

Hon BM Ncube.

**MINISTER OF GENDER
EQUALITY, POVERTY
ERADICATION AND SOCIAL
WELFARE RESPONSE TO
NOTICE QUESTION NO. 17
(28/2/2024) BY NUDO MP
HONOURABLE JOSEPH
KAUANDENGE**

Question 1: Hon. Minister, what has happened to the laboratory test carried out since last year to determine the cause of death of those 16 Family members who died of food poisoning? When will this report be made public for us to know what happened and why these 16 family members died?

Response: Honourable Member, this question should be directed to the relevant authority which is the Namibia Police as they have the mandate to release the results of their investigation. It is imperative as law-makers to acquaint ourselves with the different Offices/Ministries and Agencies responsible for the implementation of the respective laws and policies we put in place.

Question 2: *In terms of your Mandate as a Minister, have you undertaken familiarization visits to the said two Kavango Regions to ascertain, what the underlining reasons are of why some residents there eat expired food?*

Response: The Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, and relevant key partners have undertaken familiarization visits to the region, assessment were conducted by social workers to map the way forward with the families. To clarify on the statement that the 16 family members ate “expired food”, that statement is not correct. According to preliminary investigation they ate fermented mahangu which they bought from within the community. It has nothing to do with expired food from Government.

Question 3: Subsequent to the death of the 16 Family members last year, what mitigating measures have your Ministry put in place to prevent another catastrophic event like that one in the future?

The Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare worked with key partners such as the Ministry of Health and Social Services, the Regional Council and traditional leaders in the region to assess and identify the critical needs of the affected families. Social workers of both Ministries further conducted risk assessment to determine their eligibility for services, particularly food aid, cash grants, national documents, educational

needs and other essential services. I also need to state that the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare works within its mandate which is to provide families with social grants – if they meet the criteria. An assessment was done and it was found that the remaining family members met the criteria for vulnerable grants, however they did not have national documents. My staff members on the ground worked with Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security to obtain these documents, subsequently to register for the relevant social grants.

In terms, of other assistance rendered to the family and the community:

- The Ministry provided the family dignity packs, including toiletries, food and other essentials.
- Social workers also conducted group counselling to learners at Katere Primary School where the 8 victims attended school. More over, social worker continues to provide psycho-social support to individual leaners who are struggling to cope.
- Psychotherapy (individual counselling) was also extended to adult family members who survived the incident, however there are challenges with alcohol abuse among family members. Referrals were also made to Ministry of Health and Social Services, for family members with substance abuse challenges. ~~for counselling~~

- Children from the first family did not have national documents and the social workers from the Ministry facilitated the process of acquiring National Documents for these minors through the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Question 4: Are you aware of the recent deaths of two children in the Kavango East Region who equally died of food poisoning? And will you wait until others equally die of the same before intervening?

Response: Honourable member, the incident of the recent deaths of two children in the Kavango East Region have been reported widely in nearly all media platforms. The Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare was on the ground to render the necessary support to the families. As I have pointed out in my first response, as Law makers we cannot continue to appear oblivious of the mandates of the different implementing Government Offices, Ministries and Agencies. Honourable Member, please assist me to locate the mandate of Food Security within the different OMAs. As far as fighting hunger, poverty, and inequality, which are cross-cutting issues, the mandate of the Ministry lies mainly with the provision of social

grants, which has proven over the years, as one of the critical tools to address extreme poverty and the reduction of inequality, not only in Namibia, but the World over. And as I have rightly pointed out earlier, the Ministry has been working with all relevant stakeholders, to ensure that those eligible for social grants are registered. Accordingly, this is a continuous exercise of the Ministry as part of its regional outreach programmes.

Question 5: Are you using the money allocated to your Ministry effectively in as far as addressing the root causes of poverty in the two regions are concerned, food distributed to those most vulnerable people in the two

regions, if yes where and can you provide statistics of how this food is being distributed?

The Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare received an appropriated budget of N\$ 48,148,000.00 (Forty-Eight Million, one hundred and forty-eight thousand) for the 2023/2024 Financial Year for the procurement and distribution of food items to 29,004 households of the Marginalized Communities in Kunene, Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana, Oshikoto, Otjozondjupa, Omaheke, Kavango East, Kavango West, and Zambezi Regions. Out of these families, 2,800 are from Kavango West and 3884 are from Kavango East. These households are also provided with

drought relief food from the Office of the Prime Minister, through the Directorate of Disaster Risk Management.

