



# Legitimizing Basic Income in Developing Countries: Brazil<sup>+</sup> Or The Answer is Blowin' in the Wind

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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s),  
and do not necessarily represent the views of BIEN or BIEN-Suisse.*

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During his lecture about the development of the idea of the basic income last August 17 at the University of São Paulo, in Brazil, speaking to a qualified audience of 350 professors, philosophers, economists, historians, administrators, politicians and students, Professor Philippe Van Parijs affirmed that unconditional basic income should better be introduced gradually, step by step, and that it would be irresponsible to introduce it immediately in a country like Brazil.

Interviewed later by the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, he was asked about the viability of introducing an unconditional basic income as a citizen's right to all Brazilians in 2005 - the middle of the next presidential mandate, as proposed in my draft of a law presented to the Brazilian Senate, in December 2001, still to be approved.

Philippe said he would answer telling a parable.<sup>1</sup> When recently in a park in Montevideo, he saw a beautiful bronze sculpture of a gaucho with an oxcart. This oxcart was inclined and stuck in a hole in the mud. Much effort was necessary to take the oxcart from the hole, as was it necessary for a person to look ahead to prevent the cart from being stuck again. That person is Eduardo.

I found this story quite moving and stimulating. In fact, much has happened in Brazil since 1991 when I presented, and was able to have approved by the Brazilian Senate, a draft of law that would introduce a guaranteed minimum income through a negative income tax. Every man or woman with age of 25 years or more with monthly income below US\$150.00 would have the right to receive a complement of income equal to 30 per cent (or up to 50 per cent, depending on the availability of funds and the experience of the programme) of the difference between that amount and his or her level of income. Antonio Maria da Silveira,

<sup>1</sup> Although fully recorded, when published by *Folha de S. Paulo*, on August 26, 2002, p.B6, *Filósofo propõe renda mínima para todos*, by Marcelo Billi, the interview with Van Parijs did not publish the part with the mentioned parable. Van Parijs' published answer to the question about the feasibility of my project to introduce a basic income in 2005 was: "We need a person that it is ahead of his time, that tells the people how much you may advance. If you tell the people that a basic income to Brazil will only be realistic in 2025, nothing will happen. You must say that it is for tomorrow for things to happen".

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who proposed in the Brazilian academic literature a negative income tax in 1975, helped me in the design of this draft of law. On December 16, 1991, after four hours of debate, the Brazilian Senate approved the proposition with the votes of all parties. No senator voted against it. Only four senators, out of 81, abstained. On that day the leader of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party, today's president Fernando Henrique Cardoso referred to the proposal as a realistic utopia, with feet on the ground. The Senate was able to make it feasible, since it would be gradually implemented, from 1995 to 2002, starting with those aged 60 years or over in the first year, 55 years or over in the second year, and so on. Today, all those with 25 years or over would already have that right, and we could be thinking about those with 18 years or over for the next year. The draft law went to the Chamber of Deputies, got a positive and enthusiastic report from the federal representative Germano Rigotto (PMDB), but has remained there, ready to be voted, for ten years.

In fact, the Executive, which has much influence on what is being voted in the National Congress, never moved a straw to allow that matter to be voted in that form. The discussion about the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income in order to eradicate poverty in Brazil stimulated interest in the idea of transferring an income to poor families with children of school age, as long as they were really going to school. Important in this discussion were the contributions of José Márcio Camargo, Cristovam Buarque, José Roberto Magalhães Teixeira and others, as reported in a more comprehensive form in my book *Renda de Cidadania. A Saída é pela Porta*.<sup>2</sup> In 1995, pioneer scheme started, with positive results: In the city of Campinas, the mayor Magalhães Teixeira introduced the Guaranteed Minimum Family Income Programme and in the Federal District Governor Buarque introduced the *Bolsa-Escola* Programme. In both cases, those families with monthly family income below half the minimum wage per capita (at the time the minimum wage was around US\$70.00 per month) had the right to receive a complement of income as long as the family

<sup>2</sup>Eduardo Matarazzo Suplicy *Renda de Cidadania. A saída é pela porta*. São Paulo: Cortez Editora/Fundação Perseu Abramo (2002).

