameeta, Minister of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare;**
- **All Cabinet Ministers present;**
- **Reverend Aino Kapewangolo, Deputy Minister of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare**
- **All Deputy Ministers present;**
- **Honourable Cleophas Mutjavikua, Governor of the Erongo Region;**
- **Ambassador Angel Dalmau, Food Bank Technical Advisor;**
- **Captains of Industries;**
- **Distinguished invited guests;**
- **Members of the media;**
- **Ladies and gentlemen.**

During my inaugural State of the Nation Address, I shared a goal with the nation, stating that, “In the Namibian House, no child should go hungry. I am committed to the introduction of a Food Bank.” I declared in that same speech, all-out war against poverty and inequality. The Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Warfare was subsequently established, to spearhead the coordinated Government approach to arrest and eradicate poverty. I have reiterated from the onset that poverty is multi-dimensional and will require a multi-faceted approach to be effectively eradicated. Some of the dimensions of poverty include hunger, lack of shelter and sanitation, access to education and health services.

Programme Director,

The Food Bank represents one of several strategies aimed at eradicating poverty in Namibia and today, our objective of arresting hunger poverty is closer to being realized in all 14 regions of our country. It is for this reason I stand before you with a great sense of pride, as we mark a pivotal moment in our quest to eradicating extreme poverty in Namibia by 2025. Today is an emphatic demonstration of Government's commitment to ensuring no one dies of hunger in the Namibian House.

By declaring all-out war against poverty in March 2015, Namibia joined the World in the call to eradicate extreme poverty by the year 2030, a target we have vowed to reach, 5 years ahead of time. We are making headway in this regard. The latest Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey (NHIES) 2015/2016 Report from the National Statistics Agency (NSA), reveals further

reduction in poverty levels between 2010-2015. Extreme poverty shrunk from 15.4 percent to 10.7 percent over the same period. Equally, the food poverty line has been reduced from 7.2 percent to 6.1 percent, between 2009/10 and 2015/16 respectively.

Statistics further reveal that inequality in the distribution of income and wealth (Gini Coefficient) decreased from 0.58 to 0.56. Despite this decline, we acknowledge that disparities in the income and wealth of Namibians remain unacceptably, among the highest in the world. The fact that we are reducing inequality, albeit marginally, should encourage us to redouble efforts and remain committed to the cause.

A factor that has played a significant role in the reduction of poverty in Namibia is the provision of social assistance to vulnerable Namibians. The Government has implemented Social Safety Net Programmes such as the Old Age Social Grant; the Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) grant; the Disability grant; School Feeding Programmes; Emergency Relief; grants for Veterans and Development Programmes for Marginalized communities. The leitmotif is clear - to improve the living conditions of our people.

I have to single out the old age social grant that reaches 182,195 pensioners and the disability grant that reaches 44,172 Namibians. Both have been effective in reducing child poverty and income inequality. Without doubt, the increment of the old age social grant from N\$600 to N\$1,300 in less

than five years is something we ought to be proud of.

In our quest to further improve the impact of social safety nets in the eradication of poverty, the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare was tasked, under Social Progression Pillar of the Harambee Prosperity Plan, to investigate the feasibility of consolidating the plethora of social grants into a more effective safety net. Following consultations with an array of stakeholders, including a core team of social protection experts from various Government Offices, Ministries and Agencies, the Ministry, with assistance from the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), embarked on a process of reforming Namibia's social protection system. A proposed reform is the development of a National Social Protection Policy, which seeks to ensure dignified life for all

Namibians, by addressing risks and vulnerabilities experienced by:

- **Mothers at childbirth;**
- **Children as they grow and learn;**
- **Young people seeking skills and employment;**
- **Women in need of equal opportunities and better income;**
- **Men in their quest for decent income in their working lives;**
- **Persons with disability struggling to work or learn;**
- **Children and adults with insufficient diet;**
- **Marginalized people facing extreme poverty, illiteracy and lack of income; and**
- **Elderly persons facing risks of low income in old age.**

This Policy is at an advanced stage and expected to be tabled in Cabinet and Parliament before the end of the current financial year.

Programme Director,

A distinction is drawn, under the social progression pillar of the Harambee Prosperity Plan, between the rural and urban poor. The rural households have been and continue to be supported through rural development initiatives, that center on improved food security and agricultural productivity.

