

Background

India Network for Basic Income (INBI) is a collective of researchers, journalists, students, social activists and concerned citizens who believe that unconditional basic income could be an alternative policy option to address poverty in India and elsewhere in the world. This network is an offshoot a major pilot study conducted in Madhya Pradesh, India by Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)¹ between 2011 and 2013. This study is now well known in the global basic income community and literature as the MP UBI Pilot Study. Following the release of the Technical Report in 2014², the main findings were also published in a book in 2015³. As the culmination of the pilot study, a national conference was organised in 2014 in New Delhi, and subsequently the findings of the study were disseminated and discussed widely.

UBI and Indian Government

On the 31st of January 2017, a day before the Federal Budget was announced, India's Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, presented the annual Economic Survey in the Parliament. This year, this document had a full chapter on Universal Basic Income, authored by Arvind Subramanian, the Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India⁴. The author writes with a certain conviction that Unconditional Basic Income is a good idea, and that it should be seriously considered in India as a policy option. A major debate on the pros and cons of unconditional basic income in India ensued in the country. In March 2017, India Network for Basic Income (INBI) and SEWA Bharat jointly organised a major national conference in which politicians, academics and bureaucrats discussed the idea of UBI and its relevance to India⁵. In organising this conference INBI and SEWA worked very closely with the Government of India, particularly with the Office of the Chief Economic Advisor.

19th BIEN Congress in 2019

It is against this backdrop that INBI proposes to host 19th BIEN Congress in India. This is an opportune moment in India to give a big push to the idea, and hosting a BIEN Congress will do precisely that. A global Congress of this kind will strengthen the significance and the legitimacy of the basic income idea itself.

Location: The proposed location for the Congress is New Delhi, the national capital, or Hyderabad in the south. We also propose to collaborate with the Office of the Chief Economic Advisor and the Ministry of Finance. The local government in Telangana state, whose capital Hyderabad is, has also shown interest in the idea of unconditional basic income, and we are exploring possibilities of collaborating with one of its Ministries and attached research institutions.

Dates: The most likely dates are in the second half of November or the first half of December 2019.

Venue: If the Congress is going to be held in New Delhi the venue will be India International Center where we have already held two national conferences. If we finally decide to have the Congress in Hyderabad, the venue would be Hyderabad International Convention Centre. In either case, we need to book the venue at least a year and half in advance since December is always peak season for international conferences.

Proposed number of Speakers and Participants:

We are planning to have Key Note Speakers and other noted scholars from across different continents as is the case with all BIEN Congresses: Africa -2, Asia – 4, Americas – 3, Europe – 3, India – 3

Fund-raising: We are actively contacting various agencies, both corporate and international development agencies, that are supportive of Unconditional Basic Income and of our work both within India and internationally. Some agencies that have supported our work so far have been: UNICEF, International Development Research Centre, Canada, Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiative, Omidyar Network – India, etc. We are hopeful that we will get financial support from these and other agencies.

To start with, we have received positive response from Mustardseed Trust, a European charity, to provide an initial fund to do the preparatory work.

¹ . SEWA Bharat is a national federation of women workers' trade unions in the informal sector with a membership of nearly two million.

² <http://sewabharat.org/resources/report-on-unconditional-cash-transfers/>

³ S. Davala, R. Jhabvala, S. K. Mehta and G. Standing (2015), Basic Income: A Transformative Policy for India. London and New Delhi: Bloomsbury

⁴ <http://indiabudget.nic.in/es2016-17/echap09.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvSpOyLCAJVvfHP78BffBRA>