



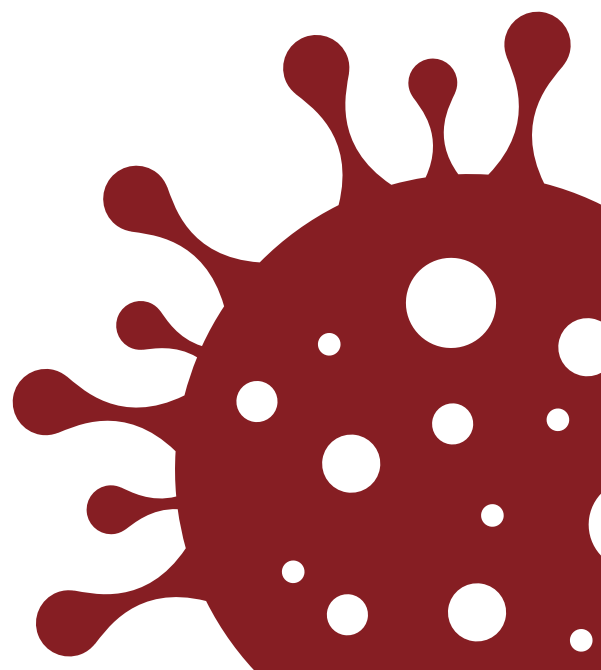
**STUDIES IN POVERTY AND
INEQUALITY INSTITUTE**

OSISA/SPII BIG NAMIBIA (BIGNAM) PROJECT

Evaluation of the Namibia Basic Income Grant (BIG) process and the implementation of an Emergency Income Grant (EIG) in the context of social protection responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIG	Basic Income Grant
Covid-19	Coronavirus disease
CS	Civil society
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DO	Development organisations
EIG	Emergency Income Grant
FPG	Foster Parent Grant
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRN	Government
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
n/a	Not applicable
NAMTAX Commission	Namibian Taxation Commission
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OAP	Old age pension
OSISA	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa
RCSN	Red Cross Society of Namibia
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SPII	Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute
TOR	Terms of reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank all the interviewees for their time during a challenging period. The report was undertaken during the Christmas break. While this is a challenging time to contact interviewees, many agreed to make themselves available. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic demanded that most of the engagements be remote. Interviewees kindly agreed to this modality. The authors are therefore grateful for these additional accommodations that interviewees granted us in undertaking this endeavour. Lastly, the authors would like to thank SPII for offering them the opportunity to research the BIG concept in Namibia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Basic Income Grant (BIG) is a periodic cash transfer made unconditionally to all individuals. While interpretations of its meaning and the way to implement it remain contested, this concept seems to be receiving increased international attention.

In Namibia, the process started in the early 2000s with the formation of the BIG Coalition, and peaked in 2008 with the implementation of the BIG pilot in Otjivero. After facing adverse reactions within government, the BIG concept gained ground again in 2015, with the appointment of the BIG Coalition chair as the first Minister of Poverty Eradication. However, the BIG was not implemented during his tenure, and the momentum seemed to fade. In 2020, a revival of the coalition, and the implementation of an Emergency Income Grant (EIG) in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, seemed to reactivate the discussion. The likelihood of a national implementation of a modified BIG appears to be on the cards.

The report is based on critical reflections by civil society, government, and development organisations on the BIG process and concept in Namibia. The report does not document the BIG process extensively, nor does it delve into the debates on the concept of the BIG. Instead, it presents critical reflections on the process so far, on the likelihood of implementation, and on the significance of the roll-out of the EIG in this context.

The report finds that government and international development agencies understood the BIG as a measure targeting a specific sector. It is only civil society that understood the BIG as a universal measure.

The report finds that government recognises the benefits of social protection in the country but, at the same time, does not see this as the only measure to address the national economic situation. In the context of an increasingly difficult local economic situation, the likelihood of implementing a BIG in a non-universal – and potentially incremental – form, appears to rely on consolidation of existing social protection measures.

The report still finds considerable divergences in the views on the BIG. While government and development organisations see it as an additional expenditure in the category of social protection, civil society sees increased potential of a BIG in the context of the current economic crisis as a bottom-up stimulus to the national economy.

The report finds that government interventions appear to have learned from the BIG process as they implemented relief measures such as the EIG in the context of the responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report also shows evidence that there is increasing acceptance of direct cash transfers as a development measure.

This report is relevant in the context of discussions on social protection in Namibia, which is considered as not only one of the most comprehensive on the continent, but also as the most direct way in which government addresses poverty and inequality in the country.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII) in the context of a broader partnership with the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA). The aim of this broader partnership is to enable a regional dialogue and synergies on the BIG as one of the themes. This study therefore aims to contribute to this objective with the latest discussions and events from the Namibian front.