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had children in school age, attending at least 90 per cent of the classes in school. Whereas in Campinas the family benefit was defined as the amount equal to half the minimum wage multiplied by the number of members of the family, in the Federal District the benefit was made exactly one minimum wage, no matter the family size. From then on, many municipalities such as Ribeirão Preto, São José dos Campos, Belém, Mundo Novo, Belo Horizonte, Piracicaba, Jundiaí, Blumenau, Caxias do Sul and many others instituted programmes with variations on the benefit design based on the same principle.

As a result of those experiences, new drafts of a law were presented in 1995 and 1996 both in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, such as the ones by Nélon Marchezan (PSDB), Pedro Wilson (PT), Chico Vigilante (PT), José Roberto Arruda (PSDB), Ney Suassuna (PMDB) and Renan Calheiros (PMDB) proposing minimum income programmes associated with education, or *bolsa-escola* programmes.. In August 1996, when Philippe Van Parijs came to Brazil at the invitation of the University of São Paulo and the Catholic University of São Paulo, I accompanied him in a meeting with President Fernando Henrique Cardoso. On that day, Van Parijs stated that it was a very positive step to start providing a guaranteed minimum income to families linked to educational opportunities. There were good reasons to relate that income to investment in human capital. Deputy Nelson Marchesan,<sup>3</sup> who was also present, mentioned several times that Van Parijs' opinion encouraged the Executive to coordinate the approval by the National Congress in 1997 of Federal Law 9.533 that allowed the Federal Government to provide 50 per cent of the funds required by municipalities that wanted to institute guaranteed minimum income programmes linked to socio-educational opportunities. The family benefit was quite modest, but the programme would gradually be expanded from poorer areas to richer ones over the following five years.

In April 2002, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso sanctioned a new Federal Law 10.219, approved by the Federal Congress, named José Roberto

<sup>3</sup> He died in 2002.

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Magalhães Teixeira, who died in 1997, in honour of the first mayor to implement the idea in Campinas, and that authorizes the federal government to establish agreements with all Brazilian municipalities to adopt the minimum income programme related to education or *Bolsa-Escola* programme. According to this law, whereas municipalities are responsible for the administration of the programme, the Federal Government is responsible for the directly transfer the monetary benefit to each family enrolled in the programme through a magnetic card issued by the *Caixa Economica Federal*, a federal official institution with agencies in almost all Brazilian cities. All families with income below R\$90.00, or half the monthly minimum wage (R\$180.00 in April 2001), and with children from six to 15 years of age, have the right to a modest benefit that is of R\$15.00, R\$30.00 or a maximum of R\$45.00, depending if the family has one, two, three or more children. They receive the benefit on condition that the children attend school for at least 85 per cent of the time the schools are operating.

The programme is being implemented quite rapidly, especially when we consider the huge size of Brazil. As of August 2002, according to Israel Luiz Stal, the secretary responsible for the programme at the Ministry of Education, 5,536 out of the 5,561 Brazilian municipalities have made agreements to implement it. There are now only 25 cities that have not implemented the system. There are already 5.1 million families enrolled in the *Bolsa-Escola* programme. R\$2 billion was allocated for the purpose of this programme in the federal annual budget of 2002. Mr. Stal has estimated that R\$1.6 billion will be spent this year, plus around R\$100 millions of administrative expenses, which are considered rather modest. Since the demand for the programme in most municipalities is for an increase of around 20 per cent in the number of families that fulfil the requirements of the law, the government is estimating an increase in the enrolment so as to reach the target of 5.7 million families by the end of 2002.

Every three months the municipal administration reports to the federal coordination the attendance rate in school of the 8.6 million children enrolled in the programme. If the child has not attended at least 85 per cent of the school days, his or her individual R\$15.00 monthly benefit will be cut for the next three months. In any one family, if one out of two children does not fulfil the

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requirement the payment is suspended only for that child. In the past three months 60,000 children out of 8.6 million enrolled had their benefit suspended. This mechanism has contributed significantly to a higher attendance to school.