Traditional support to small-scale farmers such as subsidized inputs, implements and ploughing services, has been supplemented with Drought

Relief aide. Adverse weather conditions compounded by Climate Change, present an agricultural sustainability challenge that requires proactive strategies to boost climate resilience and crop adaptation. Thankfully, rainfall has been recorded in some parts of the country and we anticipate the restoration of the rainfall cycle, to revive food production.

The Food Bank is therefore one of the main strategies to address hunger in urban and peri-urban households that are exposed to the immediate risk of starvation and under-nourishment. It is this predicament, faced by the urban and peri-urban poor that led Government to develop a food assistance programme in the form of a Food Bank.

Among the most vulnerable members of our society, are homeless men, women and children, who live and work on the streets, with no shelter, pot or pan. It is my expectation that the National Social Protection Policy will make necessary provisions to respond to this rising challenge to ensure no Namibian dies of hunger.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Food Bank is also geared to restoring the dignity of disenfranchised youth through the 'food for work' opportunities. It was disheartening, when I personally witnessed the helplessness of some youth in a suburb in Windhoek.

Having witnessed on a drive, one Sunday afternoon after church, the despondency of these young

people, I had a moment of inspiration, drawing from the experience of our fraternal brothers and sisters from Cuba. While on a State Visit to Cuba in 2015, I approached then President Raúl Castro Ruz, outlining my vision for the establishment of food banks in Namibia. I requested for the provision of technical support to replicate the tried, tested and successful Cuban concept of Street Committees, for the Namibian Food Bank Programme.

We received a positive reply to our call for technical support and in a typical gesture of solidarity, Cuba offered us the services of an old and trusted friend of Namibia, the first Cuban Ambassador to Namibia, Comrade Angel Dalmau Fernandez, to serve as the Food Bank technical advisor. Comrade Dalmau commenced in February 2016, the process of identifying and training young

people, equipping them with the necessary knowledge to make a positive contribution towards the implementation of the Food Bank Programme. As a result of his sterling work and that of the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare under the dedicated leadership of Bishop (emeritus) Zephania Kameeta; I was able to officiate the launch of the first ever food bank in Namibia, on 30 June 2016.

The launch was followed by a pilot in seven constituencies of the Khomas region, namely: Tobias Hainyeko, Samora Machel, John Pandeni, Katutura Central, Katutura East, Khomasdal and Moses Garoeb.

Upon completion of the Khomas pilot, an assessment was conducted, with objective to inform Government's approach in rolling out the

food bank programme to the rest of the country and to review effectiveness of the eligibility criteria, in selecting those truly needy beneficiaries given the current strenuous fiscal condition.

Findings were followed up by revised internal processes, which demonstrated readiness to roll-out the food bank. Today, as we launch in Erongo, to complete the countrywide roll-out, the food bank programme is benefiting 10,100 households and employing 383 young Namibians across the fourteen regions of the country. Testimonies from beneficiaries confirm that the programme provides much needed aid where it matters most.

I am pleased the Cuban concept of street committees has been successfully incorporated into the programme. I am of the view that the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare

together with key stakeholders, should leverage fully the Cuban experience of street committees, by expanding the duties of street committees to other social activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To attain victory against poverty and inequalities, we need to fight collectively and pull in the same direction. I renew my call to farmers and the business community to be part of this noble undertaking. We have an obligation to ensure, no child dies of hunger or goes to bed hungry in the Namibian House.

At this juncture, let me thank those Namibians who have already joined hands by making monetary and

in-kind donations, either through the Office of the Prime Minister or the line Ministry.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The road to success is riddled with challenges. However, challenges should be seen as opportunities for growth, and not limitations. The success of the Food Bank initiative, an idea scoffed by many at inception, is proof that many of the limits we face in life, are self-imposed.

I thank most sincerely the efforts of Namibians from all sectors and the solidarity of our Cuban brothers and sisters. Together we have demonstrated that when we hold hands and cast off all doubts and limitations, we can achieve beyond expectations. Today, we take a step closer

to arresting hunger poverty. Today, we have taken a giant step forward in our march to eradicate poverty.

Let us leverage the energy and momentum spurred by this historic moment, to complete the task at hand and bring the promise of inclusive growth and shared prosperity to all Namibians.

I thank you.