The BIG “is a periodic cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement”¹. Historically, the idea dates back centuries, but only in the 20th century did the concept gain traction. In Namibia, the BIG was first discussed in the public sector in 2002, when the Namibian government’s Taxation Commission (NAMTAX) proposed a universal grant to stimulate the country’s economic development. A coalition was formed, and in 2008, a pilot was implemented in Otjivero/Omitara, a small settlement of about 1 200 inhabitants in the central-eastern area of the country. The results were positive, and the pilot received considerable attention internationally. Since the government had been engaged throughout the process, there were hopes that the BIG would eventually be implemented nationwide. The momentum reached a climax when one of the politicians who openly supported the BIG idea became president in 2015, and appointed the chair of the BIG Coalition as the first Minister of Poverty Eradication. However, the implementation did not take place during his administration, and he eventually stepped down in 2020. In the same year, the BIG Coalition was “re-launched”, as it had become effectively dormant. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Namibia, the government launched an EIG, which was praised as an efficient relief measure in the context of this crisis. It signalled the government’s trust in direct cash transfers as a development measure. While hopes about the implementation of a BIG in this context were shared by some members of the BIG Coalition, the likelihood of an implementation of the BIG remains unclear.

Despite Namibia being considered an “upper-middle-income country”², it remains among the most unequal countries in the world. Its social protection system³ is considered “one of the most comprehensive in Africa”⁴, its cost representing 4.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Some have observed that Namibia’s social protection system, together with that of South Africa, is primarily age-based, while low-income countries in the other regions within sub-Saharan Africa have a less comprehensive mix of poverty-based measures⁵. Social protection in Namibia is considered to be the government’s “most effective direct mechanism for reducing poverty and inequality”⁶. But the prospects of expanding this system are dim in view of an increasingly difficult economic situation.

This report does not aim to duplicate any of the data contained in the BIG assessment report⁷ or the grassroots experiences that the 2019 report documented, 10 years after the pilot⁸. Instead, it focuses on presenting a critical reflection on the BIG process in Namibia, based on accounts of civil society, including members, supporters and beneficiaries of the BIG process; government; and development organisations (DO). For the purpose of this report, a short timeline of events is presented in the following section, but readers are encouraged to refer to the existing literature for documentation of the BIG process in Namibia (see Section 7). The report finds that government appears to have learned from the BIG process as it implements measures such as the EIG in the context of its responses to the Covid-19 crisis; the increased acceptance of direct cash transfers as a development measure; and through the drive to consolidate and expand social protection systems in the context of a contracting economy.

¹See: <https://basicincome.org/>

²See: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/namibia/overview>

³Social protection grants in Namibia include primarily an old age pension, child maintenance grants, disability grants, and grants to veterans of the liberation struggle; other measures include social housing, school feeding programmes, grants to marginalised communities, and a recently established “Food Bank”.

⁴Schade, K., La, J., & Pick, A. (2019). Financing social protection in Namibia (OECD Development Policy Papers). OECD. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/financing-social-protection-in-namibia_6957c65a-en

⁵Niño-Zarazúa, M., Barrientos, A., Hickey, S., & Hulme, D. (2012). Social protection in Sub-Saharan Africa: getting the politics right. *World Development*, 40(1), 163–176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2011.04.004>

⁶Ibid.

⁷BIG Coalition (Ed.). (2009). Making the difference! The BIG in Namibia: Basic Income Grant pilot project assessment report, April 2009. NANGOF. http://bignam.org/Publications/BIG_Assessment_report_08b.pdf

⁸Haarmann, C., Haarmann, D., & Jauch, H. (2019). Basic Income Grant. Otjivero, Namibia – 10 years later. Economic and Social Justice Trust. http://bignam.org/Publications/BIG_ten_years_later_report_2019.pdf

The report presents the strategy to implement the assignment (Section 2), and key socioeconomic indicators for the reader to familiarise herself with the Namibian context (Section 3). This is followed by a summary of the interviews conducted (Section 4).

The main contribution of this report (Section 5) lies in a critical synthesis of the accounts obtained. It includes critical observations by each actor, a section identifying convergences and divergences in the accounts obtained. It concludes with a reflection on the relevance of the EIG in the context of Covid-19 responses, and the emergence of direct cash transfers as a tool to implement development and relief measures.

The conclusions (Section 6) present a critical reflection on the significance of the information gathered for the BIG process in Namibia.

2. STRATEGY

The Terms of Reference (TOR) outlined three sections to be covered by the respondents in this study. The rationale for the selection of interviewees is as follows:

1. **Civil society:** Members of the churches, labour movement, women's groups, youth activists, and rural organisers that were part of the BIG Coalition, supporters, and beneficiaries.
2. **Government:** Government officials and representatives.
3. **Development organisations (DO):** Members of a global institutional network with a presence and operations in Namibia.

As the interviews were a requirement as per the TOR, we sought to triangulate some of this information with a systematic review of newspaper articles.

Although the project was indeed implemented locally, the majority of the interviews were conducted electronically due to Covid-19.

The schedule of questions for engaging the interviewees comprised an introduction, and two sections focused on the BIG process and experiences regarding the EIG implementation. The key objective was to prompt a critical reflection on what, for the purpose of this study, was deemed as the BIG process, including the experiences of the implementation of the EIG.

