

**Basic Income Pilot Project:
A Great Opportunity for the People of Catalonia**

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About a year ago, when I heard from the Office of the Pilot Plan to Implement the Universal Basic Income in Catalonia² inviting me to be a member of the Scientific Committee advising the pilot process, I was truly delighted. Having lead basic income pilot projects in India, reflecting on them and writing about them for over a dozen years, I have come to believe that pilot studies are an extremely effective way of initiating an informed discussion about public policy options. As we rapidly march into the twenty first century with massive income insecurities looming large, we see that the policy options are progressively narrowing; compelling us to seek effective ways of addressing the pressing social and economic problems we are confronted with today.

Last month, we had the first meeting of the Scientific Committee, which was attended by several leading social scientists and academic figures from all over the world – all of them volunteering as members of this committee. The meeting was well attended, which itself is an indication of the significance of basic income pilot studies in general, and the Catalonia one in particular. It is also a demonstration of how keenly every basic income pilot is being followed globally. Close on the heels of this meeting, which was charged with such positive energy and enthusiasm, we now get to hear that the pilot study has been postponed, and could face the threat of even being discontinued. This is really unfortunate!

In this brief appeal to the leaders of Catalonia, I would like to present my arguments why it is important and necessary to conduct this pilot study.

In the first place, let us make a distinction between conducting a basic income pilot study and implementation of basic income policy. A pilot study is a scientific inquiry into the efficacy or otherwise of a particular model of social policy. Such a study potentially brings out data -both quantitative and qualitative - on the likely impact of a specific policy on people's lives, local economy and the community. Such an analysis adds value to public conversation about how we understand our society, and what is good for our people. I can understand a certain group or a section of the society

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² Oficina del Pla Pilot per Implementar la Renda Bàsica Universal

opposed to certain ideas, in this case, an unconditional basic income that is universal, individual and periodic, in principle. If they feel that it is not good for the society, they do have a right to participate in the debate and express their opinion. However, what we see is a potential rejection of *scientific inquiry* itself, and acting in a manner to forestall what could have been a process triggering a fruitful debate. Scientific inquiry is a foundational value of modern civilization, and the very bedrock of our society and economy. Any opposition to this militates against the very spirit of our age and the times.

Secondly, to anchor policy debates on data and analysis which is available in the public domain is a practice of **good governance**. It demonstrates the willingness of the leadership of a country to be transparent. In India, about a decade ago, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a women workers' trade union initiated what is now well known as the Madhya Pradesh Basic Pilot Study. This was a massive pilot project that gave a basic income to 6000 individuals in nine villages. It was this study, done under the supervision of Prof. Guy Standing of University of London, that introduced the concept of universal and unconditional Basic Income to the Indian public. SEWA started the public debate by putting out findings of the study and its data in the public domain. It presented the findings not only to various governments but also to different stakeholders in the society. It was this practice that kicked off a wide discussion in India about a basic income. What is equally significant was that the findings of this study began a process of interrogating some of the existing poverty alleviation schemes that were not working and were actually a drain on the state exchequer. Some people opposed the idea of an unconditional basic income and some supported it. But that is not the point. The point is that it kicked off a much wider public discussion about the way we address the economic and social problems of our society, and asking if there can be better ways of doing so. Isn't this a practice of good governance? In Catalonia, if the basic income pilot project is cancelled, wouldn't it be a lost opportunity for the people of Catalonia? If the study continues as planned and brings out a study, would it not enrich the public discussion on the subject? Isn't this a good practice characteristic of any enlightened society? What would anyone lose from a study?

I hereby appeal to the leaders of political parties in Catalonia and Spain to reconsider their decision to postpone the pilot study. I urge you to continue it as planned. The spirit of scientific inquiry should prevail and should not be sacrificed at the altar of ideological battles. In fact, good science can actually act as a bridge between groups that have opposing ideologies.