

Ladies and Gentleman

Irrespective of the indication that there are some signs pointing at positive growth in our economy, after the world wide economic slump which indeed also impacted on our economy albeit moderately, the overwhelming reality of poverty on the ground still remains a fact of daily life in rural areas in Namibia.

High unemployment rates in rural towns like here at Khorixas with growing crime rates are becoming hallmarks of daily life. The untold miseries which the locals endure are nothing new and in any event not newsworthy enough to make it in to the media. Youth lie around their homes or hang out at places with a dubious reputation where drugs and alcohol are freely available because hardly anybody, apart from Government officials is employed.

This scene does not only unfold itself here at Khorixas but is replicated in almost all our rural towns across the country. After months of boredom in smaller towns hoping in vain for an employment opportunity, scores of young people move to bigger towns and to the City in anticipation of some or other form of employment to make a living. They stay on the edges of the city in makeshift shanties under conditions of squalor. Very many times of those youngsters soon find themselves involved in crime.

The question now poses itself: what can be done to address these problems and should Government alone be responsible for a solution?

Women's Action for Development holds the view that it is the joint responsibility of the state, NGOs churches, Schools the private sector and parents to address these problems. WAD therefore invites all line ministries to enter into a closer relationship with us in order to assist as far as possible to implement their programmes. WAD has

representation through our community Voice members in all 107 constituencies of the country and therefore has the ability to greatly assist line ministries to roll out their programmes. Being an NGO, Ministries can count on expeditions and efficient action to fast track the flow of information and assistance between Ministries and the people on the ground. WAD has already started the process of establishing contact with some Government institution and hope to take it further. With this in mind WAD engages in a continuous lobbying process to solicit funding from donor countries and international organizations as well as from local banks and the business sector.

Funding solicited in this way is strictly project directed and not for building up cash reserves. All monies lobbied for are for development projects and the youth remains a high priority when projects are identified for submission to donors. We believe that young people in the prime of their lives and with a long potential working career still ahead of them should be prioritized for empowerment training.

The sooner such young people can start working, the sooner they can start improving their lives and those of their families. Let me at this point qualify a concept which is often perceived to have one meaning only. When I refer to "Working," I don't only imply working for an employer. WAD always very strongly encourages young people to think of starting own income generating ventures and to become self-employed, meaning you becoming your own boss. It should in fact be the first thing to consider, namely how to start your own business and in so doing create jobs for other people. Very carefully study the needs of your community in view of an underserved niche of business opportunity which you can exploit to establish an own business.

In view of the establishment of such small businesses and humble income generating ventures by the poor, the recent request of Nampower to increase the price of electricity by 35%, is extremely

counter productive. In fact it must be the worst news the poor could have received in recent years. The price hike will not only directly impact upon their income but also via the increased price consumer goods which will inevitable go up as well.

Whereas Government listed poverty eradication as a high priority for its new term of office, the proposed massive price hike for electricity, directly impacts against poverty alleviation. One gets impression that state owned enterprises (SOE's) as a first strategy to balance their books, in the event of short falls target their consumer to cough up more irrespective of Government's overall plans as if the left hand does not quit know what the right hand is planning.

Higher electricity prices have serious negative consequences for the environment because more people will fall back on wood as fuel for domestic use. More and more plants around towns will therefore be uprooted to use as fire wood and this in turn speeds up the destructive domino effect which is triggered by destroying plant life. More should be done to generate relatively cheap and clean electricity from replenishable natural resources like wind, solar and wave power along our very long coastline. The tortured consumers would really welcome some innovative and unconventional thinking from those entrusted with the responsibility to provide basic commodities like electricity and water. Even though we do not always take to the streets to beat on our pots and pans as an expression of our dismay WAD, thinks with a heavy heart of all our impoverished mothers who will certainly fear the brunt of the proposed price hikes, when it comes into effect. We therefore call upon the Electricity Control Board (ECB) to limit the escalation of the price of electricity to the equivalent of the inflation rate.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the greater pressure which the proposed astronomical price hike for electricity will have on women and mothers

in particular, brings me to the grossly worsened representation of women among our newly elected legislature.

Whereas there were high hopes for Namibia to be one of the leading countries to honour the long cherished ideal of equal representation of the genders and really honouring women's rights, we on the contrary stand with red faces because of the huge step backwards in this regard.

To some extent lost ground can be won if Government does something tangible with regards to the upcoming Regional Council elections. It is however for the powers that be to decide.

I thank you.