**FIGURE 1:
THE BIG PROCESS IN NAMIBIA**

		Termonology in study
2002	NAMTAX Commission	Formation of the coalition
2003	Churches mobilise around the idea of a BIG	
2004	Formation of the BIG Coalition	
2005–08	Campaign years	
2008–09	Implementation of pilot	Implementation of the pilot
2009	Publication of results	
2010	Statement of President Pohamba against BIG, withdrawal of largest trade union federation from coalition	Post-pilot years
2015	President Geingob assumes presidency, appoints Bishop Kameeta as first Minister of Poverty Eradication	
2020	Kameeta’s term as minister ends	
	Relaunch of the BIG Campaign	Revival of the coalition
	Implementation of the EIG	

For those within government and development organisations, BIG became part of their work in 2015, when the BIG became part of the national agenda. The schedule of interviews was then refocused accordingly.

The interviews were prompted by the changes that had taken place from the implementation of the pilot in 2008 until today. These were contextual changes in the political economy, public opinion, and other events that may have influenced the BIG process then and now.

The interviewees were also prompted to reflect on the likelihood of implementation of a BIG; not only vis-à-vis the BIG process to date, but also in light of the implementation of the EIG in the context of the Covid-19 response.

The client was consulted regarding the selection of interviewees and the schedule of questions before implementation. The schedule of questions was tested in the first two interviews, calibrated, and then rolled out in the subsequent interviews.

The questions were forwarded to the interviewees beforehand, along with introductory letters and information about the project. Proof of consent was submitted to the client.

Detailed notes were taken, and the notes were returned to the interviewees for verification. These notes were submitted to the client as well.

3. SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF NAMIBIA

3.1. Macroeconomic indicators

In 2008, Namibia was reclassified as an upper-middle-income country⁹. This is because Namibia registered a GDP of US\$12.3 billion and US\$4 700 per capita. This figure was arrived at by merely dividing the GDP by the number of inhabitants, thus completely missing the levels of inequality of the Namibian society, which remain – along with those in South Africa – the highest in the world¹⁰.

Real GDP peaked at 6.1% in 2015, and contracted by an estimate 1.6% in 2019. This followed an estimated contraction of 0.5% in 2018. In 2020, real GDP was expected to contract by 7.3%; less severe than anticipated, with earlier estimates resting at 7.8%. The economy is expected to recover slightly in 2021 and 2022, with estimated growth rates of 2.6% and 3.2%, respectively¹¹. However, even in times of economic growth, the redistribution and employment were not concomitant¹².

The sectors that have been most severely affected by the pandemic include mining, transportation and storage, wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels, construction and manufacturing¹³.

3.2. Poverty indicators

As stated above, Namibia remains one of the most unequal countries in the world. This was already the case in the mid-nineties with a Gini coefficient of 0.70. It maintained this status in the 2000s with a lesser, but still significant coefficient. This is the legacy of colonialism, which relegated most of the black population to low-level jobs, without decent pay. This legacy continues today, with inequalities still divided along racial and ethnic lines. The poorest among the Namibian population are the Khoisan and Rukwangali-speaking groups (between 54% and 60% of these groups were affected by poverty in 2012)¹⁴. German and English-speaking groups find themselves on the opposite end of the spectrum, which can also be reflected in expenditure patterns¹⁵.

The percentage of the poor in the country varies, depending on the measure used. In 2004, the Namibian government employed a criterion related to food expenditure: if one spent more than 60% of one's income on food, one would be classified as poor, and if more than 80%, one would be classified as extremely poor. According to this measure, 28% of Namibians lived in poverty¹⁶.

Another measure is working out the price of a food basket, based on the spending patterns in lower-income houses, in addition to other non-food items. In 2004, any person who spent less than N\$262 was poor, while those who spent less than N\$184 were regarded as extremely poor. In terms of this measure, 27.6% of Namibians could be classified as poor, and 13.8% as very poor.¹⁷

Applying the crude poverty line, which amounts to US\$1 per day, 62% of Namibians would be classified as poor. Using a measure which places a monetary value amounting to N\$399.80 per person per month on essential food and non-food items, which are needed for a household's survival, 82% of Namibians would be classified as poor¹⁸.

⁹Bank of Namibia. (2019). 20th Annual Symposium. Escaping the Middle-Income Trap: A Perspective from Namibia p. 15

¹⁰World Bank. (2020). GINI Index (World Bank estimate). World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>

¹¹Bank of Namibia. (2020). Economic Outlook: 2020. p. 4

¹²The World Bank's Country Partnership Agreement with Namibia notes that "[e]conomic growth has not generated jobs as the structure of the economic production and trade have remained essentially unchanged [since Independence]". World Bank. (2013). Country Partnership Agreement for the Republic of Namibia (No. 77748-NA). p. vi

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Jauch, Herbert. (2012). "Poverty, Unemployment and Inequality in Namibia". TEMTI Series of Economic Perspectives on Global Sustainability, EP 02-2013, TEMTI – CEESP / IUCN. p. 4. Available at: http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/ceesp/what_we_do/wg/temti.cfm; Last accessed 08 February 2021.