Interviews with families enrolled in the programme indicate that they are glad to have, for the first time in their lives, a magnetic card that they may use, for example, in a supermarket. Last June, the Federal Government announced the institution of a Citizen's Card and the Unique File of all Social Programmes that will comprise all direct income transfer programmes that exist in the several federal organisms. They are: the *Bolsa-Escola*, the *Bolsa-Alimentação*, *Bolsa-Renda*, *Programmea de Erradicação de Trabalho Infantil - PETI*, Young Agent, Gas Help, and in the following step, the social benefits established by the 1988 Constitution, the rural social security, the continuously assistance and the vital monthly income.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas the Ministry of Education administers the *Bolsa-Escola*, the *Bolsa-Alimentação* (Food-Scholarship) is administered by the Ministry of Health. It was created in 2001 with the objective to transfer R\$15, R\$30 or a maximum of R\$45 per month to families with monthly income below half the minimum wage and respectively with one, two, three or more children up to six years of age or pregnant mothers with nutritional problems. In August 2002, there are 675,000 families enrolled in this programme, benefiting 3.5 million people, including 2.7 million children and 800,000 pregnant mothers, in 3,032 (or 80 per cent) of the Brazilian municipalities. Total expenditure in this programme will amount to R\$300 million.

The Programme to Eradicate Infant Work (PETI), of the Social Assistance and Security Ministry, transfers monthly R\$25.00 in rural areas and R\$40.00 in urban areas to families that live in regions with serious problems of child heavy labour. The beneficiary families are required to send their children from seven to

<sup>4</sup> IPEA (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*); SEDH/MJ (*Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos Humanos do Ministério da Justiça*) and MRE (*Ministério das Relações Exteriores*)(2002) *A Segurança alimentar e nutricional e o direito humano à alimentação no Brasil*. Brasília, IPEA

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14 years of age to school and to stop them from doing those working activities. In 2002, there are 720,000 children enrolled in this programme, with a total expenditure of around R\$235.8million

The Young Agent Programme, also of the Social Assistance and Security Ministry, transfers monthly R\$65.00 to 15 to 17 years youngsters of poor families in risky situation, as long they are going to school and engaging in community activities. 40,000 teenagers in risky situation are enrolled in this programme with an expenditure of around R\$51.9 million in 2002.

The *Bolsa-Renda* or Income Scholarship programme, administered by the National Integration Ministry, transfers monthly R\$60.00 to poor families who live in emergency situation, provided their children from seven to 14 years are going to school. Families with four or more members receive R\$120.00 monthly. There are 900,000 agriculturers receiving this benefit amounting to an expenditure of R\$253.3 million in 2002.

The *Auxílio-Gás* or Gas Help Programme, administered by the Ministry of Mining and Energy, transfer monthly payments of R\$15.00 to poor families, including those of the former programmes. 5.7 million poor families are enrolled in this programme amounting to an expenditure of R\$900 million in 2002.

The Social Assistance and Security Ministry also administers the Continuously Social Benefit transferred monthly in the form of a minimum wage, today R\$200.00, to old people or who have special necessities, or with physical deficiencies, and to those families with income below one quarter of the minimum wage per capita and that do not receive other benefit from that Ministry or unemployment insurance. There are 1.3 million invalids or that have special needs and 740,000 old people protected by the Social Security. Total expenditure with these programmes amounts to R\$3.5 billion in 2002.

Finally, the Social Assistance and Security Ministry transfers a permanent monthly and in a permanent way a minimum wage to old people, widows, people in work license, recuperating from work injury or ill, or who are in special security since they have worked in rural family activities. There are 7.3 million

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pensioners in this programme amounting to an expenditure of about R\$15.3 billion in 2002.

Summing up all those programmes, we have an estimated expenditure of around R\$22.4 billion in 2002. Will it be possible to avoid the possibility the Citizen's Card will forever be identified as a symbol of non-citizenry, of exclusion, as foretold by Antonio Delfin Netto in *Folha de São Paulo* (May 29, 2002)? Today, after thinking so much about the best form of guaranteeing an income to all, after interacting with all the members of BIEN since I first came to the Fifth International Congress held in London, 1994, to the Sixth in Vienna, 1996, - I could not come to the Seventh in Amsterdam because I had to participate in the 1998 campaign for the Senate so as to continue this struggle - to the Eighth in Berlin, after reading the works of Philippe Van Parijs, Guy Standing, Claus Offe, Tony Atkinson, James Tobin, James Edward Meade and so many others, I have become convinced that the best form and design is the unconditional basic or citizen's income paid equally to everyone, no matter the person's origin, race, sex, age civil or socio-economic condition.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Philippe van Parijs, (2001). *What's Wrong with a Free Lunch?* Foreword by Robert M. Solow. New Democracy Forum Series. Boston, Beacon Press.; *Real freedom for all: what (if anything) can justify capitalism?* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995); "Au delà de la solidarité. Los fundamentos éticos de l'Etat-providence et de son dépassement". *Futuribles*, Revista Mensal, n° 184, fevereiro, pp 5 – 29, 1994); (ed.) *Arguing for basic income: ethical foundations for a radical reform*. (London, Verso, 1992); *Qu'est-ce qu'une société juste? Introduction à la pratique de la philosophie politique*, (Paris, Le Seuil, 1991). (*La Couleur des idées*).

