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Business 7 Article - By Jan-Barend Scheepers

How about a Basic Nutrition Grant instead?

There has been much talk about the Basic Income Grant (BIG) in Namibia, and elsewhere, however an alternative option worth considering is a Basic Nutrition Grant (BNG).

One of the pressing issues facing Namibia's developmental state is widespread under-nutrition throughout the country, particularly amongst children under the age of five.

Namibia's arid and sparsely populated landscape makes producing, transporting and storing fresh produce difficult, which in turn makes food insecurity and under-nutrition more pronounced. In addition, the importance of the correct nutritional balance, particularly for young children, is often poorly understood. Culture, mainly due to a historic lack of availability, undoubtedly also plays a role in the absence of nutritional education, which is further compounded by the comparatively high costs of nutritional produce.

A BNG, as opposed to a BIG, could be beneficial in that it could potentially limit the possibility of the grant being used for less beneficial consumption (e.g. alcohol) and ensure that funds from the grant are used to buy nutritional produce, thus fulfilling one of the most basic human needs.

A BNG could also ensure that children receive adequate nutrients, which is essential for their cognitive development, potentially bringing down the high rates of underweight and stunting in children, not to mention improving educational outcomes across the board.

Applied correctly, a BNG can also go a long way in the nourishment of vulnerable women in both rural and urban areas, thus improving mean BMI, energy and iodine deficiency.

Over the long term, investing in a nourished populace can lead to a healthier and competitive workforce, thus breaking cycles of poverty, as well as reducing the burden on the health sector.