¹⁵NSA. (2018). Namibia – Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2015/16. Namibia Statistics Agency. https://nsa.org.na/microdata1/index.php/catalog/28/related_materials

¹⁶Jauch, H. (2015). The Rise and Fall of the Basic Income Grant Campaign: Lessons from Namibia. *Global Labour Journal*, 6(3), p. 339.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹The World Bank. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/namibia/overview>; Last accessed 08 February 2021

²⁰Ibid.

Namibia has been reported as having made great strides in reducing poverty, halving the proportion of Namibians living below the poverty line since independence. In 2010, the percentage of Namibians living below the poverty line was 28.7%. In 2015, the figure stood at 17.4%¹⁹.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on many Namibians' lives. Because of this, the levels of poverty are expected to rise. The estimated figure for extreme poverty rates is expected to increase to 18.9% in 2022²⁰.

3.3. Employment indicators

The issue of unemployment has remained unresolved in Namibia since independence. In 1997, the overall unemployment rate stood at 35%. In 2000, the percentage decreased slightly to 34%, and increased once more in 2004, to 37%. In 2008, unemployment reached a staggering rate of 51%. Due to a change in methodology, this figure dropped to 27% in 2012. In 2012, the labour force expanded as they counted as "employed" any person who had engaged in any kind of economic activity for at least one hour during the last week. This was held to include activities such as catching fish, fixing fences, repairing any household items, looking after animals, and so forth. This would mean that persons who participated in rural subsistence agriculture, and those who were at home looking after their families, were classified as employed. This broadening of the definition of employment resulted in the lowering of the official unemployment rate²¹.

Although data has only started to emerge in the recent months²², Covid-19 is also expected to change the state of labour in Namibia. According to the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, in the first quarter of 2020/2021, 388 employers laid off 5 748 employees. Namibia was experiencing a recession, which was further exacerbated by Covid-19. Of these employees, "1,816 were retrenched due to Covid-19-related reasons while 3,932 were retrenched due to other reasons"²³. As of 21 September 2020, 2 726 retrenchments out of a total of 11 009 retrenchments were a direct result of the impact of Covid-19²⁴. These figures show that Covid-19 has had a comparably lesser impact than other factors. However, as was pointed out by a local economics lecturer: "Covid-19 compounded the situation. In fact, the Covid-19-combating measures worsened things much more than the ongoing recession pre-Covid-19"²⁵.

The Ministry attempted to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 on workers by suspending certain provisions of the Labour Act²⁶. The regulations enacted stated that employers could not "dismiss any of their employees, reduce their pay or force them to take leave because of the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has on the employers' business"²⁷. However, they were declared unconstitutional and invalid by the court in *Namibian Employers' Federation v President of the Republic of Namibia*²⁸.

3.4. Social protection system

To combat the problems of inequality, poverty and unemployment as outlined above, the Namibian government has enacted social protection schemes. The list of grants it supports is listed in the table below, with some further description following it.

²¹See 16, p. 338.

²²NSA & UNDP. (2020). Survey on COVID-19. Effect on Selected Businesses. Namibia Statistics Agency and the United Nations Development Programme. https://cms2.my.na/assets/documents/Survey_on_COVID-19_Effect_on_Selected_Businesses.pdf

²³Matengo, D. (2020). Namibia records major job loss amid COVID-19. Available at <https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/08/12/namibia-records-major-job-loss-amid-covid-19/>; Last accessed 08 February 2021

²⁴Erastus, N. (2020). Economy continues with brutal retrenchments. Available at <https://www.namibian.com.na/205482/archive-read/Economy-continues-with-brutal-retrenchments>; Last accessed 22 February 2021.

²⁵Idem.

²⁶11 of 2007.

²⁷Menges, W. (2020). Ban on job cuts falls in court. The Namibian. Available at <https://www.namibian.com.na/201971/archive-read/Ban-on-job-cuts-falls-in-court>; Last accessed 08 February 2021.

²⁸(HC-MD-CIV-MOT-GEN-2020/00136) [2020] NAHCMD 248 (23 June 2020)

Table 1:
VALUE OF GRANTS IN NAMIBIA

	Monthly amount in N\$	Notes
Old age	1 300	54.3
Disability	1 300	59.20
Maintenance	250	Per child, up to 3 children
Foster parent	250	Per child, up to 12 children
Maintenance grant	1 000	For four children, increases N\$250 per child up to 13 children
Vulnerable grant	250	Per child, up to 20 children
Special maintenance grant	250	67.90
Place of safety allowance [^]	10	Per child per day
Veterans [*]	20-50 000	Initial once-off payment, depending on period served
	2 000	Monthly payment

Source: All values provided by the MGEPEWSW, except for the Place of safety allowance ([^]), obtained from the Ministry's website (<https://mgecw.gov.na/web/mgecw2/place-of-safety-allowance>); and the Veterans' payments (^{*}) which were sourced from the Pickering v. Ministry of Veterans Affairs case delivered in July 2020.

a.) Old Age Pension (OAP)

The OAP is a universal grant, payable to any person aged 60 and above. It is payable monthly, and was increased to N\$1 300 in April 2019²⁹.

b.) Child Grants

The government has initiated numerous interventions which target vulnerable and orphaned children. These are the Special Maintenance Grant, the Child Maintenance Grant, the Places of Safety Allowance and the Foster Parent Grant (FPG)³⁰.

