

Basic income pilot project by South Korean youth: Imagine another world

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Abstract

In October 2016, a group of millennials from Daejeon City, South Korea gathered together and formed Daejeon Basic Income (BI) Network. After conceptualization, the group decided to conduct a pilot study called "뜨어쓰기 Tio Su-Ki Project". It means a time off from our fast paced society. The aim of the project was to encourage people living in Daejeon City to reflect on the prospect of having a basic income and its positive impact on their lives and the society as a whole. This project was inspired by the German project called "My Basic Income" presented at the Basic Income Earth Network Congress last 2016 in Seoul, S. Korea. As part of its method, the project collected donations from 200 volunteers with each donation amounting to a minimum of 6,470 won (5.7\$) and up. Three winners from the 200 participants were then randomly selected through a lottery. The three winners were given 500,000 won per month for the next 6 months and were interviewed accordingly to explore whether having a basic income provided a positive or negative impact on their lives. The first winner a 31-year-old crossfit trainer, was chosen on February 12th. The second winner was chosen on March 11th. This participant, 26 years old, reported that she was at that time in her final year in college and with a part-time job. The final winner was chosen on March 29th, 2017. With the basic income, derived from the prize money received each month, they reported spending more on their cultural activities, upgraded their lives by-utilizing their time on what they wanted. They reported that BI has a big impact on improving quality of life. This project explored the impact of having a basic income on the participants and their lives. It also looked into the possibility of one day having unconditional basic income and what it would mean not only for individuals but also for the society at large.

Key words; Korea Basic Income pilot study, Basic Income experiment, Deajeon Tio-Suki project, Labor ethics, Lottery method, Basic Income Korean Network, BIKN.

1. Introduction

- **Basic Income (BI) Movement of South Korea (S. Korea)**

S. Korea impeached the corrupt government in March, 2017. With the new President taking over the seat after the presidential election following the impeachment, Korea is going through a very crucial period than ever. There are currently too many irregular jobs. Koreans' average working hours is currently the second longest and S. Korea is the most overworked country in OECD (2015, The Korea Herald). The minimum wage is 6,470 won

(5.7\$) per hour. The Korean youth has an average personal student loan of 20 million won (17,785\$) with high interest on the top. The labor union organization rate is less than 10%. With these crisis situations in the background, the Korean citizen overthrew the previous government. Many believe that it is the right moment for S. Korea to change more positively at the same time. S. Korea can either deal with this movement by simply replacing the government or keep moving on to create a platform for another world.

The basic income movement in Korea has a rather short history. With the academic introduction from the early 2000s to the 2010s, small groups claimed basic income. After the successful 2016 Seoul International Congress, basic income has become more popular than ever. For instance, in Seongnam city, 청년배당, young people's dividend policy has been implemented to pay 500,000 won (444\$) per year every 24-year-old Seongnam citizen without any condition. There is presently a lot of controversy regarding this policy, however it is interesting. There are also problems in the process of popularizing and mainstreaming this initiative. Some other related issues are also to be noted. For example, politicians talk about simple social assistance payments as if they are basic income. On the same note, many people in S. Korea have difficulty conceptually distinguishing between cash aid (conditional subsidies), and unconditional basic income.

- **New turning point of S. Korea's basic income movement**

In the area of social movements, basic income is one of the newest subfields. Some campaigns are being initiated in various areas. For instance, similar to Seongnam city, Seoul city activists are planning to advocate for the legislation of Youth Basic Income Ordinance through signature campaigns. This is in time as there will be local council election in 2018. The goal is to pass a Basic Income Ordinance at the Seoul City Assembly.

Like Swiss constitutional amendment movement, there is a similar current movement in Korea that commenced in 2017. On the top, new Korean President Moon Jae In mentioned having an intention to apply the new constitutional amendment before S. Korea nationwide local election in June, 2018. Some of BI activists are advocating for the inclusion of a BI clause in the new constitution, such as "Everyone has the right to be happy and the government has the obligation to pay basic income."

Just like Tio-Suki Project with BIKN, there are similar experiments that have been going on. Basic Income by lottery experiment movements, such as BI experiment by Hankyoreh 21, a Korean progressive weekly magazine, as well as those conducted by Chuncheon city activists, and by Jeonbuk province activists are currently in progress over S. Korea.

3. Tio-Suki Project : Daejeon Basic Income Pilot Study.

Tio-Suki team is a group composed of young people with different genders and jobs who gathered together and conducted the basic income project, namely the Tio-Suki Project. It started last October 2016 in Daejeon, the 5th biggest city in S. Korea. This name, Tio-Suki

was taken from a book, “Translucent Opacity” (2012, Seung-hee Kim) that contained the saying, “The days has been flooding without any space.” Based on the saying, Tio-Suki is a name, made for the purpose of giving a little spare time to those who live a quite fast-paced busy life and from hand to mouth.

- **Motivation**

The aim of the project was to encourage people living in Daejeon City, Korea to reflect on the prospect of having a basic income and the positive effects of it on their lives and the society as a whole. The project was inspired by the German project called "My Basic Income" presented at the Basic Income Earth Network Congress in 2016, Seoul, Korea.