Guy Standing, *Global labour flexibility: seeking distributive justice* (New York, Ed. St. Martins Press, 1999); *Beyond the New Paternalism: Basic Security as Equality* (London, Verso, 2002).

Clauss Offe, "O novo poder". *Veja*, São Paulo, 04 de Abril 1998; "A Non-productivistic design for social policies". In. VAN PARIJS, Philippe (ed.) (1992). *Arguing for basic income: ethical foundations for a radical reform* (London, Verso, 1992).

Atkinson, Anthony. B. *Poverty in Europe*. (New York, Blackwell Publishers, 1998); *Public economics in action: the basic income/flat tax proposal*. The Lindahl lectures. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995).

James Tobin, (1965). "On the Economic Status of the Negro". *Daedalus* 94(4), Fall 1965, 878-98; (1970). "Raising the Incomes of the Poor". In: GORDON, K. (ed.) *Agenda for the Nation* (Washington, DC, Brookings Institution, 1970); *Policies for Prosperity: Essays in a Keynesian Mode*. (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 1987).

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It is important to note that today in Brazil there are several municipalities that have guaranteed minimum income programmes related to educational opportunities with benefit designs that are more generous than the one defined by the federal law. This is perfectly possible. The municipality may use federal resources for the programme as defined by the federal law and complement that by what is defined by the municipal and more generous law. It may also occur in a state where the governor and State Assembly want to introduce a more generous design for all its municipalities. Several cities, mainly administered by the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT), have more generous programmes. Such, for example is the case of São Paulo, today administered by Mayor Marta Suplicy. In October 2000, in Berlin, I told you that Marta was about to win the election and that she would start the Guaranteed Minimum Income Programme. So she did, just after initiating her mandate in 2001.

Today, in the city of São Paulo, the largest in Brazil with 10.4 million people, there are 178,590 families enrolled in this programme. Families with monthly income below half the minimum wage - the minimum wage was R\$180.00 in 2001 and is now R\$200.00 - with children from six to 15 years of age - as long as they are going to school - have the right to receive a complement of income that is two-thirds of the difference between the number of members of the family times half the minimum wage and the family's income. The programme is gradually taken place so as to enrol about 300,000 families that attend those requirements in São Paulo. The criteria was to start first enrolling those poor families in the city districts where the rates of unemployment and criminal violence were higher and income per capita lower. After one and a half year of experience, the positive results in those districts where the programme was first implemented compared to the previous situation are evident. There is a greater presence of children in the school, higher economic activity because the families started to spend their extra

James Edward Mead (1935). "Outline of economic policy for a labour government". In: HOWSON, S. (ed.) (1988). *The collected papers of James Meade*. Volume I, Employment and Inflation. London, Unwin Hyman; *Agathotopia: the economics of partnership*. (Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1998).; *Liberty, equality and efficiency. Apologia pro Agathotopia Mea*. (London, Macmillan Press, 1993); *Full employment regained? An agathotopian dream*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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income in the districts where they live, a greater level of economic opportunities and a diminishing incidences of criminal violence.

A more comprehensive view of those effects will be available soon as the programme evolves. Both Maria Ozanira Silva e Silva and Lena Lavinás who have been studying those minimum income experiences for many years are also presenting papers at this Ninth International Congress of BIEN with very relevant evaluations. Besides that, Maria Ozanira with other researchers is going to organize an evaluation seminar of all the minimum income experiences in Brazil next November in Campinas where we will advance even more.