The Child Maintenance Grant is payable to any person who is the biological parent of a child who is younger than 18, whose spouse is serving a prison sentence of not less than three months, is deceased, is receiving an old age or disability grant, or has been declared unfit to work.³¹

The FPG is granted to any person who cares for a child placed in their custody. Further, the Place of Safety Allowance is an allowance granted to any person, where a child is placed in their care in terms of the Child Care and Protection Act³², or the Criminal Procedure Act,³³ or where a child under 21 is placed in such a family's care by the Commissioner/ Director of Child Welfare

The Special Maintenance Grant is available for any person who has to care for a child below the age of 16 who is differently abled. This includes children who have tested positive for HIV, and those who are blind³⁴.

c.) Disability Grant

This grant is payable to any person who has been classified as temporarily or permanently differently abled, who is above the age of 16.

d.) War Veterans' Grant

This grant is payable to all veterans who participated in Namibia's liberation struggle. A one-off payment of N\$50 000 is payable to those who participated from 1959 to 1987, and N\$20 000 for those who participated from 1988 to 1989. Additionally, war veterans receive a monthly stipend if unemployed; houses, which do not exceed the individual cost of N\$300 000, are built for aged or disabled veterans³⁵. Persons classified as veterans also qualify for a wide range of other benefits such as "medical assistance, counselling, land resettlement, funeral assistance, educational grants for them and their dependants, and other subsidies to costs of water, electricity and transport"³⁶.

4. SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS

This section presents a summary of accounts of the stakeholders engaged throughout the project. The three categories of interviewees were defined by the TOR. It is important to highlight that only three members of the civil society (CS) were directly involved with the BIG Coalition after the formation of the coalition; others were, in fact, supporters, beneficiaries, or latecomers to the process. Government (GRN) respondents' involvement with the BIG process only took place after 2015, when President Geingob made the matter part of the national agenda. The development organisations (DO) that were consulted worked in partnership with government. Their work is therefore closely aligned with the official discourse. Every actor that was consulted had either direct involvement with the BIG process or the concept, with the exception of the Red Cross Society of Namibia (RCSN). They were approached because of their recent work with direct cash transfers – a key aspect of BIG. In the table below, the accounts of the RCSN are therefore marked in italics in order to highlight the outlier nature of their contribution. These accounts are synthesised here; an analytical synthesis is presented in the following section.

²⁹Matthys, D. (2019). Government Increases Social Grants by N\$50. Available at <https://economist.com.na/46524/community-and-culture/government-increases-pensions-by-n50/>; Last accessed 22 February 2020.

³⁰Bank of Namibia. 15th Annual Symposium 2013. Social Safety Nets in Namibia: assessing current programmes and future options. Available at <https://www.bon.com.na/CMS/Attachments/Bon/Files/bon.com.na/Of/Ofa7f5ba-5585-4471-9511-1a42811bd0d1.pdf>; Last Accessed 22 February 2021.

³¹Ibid.

³²3 of 2015

³³51 of 1977

See 30

Ibid.

Table 2:
SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS

	CS	GRN	DO
Universal/targeted	Universal	Targeted	Targeted (universal for a target group, i.e. everyone within the chosen group would get it).
Mode of engagement	Part of the coalition, supporter or beneficiary	Since 2015, part of government's agenda	On request of government --- <i>In partnership with it</i>
Formation of coalition	Formation of coalition led by churches primarily focusing on umbrella organisations. The focus was primarily on engagement, and less on pressure.	n/a	n/a
Implementation of pilot	Implementation spearheaded by the coalition. The implementation of a pilot was a means to demonstrate and convince. The results were impressive, and it was thought that the results would speak for themselves. It created evidence around which the coalition and other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) could mobilise.	n/a	n/a
Post-pilot years	Powerful political figures came out against BIG, while others supported it. This caused friction at high levels, and the coalition compromised to include all stakeholders. There was an over-reliance on the hope that Bishop Kameeta would implement BIG once he became the Minister of Poverty Eradication in 2015, and the need for political pressure was underestimated.	n/a	n/a

	CS	GRN	DO
Revival of campaign	New actors are part of it, and the focus is now on implementation. Despite awareness that political pressure is paramount, hesitancy and lack of leverage from the coalition prevent this. ("It is like we are having fear, as if not having confidence in the idea.") The composition of the coalition is not questioned.	n/a	n/a
Overall assessment	[Of BIG process] Politicians privilege political moves over principles. Although many high-level figures were in favour, positions changed when other influential figures showed disfavour. There was too much compromise at the early stages. This led to the process being taken over by bureaucracy. Further, in terms of the pilot, and any future BIG intervention, business management and financial literacy skills are key for people to use the Grant in meaningful ways.	[Of BIG proposal] Respondents are aware of the debates, i.e. that it is one of the most effective tools in the fight against poverty, while others believe BIG creates dependency. It is best to have safety nets in place to protect the most vulnerable when there are negative shocks. The MGEPEWSW and the UNDP have commissioned a study on BIG, which will be released soon.	n/a
Changes from 2008 to 2020	Today, there is more willingness to make demands. Experiences with previous interventions have left general scepticism. The economic situation is more severe. There is awareness that the social protection system is not making the difference that is needed.	The current economic situation is key. If the money should be available, BIG could be implemented. However, others note that "the mindset is still the same" regarding mainstream opposition to the BIG. There is also a general standpoint that social protection will not make the necessary difference to address poverty and inequality.	There is an understanding from a policy perspective that BIG is needed. The key debate now is more about how it should be rolled out. --- <i>[Changes from 2017 to 2020] There is more acceptance of direct cash transfers.</i>

