

India Network for Basic Income - Requisition for Affiliation to BIEN

I am Sarath Davala, and I am writing to you in my capacity as the Coordinator of the India Network for Basic Income (INBI).

1. The Network was formed in December 2015, and I am happy to inform you that we have grown very fast, and we now have membership about 50 members.
2. The Network was formed primarily to promote the idea of Basic Income. I am enclosing the invitation mail that outlines what INBI stands for.
3. We have had our first meeting in New Delhi on the 12th of April 2016, and planning a national conference in October when we hope to invite as many members as possible and formalize the network and have an executive body.
4. We now have an International Advisory Board comprising of eminent scholars connected with India and supportive of Basic Income. A list of the Members and their profiles is attached.
5. As you are aware, we had conducted a major pilot study on Basic Income between 2011 and 2014. We have the Report in the public domain. Based on this study we have also published a book, " Basic Income: A Transformative Policy for India?", published by Bloomsbury, London.

<http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/basic-income-9781472583116/>

6. A number of our members have been publishing articles on basic income in Indian newspapers and magazines.
7. We have a Facebook outreach and a website that concentrate on promoting and developing an Indian perspective on Basic Income.

<https://www.facebook.com/in4bi/>

<http://basicincomeindia.weebly.com>

If you need any further information I will be happy to furnish.

We are very keen to become affiliates of BIEN, and through this mail, I request you to do the needful to grant INBI affiliation to BIEN.

I along with thousands of those who believe in Basic Income wish and pray for a positive outcome of the Swiss Referendum.

In solidarity,

and Unconditionally yours,

Sarath

for

INBI

India Network for Basic Income (INBI)

"Basic Income: A Transformative Policy for India"

www.basicincomeindia.weebly.com

+91 789 3033 728

INBI

India Network for Basic Income

Members of the International Advisory Board



Pranab
Kumar
Bardhan

Professor of Graduate School,
Department of Economics, University
of California at Berkeley.



Barbara
Harriss-
White

Senior Research Fellow, Area
Studies, Emeritus Professor of Development
Studies, Oxford University, and Professorial
Research Associate with the Department of
Development Studies, SOAS.

	<p>Sunil Khilnani</p>	<p>Professor of Politics and Director of the King's College London India Institute.</p>
	<p>Philippe Van Parijs</p>	<p>Professor at the Faculty of economic, social and political sciences of the Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium. Co-founder of the Basic Income Earth Network.</p>
	<p>Guy Standing</p>	<p>Professor of Development Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and co-founder of the Basic Income Earth Network.</p>
	<p>Karl Widerquist</p>	<p>Associate Professor at SFS-Qatar, Georgetown University, and co-chair of Basic Income Earth Network.</p>

Dear Friend,

I write to invite you to be part of a new initiative around the idea of Basic Income in India. Let me explain what it means and its background.

In its simplest form, ***a basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all citizens on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.***

The key words in this definition of Basic Income are that it is an

'income transfer',

'unconditional',

'granted to all citizens',

'transfers to individuals'.

In India, this idea is relatively new, and not yet part of its social policy vocabulary or electoral discourse. In countries such as Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, Korea, several European countries, Canada and the United States, the idea has moved beyond being just a novel idea within the precincts of high academia, and has percolated into real-politik and party agendas. In Switzerland, there is going to be a referendum on basic income in the year 2016. Increasingly, several governments across the globe are initiating pilot projects in order to test the idea. The Netherlands and Finland are recent examples. In the last 10 years, there has been a flood of new literature – both theoretical as well as empirical – on basic income, which is increasingly being seen as a radically new direction in social policy.

In India, this idea came in for scrutiny very indirectly through the cash transfer debate. That is, cash-transfers vs commodity-transfers by the state. This debate got further reduced to 'cash' vs 'food', since in India subsidised food grain transfers is the single largest government program to address poverty. Any support to cash transfer was immediately labeled as an 'anti-food' position. If one understands Basic Income as an 'unconditional cash transfer', even though it is not *just* that, the reaction to this idea within Indian intelligentsia got polarized into outright dismissal and strong support.

Suspicion and skepticism about Basic Income, of course, comes from the assumed political implications and underpinnings that people attribute to it. The Left saw cash transfers as the state running away from its responsibilities, and the Leftish thought that it was just a lazy option. The Right, on the other hand, saw it as a dole to the undeserving. When we talked of 'unconditional cash transfers' during the course of our study, people in the corridors of power found it actually scandalous. 'How can you give money without any conditions?', 'How can you guarantee that they will not drink it away?', 'This is an irresponsible proposal!'. These were some of the reactions.

It is in this kind of hostile situation that we are to bring to the table the idea of basic income for discussion. Let this complex matter not delay us here; though it needs to be said that the debate is rich and vitriolic enough, and demands both academic and political attention.

We are not however going to the discussion table unarmed. There is indeed fresh evidence from India that Basic Income works for the poor.

Between 2011 and 2014, SEWA- Bharat in collaboration with UNICEF India office conducted a three year pilot study in the state of Madhya Pradesh to test the impact of Basic Income in eight villages. The research team was led by Professor Guy Standing, one of the founding members of Basic Income Earth Network. The study has both statistical as well as qualitative analysis. The results of the study have been extremely positive to the extent of challenging our received wisdom about addressing poverty and social destitution in India. To access the report, please see the Basic Income India website:

<http://basicincomeindia.weebly.com>

Based on this study, subsequently in early 2015, a book has been published by Bloomsbury - *Basic Income: A Transformative Policy for India?* that summarises the main findings in a more accessible form. Here is the link to access the book.

<http://www.amazon.in/Basic-Income-Transformative-Policy-India/dp/1472583108>

The MP pilot study was born out of a long process of interrogation of our social policy and its delivery mechanism within SEWA. In the last two decades, the social spending in India has increased in its volume, be it for its flagship programs like Public Distribution System or NREGA or fringe programs like pensions, cash support to girl children, brides and lactating mothers. However, there are two major problems with the very nature of Indian social thinking and practice. One, the framework by which the poor are defined, selected and lined up (or rejected, for that matter) for support. Two, the scandalously high degree of transmission losses in all government transfers to the poor, be it commodity-transfers or cash-transfers.

These two problems compel us to question the very capacity of the government to undertake and execute transfers to the poor. How do governments account for more than 50 percent transmission losses, that are officially acknowledged? Is this not the time to think of radical alternative paradigms and fool-proof transfer mechanisms? Would we not be failing in our mandate as thinking citizens? Can we turn a blind eye to this economic cruelty that is *normalized* as 'corruption in bureaucracy', and getting used to throwing up our hands?

It is against this backdrop of unsettling circumstances on the one hand, and exciting opportunities to break new ground and innovate, that some of us who worked on the MP pilot study feel the urgent need to start this Initiative. To bring together a core group that will work on bringing the idea of Basic Income more **forcefully** and **positively** to the discussion table. The idea that prompted us to start **India Network for Basic Income** is based on this hope.

We would be happy to have you as one of the founding members, and be a part of this group. The initiative will greatly benefit from your long years of dedicated work in the academic and policy domains alluded to in this mail.

Although we hope that in joining the network you would be expressing your interest in moving towards the realisation of a basic income in India, we would like to stress that you would not be committing yourself to that, or to any particular variant or route to realising it. You would merely be expressing your interest in basic income.

We look forward to hearing from you soonest.

Unconditionally,

Sarath Davala