In Brazil, we are going to have very important elections next October 6 and 27 - if a second ballot becomes necessary - for President, governors, state and federal representatives. As of now, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the Worker's Party presidential candidate is leading the polls. In his Government Plan, there is a chapter called Social Inclusion and a reference to the policy of guaranteeing a minimum income as well as a commitment to eradicate hunger. It is stated that the government of a coalition led by the PT will implement the following programmes: it will complement the income of the poor families with children up to 15 years of age in all municipal programmes; will adopt scholarships for those young students from 15 to 25 years of age of poor families, so that they may complete intermediate or superior level of studies in exchange for communitarian services; it will guarantee an income to unemployed workers between 22 and 50 years of age so that they may have professional qualification community activity - either through unemployment insurance benefit to those of the formal labour market or through a stipend to those in the informal market -- and a New Opportunity programme for those unemployed have from 51 to 66 years of age.

In the Programme to Eradicate Hunger, a commitment is made that “immediately a food card will be distributed to the very poor families, so that they may buy the food that they need”.

It is relevant to note that Lula’s plan says: “The minimum income that our government proposes must be seen as a step towards the implementation - when the fiscal conditions are proper - of a citizen's basic income”. I have made much

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effort among PT economists and recently at the National Encounter of the party held in December 2001, in Recife, to have this principle included in the party's platform. However, it is being realistic to say that it is not yet fully assimilated by all its members, including our main economists and not even, at least in the way I hope that he will briefly be doing it, by our presidential candidate. I must say, however that Lula defends the minimum income programme today much more than in his 1989, 1994 and 1998 campaigns as well as much more than any other presidential candidate.

In recent political rallies of this presidential campaign, Lula often refers to the most important issue that worries Brazilians nowadays, the question of how to create employment opportunities. Normally he says that nothing gives more pride to a man or a woman than to work and to receive what is needed for his survival with dignity. He also says that in a Brazil of our dreams no mayor of any city will have to distribute a basket of basic goods or a minimum income to poor families. Therefore, everyone should have the right to a job with a decent wage. The economic policies should have this objective in mind.

Should a minimum income be seen as demeaning to a person? In no way, specially if we understand it, with Thomas Paine in *Agrarian Justice* (1795), that it should be seen not as a charity, but as a right<sup>6</sup>. Everyone must have the right to be a partner of the common property of a nation and of the earth. Therefore I renew my proposal that you should now really decide to rename BIEN as the Basic Income Earth Network.

Even more important to understand, mainly to a developing country of Latin America, Africa or Asia, is that the introduction of a well-designed citizen's basic income is compatible with making the economy more competitive. Since developed countries today have several forms of earned income tax credit, family tax credit, and minimum income schemes this means that in each one of those nations the community has decided to raise enough taxes or funds to complement

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Paine, "Agrarian Justice". In: FONER, P.F. (ed.) (1974). *The life and major writings of Thomas Paine*. (Secaucus, NJ, Citatel Press, 1796).

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the workers' wage so that they may attain an income level that is above a certain poverty level. Those instruments allow greater freedom for the worker - a greater bargaining power since they do not need to accept any economic activity to survive. At the same time, the firms know that the workers have a supplement in the form of a tax credit or a minimum income. Would this mean that the minimum income would be helping to allow a higher degree of exploitation of the worker? In fact, it is clear to see that from the worker's point of view it is better to have the existence of the minimum income that will give him a better bargaining position but not only that. If it is true that firms will also hire more workers because of the existence of a minimum income or tax credit programme what will be the final effect in the labour market? It will be an increase in the demand for labour and therefore an increase in wages, as clearly shown by Samuel Brittain in Capitalism with a Human Face (1965).<sup>7</sup>

This discussion, however, has not been really present in the Brazilian debate yet, either among Brazilian officials at the federal, state or municipal levels, except for a few who are seriously beginning to think of this important question, such as Marcio Pochmann and Ana Fonseca, respectively the Municipal Secretary of Development, Labour and Solidarity and the Coordinator of the São Paulo Minimum Income Programme. They are thinking continuously about the effects of the social programmes applied in the city so as to improve each one of them according to the experience. Not only the minimum income, but also the *Bolsa-Trabalho* for the youngsters to have a trainee period, the *Começar de Novo* for those aged more than 35 who have lost their jobs and need a new qualification, and the Solidarity programme to stimulate the creation of cooperatives and the *São Paulo Confia* or Micro credit programme.