	CS	GRN	DO
Likelihood of implementation	Some think it is unlikely unless there is bottom-up pressure. Others believe it is possible if we have a political champion or strong leadership from government. It also depends on whether the Social Protection Policy, currently being reviewed by Parliament, sees the light of day.	It is possible, and there is "political will", but it would have to be targeted with means testing. Universal BIG is not feasible.	It is foreseeable to have BIG, either temporarily or continuously. This will be subject to available resources. --- <i>[Regarding direct cash transfers] They can be expected to be implemented in the context of more programmes.</i>
Modality of implementation	Various amounts were suggested, with N\$300 as the absolute minimum. The thought is that the higher the amount, the less feasible it becomes. Others felt that N\$750 is too little, particularly in urban areas. The belief is that it remains universal, and children would need to be included, not to defeat the purpose. NamPost could be used to distribute payments. The eWallet process used with the EIG worked well for those who have access.	It would benefit those between the ages of 19 and 59, covering the people who currently do not receive any government grants. It must be conditional, monthly, and above the poverty threshold to have a demonstrable impact. It will be a phased approach, and the food bank and marginalised peoples' grants will be consolidated. It will be an amount of N\$389, which is above the lower poverty threshold.	Implementing BIG for two years, at an amount of N\$500, would cost the government N\$26 billion in three years. There are talks about consolidating existing grants and establishing a Sovereign Wealth Fund.
Recent social protection responses to Covid-19	Measures were minimal, with no real relief for the poor. The new regulations within short intervals were confusing. Although the frequent information sessions were good, not enough was done to quell people's fears about the virus, and some measures increased this level of fear.	From the economic perspective, N\$8.1 billion stimulus package was passed through two interventions, the EIG and N\$500 million for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).	A study on the impact of Covid-19 on the informal economy and tourism sector is yet to be released. --- <i>Information dissemination across the regions.</i>

	CS	GRN	DO
Experiences with EIG	EIG took the BIG's recommendation of rolling it out to everyone below the income taxpayer's threshold. It was implemented in a week, and money reached the beneficiaries quickly. Although it was appreciated, and people used it to meet their most immediate needs, it was insufficient (one-off) and did not offer the necessary relief for small/informal businesses. Efficacy is noteworthy. It shows that Namibia believes in direct cash transfers, and that BIG can be implemented.	Very similar in nature and design to what a BIG cash transfer would look like. It was implemented rapidly using technology transfer and had high efficacy in reaching beneficiaries. It avoided fraud and duplication. It was fair in scope and coverage.	n/a
Measures needed post-Covid-19	Implementing BIG will help. Measures to revive smaller/informal businesses must be put in place. Some propose a focus on improved nutrition.	The policy intent is to use BIG as a recovery measure. However, it comes with a huge fiscal burden. It was cut in scope to make it feasible. Fiscal policy can only help so much. What is needed in the long term is "structural economic transformation", making it possible for more Namibians to participate in the economy. BIG is not seen to play a prominent role in this. The pandemic presents an opportunity to rebuild businesses. Targeting larger business would benefit smaller businesses through a trickle-down process.	Looking into measures depending on the outcome one wants to achieve. Post-monitoring and exit surveys are needed to learn from implementation. Further, the Social Protection Policy should ensure that a strong framework is in place. A frank discussion must take place on which categories of people who must be prioritised, given the limited resources available. Grants should be streamlined, as some people receive more than one grant, while others receive none.

5. CRITICAL SYNTHESIS

This section presents a critical synthesis of the accounts documented throughout this process.

The first section includes the critical observations grouped by the three sets of actors engaged throughout the process. These observations refer primarily to the process, the context and, in some instances, to their own institution or constituency.

The second section focuses on the points of convergence and divergence between the three sets of actors. Here it is possible to identify some points where all actors converge, while others appear, at the moment, to place parties in opposition. This reveals potential for action and strategic reorientation.

The last section garners the insights on the significance of the EIG within the BIG process, which highlights the potential of direct cash transfers as an increasingly accepted means of implementing government social protection.

5.1. Critical reflections by stakeholders

Civil society has had three separate yet interrelated critical reflections on the BIG process so far.

Firstly, questions about the nature of the coalition. Examples include the focus on umbrella organisations instead of the actual organisations and – critically – the members and/or constituencies themselves; allegiance³⁷ and/or deference³⁸ to the ruling party and/or government; and questions about governance³⁹.

Secondly, the realisation that the general approach of the BIG Coalition was one of convincing instead of pressuring government, and should have been the opposite⁴⁰.

Thirdly, and related to issues of governance, are matters related to strategy. In some cases, matters on which there was not consensus among the coalition were nevertheless adopted in the process⁴¹.

Other remarks included:

- The need for accompanying measures (e.g. training on setting up businesses, management skills) to make the pilot more impactful and buffer its phasing out process.
- The need to raise awareness of the reasons for the BIG (e.g. redistribution as part of restorative justice), so that those receiving it are not reduced to passive recipients, and BIG is not reduced to “another grant”.
- Some within civil society questioned whether the intervention had “a horizon”, i.e. when beneficiaries would “graduate” and no longer need the support.

³⁷E.g. As it is the case with the largest trade union federation, which withdrew after President Pohamba’s negative comments about the BIG in 2010. See: The Namibian. (2014, April 4). A Basic Income Grant of N\$12 500. The Namibian. <https://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?page=archive-read&id=121900>

³⁸E.g. As it was the case when, during the revival of the coalition in 2020, some members proposed to adopt the slogan “No BIG, no vote” in the context of the 2020 local elections and members of the church threatened to withdraw from the coalition if this went ahead. Although this slogan eventually appeared in some social media outlets (e.g. <https://www.facebook.com/basicincomegrantnamibia/posts/3493754497313525>), it was not promoted beyond this point.

³⁹I.e. Who decides in the coalitions? How are decisions made? While the BIG process was indeed triggered by a government report, some perceived that the churches dominated the process.

⁴⁰With the benefit of hindsight, this was exemplified by those who believed that the results of the BIG pilot would “speak for themselves” and trigger widespread conviction, and those who believed that, once Bishop Kameeta became minister, the BIG would be “a done deal”.

⁴¹An example of this is the willingness of some to negotiate the concept of “universal” earlier on to achieve some degree of implementation, while others were resolute that this would compromise the principles of the Campaign. Others argued that negotiating a lower threshold than universal BIG to reach everybody would be better than a higher amount that would increase the price tag for government.

Government. From the point at which this became part of the national agenda in 2015, the definition of a BIG was already understood as a “targeted”, not a universal intervention. There is a general awareness that there is a need for interventions to alleviate poverty and inequality. The understanding is that this can be done not only through streamlining aspects of the national social protection measures, but also through economic development and employment creation. Government is aware of the budgetary/fiscal constraints that afflict the administration and, while there is principled political support for a BIG, the likelihood of implementing one would only be through the consolidation of other social protection schemes and an incremental approach to reducing the spending costs in the current budget.

Development organisations work in partnership with government, and share their understanding of the BIG concept. The exception, in this context, is the RCSN, who do not have a position on the matter, as it is not part of their work. However, they have done valuable work with direct cash transfers, a programme that they have developed and explored internationally, and implemented in Namibia since 2017. Their close collaboration with government has allowed officials to see the benefits of this mechanism in the context of relief during emergencies. Currently, there is a favourable environment to discuss and explore these measures.

5.2. Convergences and divergences

This section presents the points on which the actors interviewed converged and/or diverged. This is visualised in the table below. Each point is marked with a number. In most cases, there are opposed points in which one or two parties stand in opposition to another. But, in some cases, there are points on which they all appear to converge.

Table 3:
OVERLAPS AND DIVERGENCES IN THE RESPONSES

	Civil Society	Development organisations	Government
1	Universal	Targeted	
2	Prioritisation	Affordability	
3	Money directly to the poor		“Trickle down”
4	Social pressure	Engagement	
5	Social justice matter	Administrative matter	
6	Primarily permanent	Primarily temporary	
7	Stimulus to the national economy		Additional national expenditure
8	Direct cash transfers		
9	“BIG” as a way to address poverty and inequality		
10	Poverty and inequality remain persistent despite measures		

They key divergence (1) is about whether the BIG is universal or targeted. Here, the definition of universal is “full”, in the sense that it is received by every single member of society⁴². In this way, “targeted BIG” or “a BIG for a certain sector” is understood as targeted. In this sense, only civil society is in favour of a universal BIG and disagrees with reduced versions. As one civil society member says, a targeted BIG “is what we have, and it’s not working”.

Another key divergence (2) is that government and development organisations see the issue of implementation of an eventual BIG as a matter of affordability, whereas civil society sees it primarily as a matter of prioritisation, i.e. primarily a matter requiring political will to be implemented by realigning or streamlining existing expenditure.

Point three (3) deals with economic paradigms. Here government has spelled out their belief in supporting larger and formal businesses so that smaller and informal businesses can benefit. Civil society clearly does not believe in “trickle-down” economics, and instead proposes to make money available directly to the poor.

There are three matters on which there is less divergence between actors. One (4) is the belief that the approach should be primarily applying pressure on authorities to implement, while others believe that consultative engagement should be the primary approach. Some among civil society believe more in consultation than in applying pressure, while others believe that bottom-up pressure is more effective than – as one civil society member put it – “including everyone”. Further (5), some believe that a BIG is a matter of principle and social justice, while others believe it is an administrative issue. The overlap exists because civil society has also engaged in thinking about how to address administrative matters, but they do not reduce it to only this. The third matter (6) is between those who see a BIG primarily as a continuous or permanent measure, while others see it as a temporary measure. There are some in civil society who believe that, to achieve implementation, one can argue for a BIG as an “emergency measure”.