As alluded to, fighting the war on poverty as declared by our late President Hage. G Geingob in 2015, requires a multi-faceted approach. The late President established the then Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare to coordinated all poverty eradication efforts of Government. To this end the Ministry came up with an integrated Blueprint on Wealth Redistribution and Poverty Eradication, which was implemented by relevant OMAs dealing with the provision of basic social necessities such as water,

sanitation, energy (electricity), shelter, education and skills development and employment creation. The Blueprint came to an end, and is now being evaluated by an independent Agency under the auspices of the now merged Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare.

In addition, the Ministry spend 88% of its budget to provide different grants to our communities which are also contributing to poverty eradication such as:

- Maintenance Grants, Special Maintenance Grants for Children with Disabilities, Foster Care Grants, Vulnerable Grant, Place of Safely allowance, Old age Grant,

Disability Grant and Conditional Basic Income Grant

- The coverage of various social safety nets in the two Kavango Regions are as follow:

Grant type	Kavango West	Kavango East
Old Age/Pensioner's Grant	6,517	14,633
Disability Grant	1,499	5,786
Food Provision for Marginalised Community Households	2745	3500

Conditional Basic Income Grant (CBIG)	134	754
Vulnerable Grant	3231	2224
Maintenance Grant	323	1034
Special Maintenance Grant	36	99
Kinship Grant	3	2
Foster Care Grant	14	1

Question 6: *Will you agree with me that the level of poverty in the two Kavango Regions is out of proportions, compared to the other parts of the country and need drastic interventions from your Ministry?*

Question 7: *Finally, how do you sleep at night Honourable Minister knowing that there are Namibians dying every year because of Hunger, while there is no excuse whatsoever in this rich prone*

Namibia for such to happen, if only Government priorities was coupled with humility and duty of care towards its citizens, irrespective of tribe, social status or political affiliations?

Response: I will respond to questions 6& 7 simultaneously. The current national poverty rates will be revealed by the 2023 National Population and Housing Census conducted by the National Statistics Agency (NSA). However, according to the NSA Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report

of 2021, indeed incidents of multi-dimensional poverty were highest in the two Kavango regions (Kavango West 79% and Kavango East 70% compared to the National Index of 43%). The Ministry is dedicated to work with various stakeholders towards poverty reduction and social welfare improvement and working on programs and initiatives aimed at addressing poverty at its roots and improving the well-being of all Namibians. I have already emphasised the mandate and programmes of the Ministry of Gender

*Reasons
- SW Region
- Development
is when is on
up to SW region*

Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare with regards to addressing issues of poverty, hunger and inequality.

Honourable member, the Government of the Republic of Namibia has put in place laws, policies and programmes aimed at reducing poverty and inequality since the attainment of independence. And you will agree with me that the poverty levels at independence are not the same as the poverty rates of today. The Government went further to declare a war against poverty in 2015, upon

realising that poverty rates even at 27% are too high, thus a need for the total eradication of extreme poverty. The call to end poverty in all its forms is not just a Namibian call, but it is a World commitment as per the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, the alarming levels of hunger, poverty and unemployment are issues of national concern and should keep us all awake, including you, Honourable member. The war against hunger, poverty, inequality and other social ills, cannot be confined to one Ministry or to the Government

alone. A situation where a child has to die of hunger can be averted by a simple action of neighbourhood care and sharing. It does not have to wait for the periodic distribution of Government aid.

All of us in this House, Regional Councillors, Traditional Authorities (recognised) are funded by Government, therefore let us use those Government resources, to care and share with our neighbours and where possible to alert Government accordingly, of any life threatening situations of our people.

It is my conviction that if we leave our political differences aside when addressing issues affecting our people, such as hunger which is the lowest form of poverty, no Namibian will have to die of hunger. I call upon all stakeholders to strengthen their efforts towards eradicating hunger and extreme poverty in Namibia, it is possible and can be done in our lifetime.

I thank you Honourable Speaker