Once we understand that everybody in the nation has a right to an unconditional basic income, equivalent to the same right that every citizen has to visit the Ibirapuera Park in the city of São Paulo or to swim in the sea of the Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, we will also understand that the basic

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Brittain, *Capitalism with a Human Face*. (Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1995).

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income will mean a greater degree of dignity and freedom in the sense described by Amartya Sen in *Development as Freedom* (1999) when he says that to be really meaningful development must be accompanied by a greater degree of freedom of the whole population.<sup>8</sup>

When I was first introduced to the idea of a basic income for all, during the early nineties, my first reaction was that we should first guarantee that the poor should have the right to the minimum income and that the negative income tax form would be better such as in my 1991 draft law. Nowadays, however, I can fully understand that with modern computer systems it will be more simple and rational to extend the same right to an equal modest income to all people. The rich will contribute proportionately more but everyone will receive it. Bureaucracy will be minimized. Any sentiment of stigma will be eliminated. People will know in advance that during the following 12 months, and from then on, every year, a modest and possibly rising income will be paid to all members of each family.

An example of this idea was introduced in Alaska in 1976, by Governor Jay Hammond when he proposed to the Legislative Assembly and the people of Alaska to set aside 50 per cent of the royalties from the exploitation of the state's natural resources, such as oil, for a fund that would belong to all state residents. The idea was approved in a public referendum. It was decided that the Alaska Permanent Fund resources would be invested in fixed income bonds, in stocks of companies from Alaska, continental United States and abroad (including Brazil), and in real estate. Since then, each state resident enrolled in the fund's data bank receives every October a dividend that, last year was approximately \$1,850.00.

In my lectures on citizen's income in Brazil in the past few years, I always have to explain about the debate that was already present in Bertrand Russell's *The Road to Freedom* (1918).<sup>9</sup> Will there be an incentive to idleness? What will we do with those who have a tendency to be lazy? We should not worry so much

<sup>8</sup> Amartya Sen *Development as freedom*. (New York: Random House, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Bertrand Russell *Proposed roads to freedom - socialism, anarchism and syndicalism*. (New York, Cornwall Press, 1918).

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about them. After all they will be few. There are many important activities, such as the nutrition of babies, taking care of children and the elderly that are so important and not always paid by the market. There are also relevant works for humanity that are not recognized by the market at the same time they are produced such as the works of Franco Modigliani and Vincent Van Gogh. But even more relevant, the Brazilian Constitution as well as the majority of nations recognizes the right to private property, this means that we recognize the right of the owners of capital to receive rents, interest and profits. The Brazilian Constitution does not oblige them, however, to work. But in general, they do work, as well as send their children to school. Why? Because it is part of human nature to want to progress. Well, if we allow those who are rich to receive an income even without working, why should we not allow everyone, rich and poor, to have a modest basic income? It is a question of common sense, as simple as everyone going out of his home through the door, as Guy Standing reminded us in a speech in the Brazilian Parliamentary Conference Centre in 1998, quoting Confucius in The Book of Answers and Explanations (520 B.C.). That is why the other name of my book, Citizen's Income is “The Exit is through the Door” (2002).

I am sure that if we had introduced a basic income in Brazil we would not have so many reasons for the popular composer Patativa do Assaré to write the beautiful song “Sad Farewell” which was recorded in 1966 by the singer Luiz Gonzaga with the following words:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Songs translated from Portuguese by Anislene Brandão PERES, Roberta Quinderé ROMANO, Vanira Tavares de SOUZA.

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“Sad Departure”  
Patativa do Assaré<sup>11</sup>

“I’m selling my burro  
My donkey and my horse  
We’re going to São Paulo  
To live or to die  
[...]

Cause soon comes  
a lucky farmer  
who buys what he owns  
for such a bargain  
[...]

Oh, Lord, oh, Lord  
what a pity to see  
so strong, so brave  
a north easterner  
live as a slave  
in the North and in the South”

If we had a basic income, young people from the highly populated areas of São Paulo and other cities of Brazil, would not be singing the rap song by Racionais MCs The Man on the Road, composed by Mano Brown. This song, which means very much to many youngsters, says:

MAN ON THE ROAD  
Mano Brown, of “Racionais MCs”<sup>12</sup>

“A man on the road begins his life anew.  
His purpose: his freedom.  
Which was lost, taken from him;  
and he wants to prove to himself he is really changed,  
he is rehabilitated and wants to live in peace.  
Not to look back, tell crime: never again!  
For his childhood was no bowl of cherries, no.