Hannah, Tio-Suki Team leader, had an important role to start with. As soon as she first conceptualized this subject, she felt intuitively that "This is it, it is a good thing!" Getting the same inspiration, the team members started to wonder how we could go about implementing the basic income experiment to the people and the experience this project would allow for ourselves.

4. Methodology: The process of the campaign

A total of 200 people, 177 who directly involved as participants and 23 others who supported indirectly without being the candidates for the lottery participated in the experiment. Three of them were drawn and paid 500,000 won (444\$) per month for 6 consecutive months. This amount corresponds to at least two hours a day of minimum wages. Whoever donated 6,470 won (5.7\$) or more, an amount based on the 2017 Korean minimum wage can be the candidate of the lottery and were then asked to answer the interview questions via Kakaotalk, a Korean Social Network Service. The lottery was drawn randomly.

Although it may seem contrary to the concept of basic income, but because in reality it was impossible to pay all applicants, the emotional lottery system in Korea was enough to attract curiosity from prospective participants.

Starting March, 2017, three basic income winners were drawn in each month. The three winners were in their twenties and thirties. Before the lottery date, Tio-Suki project was announced and some promotion events were held. The events included playing BI related activities such as blue marble games and watching a movie, entitled “In Time” (October 28, 2011). There were also snacks served such as, Korean style fried chicken, pizza, drinks etc. Specifically, Basic Income Monopoly game was a great help in understanding the positive impacts of basic income. Its motif was from a documentary of SBS Korean TV station, having 15 sponsors who actually participated in the game with concept of Basic income in the manual.

One participant said. “The game is just like reality. When I played the game with the earth spoon, the gap with the gold spoon became bigger and I was less motivated. However, from the second half of the period when the basic income was paid, I felt that there was a small

hope to catch up the gold spoon. Indirectly, I was able to experience the basic income system.”
(The Gold spoon 금수저: The rich born people, The earth spoon 흙수저 the poor born)

5. Conclusion: What is the outcome of our campaign?

The results of Tio-Suki project are successful.

First, it showed the possibility of one day having unconditional basic income and what it would mean not only for individuals but also for the society at large.

The three participants were given 500,000 won per month for the next 6 months and were interviewed accordingly to explore whether having a basic income had a positive or negative impact on their lives. The first participant was chosen on February 12th 2017. He was a 31-year-old crossfit trainer. The second participant was chosen on 11th March. She was a 26-year-old college student in her senior year with a part-time job. The final and last participant was chosen on March 26th 2017. With the basic income, derived from the prize money received each month, they reported spending more on their cultural activities, upgraded their lives by utilizing their time on what they wanted. They reported that BI has a big impact on improving their quality of life.

Second, other similar experiments are going on the way in S. Korea.

Among the similar experiments conducted in S. Korea, the Hankyoreh 21 project involved 1,120 participants. However, considering the fact that it was done by a big corporation with a more stable project funding, and with a greater number of participants, only one recipient was determined. On the other hand, even with the financial constraints realistic limits and financial resources, Tio-Suki project managed to award BI to three recipients Furthermore, there were only 177 applicants from Tio-Suki project.

Following the format of Tio-Suki project, Comma project was similarly conducted in Jeonbuk Province. The project was filled with explosive interest from the people with an amazing volunteer turnout of 680 people. On August 25th 2017, the 2nd draw has been held and two recipients have been interviewed so far. Further experiments by various groups nationwide following Daejeon City and Jeonbuk Province are necessary to get further data and reports to underscore the significant impact of basic income both to the individual and to the society as a whole.

In general, three BI recipients experienced improvement in their quality of life and believed in the possibilities of unconditional basic income.

There are a number of other projects like Tio-Suki and its team want everyone to experience the same benefits derived from this initiative. Recipients experienced improvement in their quality of life and believed in the possibilities of unconditional basic income.

The third recipient, said:

“ 제가 받은 기본소득의 금액이 많다고는 생각하지 않습니다. 하지만 이러한 종류의 경험은 미래에 엄청난 차이를 만들수 있습니다. 바나나를 먹어본사람과 그

렇지 않은 사람은 다르게 생각할 것입니다. 물론 바나나를 먹은 경험이 있는 사람이 더 많이 알 수 있겠죠. 그런 이유에서 기본소득 실험에서 받은 수익금으로 저는 새로운 삶을 상상 할 수 있게 되었습니다.”

"I do not think it's a huge amount of money, but the experience of doing this kind of thing can make a big difference in the future. People who eat bananas think differently from those who never do and know more than those without experiencing bananas. So I think that the basic income experiment gave me a lot of money, so I can imagine another life." Translated from Korean.

This project explored the impact of having a basic income on the participants and their lives. It also looked into the possibility of one day having unconditional basic income and what it would mean not only for individuals but also for the society at large.

Limitations and discussions,

1. Extending BI recipients' age range to other age groups will be discussed. The reason for the participants being mostly young people is due to their easy access to SNS campaigns via Kakao, Facebook, etc. Another reason is that BI youth dividend was then a hot agenda in S. Korea.
2. It needs to consider the ideology relating to Labor ethics of S. Korea, "Those who do not work don't have right to be fed themselves" which is contrary to BI that does not involve commensurate labor from the recipients.
3. Is the Lottery method for BI experiment effective enough? Are there other methodologies that are more appropriate?

Reference

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Appendices

- 3 participants' interview questions
- 9 Tio-Suki team members introductions