One of the points on which there is also considerable divergence (7), and related to a previous point (3), relates to the view of a BIG as an additional expenditure instead of, as one civil society member put it, “a stimulus to the national economy”.

The universal points of convergence are in (8) the positive aspects of direct cash transfers, that (9) a “BIG” is a positive measure – even as the divergence relies on the interpretation of what a BIG is – and (10) that the poverty and inequality remain persistent despite the measures that have been implemented.

5.3. Covid-19, EIG and the emerging potential of cash transfers

In the context of Covid-19 responses, one of the key economic measures was the EIG. In short, government announced a one-off direct cash transfer of N\$750 using an eligibility criterion that was easily verifiable, using cell phones and eWallet financial services. Government estimated that about 739 000 people were eligible for this, using a simple set of criteria; crucially excluding those paying income tax⁴³ and those receiving the monthly OAP⁴⁴. Within three days, 350 000 applications had been received, and a week later, the first 147 000 grants were transferred. This earned Namibia the reputation of having implemented, in a remarkably efficient way, a measure that was universally regarded as positive⁴⁵. This evoked images of how a BIG could be implemented, despite the inclusion/exclusion errors that were inherent to a measure implemented for the first time.

⁴²See definition in Section 1.

⁴³In Namibia, this includes those who earn a yearly income below N\$50 000.

⁴⁴Given to those that are 60 years and older, currently standing at N\$1 300.

⁴⁵Seekings, J., Gronbach, L., & Nattrass, N. (2020, April 29). Covid-19 grant: We can learn from Namibia. GroundUp News. <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/covid-19-grant-we-can-learn-namibia/>

The EIG is seen by some members of civil society as proof that the BIG has brought lessons, and that Namibia “believes” in such measures. Civil society also perceived this measure as positive, but insufficient. From the social justice perspective, some argue that this was not seen as an additional measure, but “money needed that was long overdue”. This highlights existing unaddressed questions about redistribution and historical reparations that create “accumulated dissatisfaction regarding the situation”. The critical perceptions of the EIG may not be due to the measure itself, but by its positive aspects being overshadowed by the overall punitive responses that were also implemented during the Covid-19 national emergency, e.g. deployment of police and the military to enforce stringent regulations. Some government officials recognise the relevance of a BIG in the context of shocks, some mentioned that “we [in Namibia] would have hoped the BIG would have been in place when Covid-19 hit”.

6. CONCLUSIONS

While the implementation of a BIG in Namibia appears to be imminent, it will be in quite a different modality to the one promoted by the BIG Coalition. Civil society is critical of this, as they see it as just one additional grant within a system that is generally regarded – including by official sources – as fragmented. While government does appear to be in need of “structural economic transformation”, it is of the view that there need to be more than social protection responses to attain this.

Currently, in light of an increasingly difficult national economic situation, the chances of expanding the social protection system appear to rely on consolidating existing measures. However, a BIG targeting those between ages 19 and 59 appears to be on the cards. While this is not the universal kind, favoured by civil society, it may, in effect, bridge social protection between the child grants (until age 18) and the OAP (from age 60). The exact way in which this measure will be rolled out will only become clear during the course of the remaining three years of the current administration.

There is a general sense at the civil society level that dissatisfaction has grown, and that, as time passes, the scepticism about government interventions increases. This coincides with a recognition by officials that, despite moments of economic advance and comparatively generous social protection, poverty and inequality remain persistent.

The key critique of the BIG process from the civil society perspective is the approach of convincing authorities instead of applying social pressure. This may be due to internal governance within the BIG Coalition. The result is that the bottom-up voices have not attained the necessary leverage to be in a negotiating position, despite some coalition members having access to the highest levels of government.

While there is an indication of the likelihood of the implementation of a BIG in the remaining period of the current administration (ending in 2023), this may be subject to the release of the Social Protection Policy. However, it was not possible, in the context of this study, to say when this could realistically be expected.

Pressure from the BIG Coalition in its current state may not be sufficient to influence this. In some cases, members of the coalition may be able to influence authorities based on previous engagement tactics of conciliatory engagement and advice. Therefore, another large-scale direct cash transfer could be rolled out, but it is unlikely that it would be done at the scale envisaged by the proponents of the BIG Coalition.

The risks of deepening economic hardship, and the likelihood of Namibia losing autonomy in the decision regarding its social protection measures if the worst case scenario realises, is both the challenge and opportunity for a BIG or a recurrent EIG to be implemented.

As one civil society interviewee mentioned: “Namibia believes in direct cash transfers” and has demonstrated the capacity to implement it in remarkably efficient ways. The comparison of the costs and efforts of distributing food parcels with direct cash transfers has influenced the way in which social protection is understood and implemented. This can become a leverage point to channel direct benefits from central government to Namibians.

The question of why cash transfers are not implemented universally through an unconditional BIG may be due to ideological and political reasons. However, the increased acceptance of implementing measures through direct cash transfers rather than in-kind contributions or more complex social protection measures, is promising.

7. FURTHER READING

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