<sup>11</sup> Popular Brazilian poet from the State of Ceará who describes the arid universe of the drought-plagued northeastern Brazil.

<sup>12</sup> Rationals, Masters of Ceremony, one of the main Brazilian rap and hip hop groups.

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At Febem<sup>13</sup>, painful memories, so.  
Yeah, make money, get rich, at last.  
Many have died, yeah, in such wild daydreaming,  
tell me who is happy, who will not despair,  
to see his child born in the cradle of misery!  
A place where the sole attraction is the bar,  
and candomblé<sup>14</sup> is the place to seek blessing.

This is the stage for the story I'm gonna tell.  
The man on the road.  
Trying to keep steady in a dreary, wrecked, filthy shack,  
though his only home, his property, his shelter.  
A nasty smell of wastewater in the backyard,  
everywhere, it'll be fatal if it rains.  
A piece of hell, that's where I am.  
Even IBGE<sup>15</sup> once stopped by here and never returned.  
They numbered the shacks, asked a bunch of questions.  
They forgot us right away, the sons of a bitch!  
A gal was found, she was dead and raped,  
they must have been enraged.  
'Man, what a mess!'  
She was unrecognizable. Her face disfigured.  
At midnight, the body was still there.  
Covered with a sheet, dried up by the sun, forgotten...  
The IML<sup>16</sup> was only ten hours late!

Yeah, make money, get rich, at last!  
I want my son to forget this place,  
to have a safe life.  
I don't want him to grow up with a big 38 at his waist  
and a rod pointed at his head.  
He lay awake the rest of the night, wondering  
how to fly the coop?  
Unemployed, then.  
And ill-famed.

A life spent in jail.  
No one would trust this man.  
... his life forever ruined.

<sup>13</sup> Brazilian Foundation for the Well-Being of Minors.

<sup>14</sup> Like Santeria and Voodoo, Candomblé is a mix of West-African Orisha-worship, indigenous religion, and Catholicism.

<sup>15</sup> Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

<sup>16</sup> Brazilian forensic medical institute.

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Man on the road...  
Man on the road...

Another day comes, nothing changed.  
You can't stand this heat, 28 degrees.  
No water, as always, as usual.  
No signs of having it again, huh! It's now been five days!  
It's 10 o' clock, streets are buzzing,  
an ambulance called in a hurry.  
Madness, too much violence!  
Busted his own mom, he was drunk.  
Way before hangover, he was sentenced.  
The poor creature was dragged down the street,  
ruthlessly lynched, you figure?  
You couldn't recognize his face!  
They were merciless.

The rich campaign against drugs  
and tell us how damaging they are.  
On the other hand, they make a lot of money  
from the booze sold in the slums.  
Bags under his eyes, he goes for a walk.  
He can't believe what he sees, not like that,  
kids, cats, dogs fighting for food inch by inch  
right behind the farmer's market!  
Kids with no future, I foresee it already:  
they only go to school to eat, nothing else!  
How are they gonna learn?  
With no encouragement, pride or respect  
no health or peace.

My bro was making money,  
had bought a car,  
even a rolex!  
He was shot point-blank at school,  
supplying the rich kids with yayo!  
Became famous, was on the news,  
papers made money on him, huh!  
Praise the cops!  
20 years old, reached the headlines...  
superstar of the tabloids!  
A week later, crack was there,  
Rich people behind it, the big shots!  
Here, in the poor suburbs, we have plenty of nothing.  
A month's wage in a day attracts labour.  
The patrons have dough and can afford many things,  
they are at home, under their partners' protection.  
The rich kids are stoned to their bones!  
Selling drugs is a great business here!

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Yeah, make money, get rich, at last,  
I want a better future, I don't wanna die like this,  
in any morgue, as a down-and-outer  
with no name, no nothing...  
Man on the road.

Robbery in the area, suspicions have been raised.  
Soon they accused the slum, just for a change,  
and the comments are this man has  
his name there, in the suspects list  
pinned on the bar's wall.  
Night falls and there's a weird atmosphere in the air,  
not suspecting of anything, he goes to bed peacefully,  
But in the middle of the night, they squealed on his past,  
as if it was an incurable disease,  
a tattoo on his arm, criminal record, one offence, section 157...  
There is no one left by his side.  
Criminal Justice is deadly.  
They take away his freedom, family, and moral.  
Even far from jail  
they will forever call you an ex-convict!  
I don't trust the police, fucking race!  
If they find me bullet-wounded on the sidewalk,  
they kick my face and spit on me! Yeah..  
I would bleed to death...  
That's it, tough luck!  
That's why I make my own safety.

In wee hours, everything seems normal.  
But this man wakes up, he can sense evil,  
too many dogs barking.  
He is startled by car squeals and steps in the backyard.  
The neighbourhood is silent and scared,  
foreseeing the end it knows well.  
There is no law in the slum's dawn,  
maybe the law of silence,  
the law of the devil perhaps.  
They will invade your shack, police!  
They came to smash, full of hatred and malice!  
Sons of a bitch, carrion eaters!  
You have passed my sentence and I wasn't even in the "business"!  
They are not few and have come raging!  
Fouly killing, they won't waste their journey.  
Fifteen blokes outside, many calibers,  
and all I have is an automatic thirteen-shots.  
It's me and myself, my God and my Orisha.  
At the first noise, I'll shoot.  
If they catch me, my son is left with no one!  
Just what they want, another "black" boy in FEBEM!

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Yeah, make money, get rich at last,  
we dream of that all life and only wake up at the end of it,  
my reality was different, but there's no time left..."

(shooting)

(Radio extract: "A Dark-skinned man of 25 to 30 years of age was found dead somewhere on the M'Boi Mirim highway. Evidence points to revenge between rival gangs. According to the police, the victim had vast criminal record"...)

I am sure that a citizen's unconditional basic income is an instrument of economic policy that are among those consistent with the objective of building a just and civilized society, as recommended by Paul and Greg Davidson in Economics for a Civilized Society (1988).<sup>17</sup> Other instruments are an agrarian reform, a stimulus to cooperatives, expansion of micro credit institutions, expansion of public education and health assistance and others. The applications of those tools take into consideration values such as the ones so well synthesized in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words in 1963:<sup>18</sup>

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted,  
every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places  
shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made  
straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh  
shall see it together.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to  
sing with new meaning - "my country' tis of thee; sweet land of  
liberty; of thee I sing; land where my fathers died, land of the  
pilgrim's pride; from every mountain side, let freedom ring"-  
and if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

<sup>17</sup> Greg Davidson and Paul Davidson *Economics for a civilized society*. (London: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. *Where do we go from here: chaos or community?* (New York, Harper Row. 1967).

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And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children - black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants - will be able to join hands, and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

The basic income is one of the main instruments of economic policy that should be in the centre of negotiations around the main social conflicts that are now taking place in so many nations in our Latin American Continent, in Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Uruguay and elsewhere, as well as in Africa and Asia. The citizen income should also be an important topic in discussions on integration of those economic regions. A citizen's income is a common sense solution so simple to understand - the exit is through the door. We may also say with Bob Dylan that the answer is *blowin' in the wind*:

How many roads must a man walk down  
Before you call him a man?  
Yes, 'n' how many seas must a white dove sail  
Before she sleeps in the sand?  
Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannon balls fly  
Before they're forever banned?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.

How many times must a man look up  
Before he can see the sky?  
Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have  
Before he can hear people cry?  
Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows  
That too many people have died?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.

How many years can a mountain exist  
Before it's washed to the sea?  
Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist  
Before they're allowed to be free?  
Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head,

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Pretending he just doesn't see?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.

Is it relevant that both in Brazil and South Africa there is growing interest in the concept of a basic income, with an understanding that it is consistent with sustainability of development? According to the latest 2002 United Nations Report on Human Development, Brazil and South Africa are respectively ranked 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> among the most unequal nations, with a Gini coefficient for income distribution of 60.7 (1998) and 59.3 (1993-94) respectively, and annual income per capita of US\$7,625.00 and US\$9,401.00. In terms of the Human Development Index, they were respectively classified as 73<sup>rd</sup> and 107<sup>th</sup>. The implementation of a citizen's income in both nations might become a significant step towards attaining the objectives of eradicating poverty, diminishing inequality and providing people with much more freedom and dignity.