

# UBI TIMES

BASIC INCOME  
EARTH NETWORK  
**ASIA-PACIFIC**

Jan, 2025 #1



*'Basic Income for All in Nepal' Roundtable, Kathmandu, Sept 2024*

Message from the  
Hub Manager 2

Inaugural Note from  
the Chair, BIEN 4

What is happening  
in the hub 5

IndoBIG Network's  
Journey 9

Publications from  
the Hub 12

UBI on Screen 13

Inaugural Note from the  
Chair, BIEN 4

9

IndoBIG Network's Journey: Building  
the Case for UBI Across Indonesia

'Unconditional'  
Documentary Film 13



## Message from the Hub Manager *John Michael*

Dear readers,

Greetings from the BIEN Asia-Pacific Hub. And, welcome to the inaugural edition of UBI Times, the bimonthly newsletter of the BIEN Asia-Pacific Hub.

It gives me immense joy to connect with all of you, as we take this crucial step in amplifying the conversation around Universal Basic Income (UBI) across our region.

The establishment of BIEN's regional hubs stems from the ambition of making BIEN truly an *Earth Network*—one that reflects the voices, struggles, and aspirations of the Global South. Our work in the Asia-Pacific region is pivotal to this vision. With a population of over 4.7 billion, spanning diverse cultures, economies, and geographies, the Asia-Pacific is facing a crisis of aging without social security, rising inequalities, and economic-ecological precarity. In most of our countries, people retire without anything to fall back on—no pension, no safety net, and no assurance of dignity in their later years. The conversation around UBI, therefore, is not just timely but necessary.

At the hub, we firmly believe that the path to UBI must be rooted in the unique social, cultural, and political contexts of each country. This has been the guiding principle behind our efforts. From collaborating with activists, academics, and policy advocates to working alongside grassroots movements, our focus remains on building localized momentum for UBI while keeping the larger, regional picture in mind.

Some countries in the Asia-Pacific region are already heating up the UBI discourse. South Korea and India are reaching advanced levels of political engagement on UBI, and I am proud to share that we have been part of this movement. In India, which now holds the title of the world's most populous country, we helped initiate the India Basic Income Coalition (I-BIC). This coalition has done instrumental work in bringing the UBI narrative to political parties and policymakers during the recent national elections.

Last month, the hub has supported in organising a national conference

in India on cash-based social policy. In addition, we have had the privilege of supporting an innovative UBI pilot with the Transgender Persons, where the hub served as the Advocacy partner. Projects like these inspire us to see the transformative potential of UBI in addressing historical marginalization and creating more inclusive societies.

We had the opportunity to do some interesting work across the region. In Malaysia, we engaged with local partners during the national budget season to spark discussions around UBI. In Nepal, an in-person roundtable convened activists and academics to explore the possibilities of a basic income framework for the country. Both initiatives have been deeply encouraging for the hub's operations.

Looking ahead, we are thrilled by the proposal from our friends in Indonesia to host the BIEN APAC Regional Congress in 2025. Imagine the power of activists, scholars, and UBI enthusiasts from across our region coming together to share ideas, strengthen networks, and advance our collective mission. I sincerely hope we will meet there, united in our determination to make UBI a reality.

This newsletter would not have been possible without the incredible support of the BIEN team. A heartfelt thanks to BIEN Chair Sarath Davala for his vision and guidance, and to Hilda Latour and Neil Howard for their inspiring leadership. Special gratitude to Aparna Rajesh for the thoughtful and creative design of this newsletter and for enriching our communications as a hub. To my colleagues at hubs - Wolfgang, Chris, and José, and to all our affiliates and comrades in the basic income movement, thank you for your encouragement and solidarity.

As we usher in the new year, let us reaffirm our commitment to expanding the basic income movement across the Asia-Pacific and the Global South. Together, we can work toward creating a world where everyone has the freedom and security to live with dignity.

Please share this newsletter widely and connect us with more comrades from across the region. Let's make this movement grow stronger, together.

*In solidarity,*

John Michael,

Asia-Pacific Regional Hub Manager

Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN)

# Inaugural Note from the Chair, BIEN

## *Sarath Davala*



Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) was founded in 1986. Initially it was conceived as a European Network which subsequently transformed into the Earth Network. Its mission is to promote conversation across the world, in every country and every last mile, about basic income as a necessary policy initiative and as the very foundation of societies today and in the future.

As the working people and their families across the world increasingly become income-vulnerable and income-insecure, the need for a basic income in the twenty-first century is becoming even more urgent. What one has realised in the last twenty years is that the postwar European welfare institutions, which most modern industrialised societies adopted, no longer seem to respond to the social protection challenges of this century. We need to design a new welfare architecture that ensures basic income security, dignified livelihoods and freedom to the people. That's why we need fresh conversations about why our current welfare systems are not working, and how we need to redesign them.

With this mission in view, BIEN has initiated 'BIEN Hubs' in different continents as energy centers to stimulate conversations about unconditional and universal Basic Income. I am happy to see that the Asia-Pacific Hub of BIEN has become very active in taking BIEN's mission forward. I am equally happy to inaugurate the first BIEN APAC Newsletter which would now become a regular feature, bringing news and analysis about basic income conversations, debates, activities, policy initiatives and advocacy efforts made in the Asia-Pacific region. I congratulate John Michael who is doing an amazing job of building the APAC Hub, and earnestly hope that through these efforts, more countries in the region move in the direction of providing unconditional basic income to all their people.

# what is happening in the hub?

## Utilisation Survey visit to Sada, Rajasthan - [Project DEEP Lump Sum Pilot](#)

To understand where families have used the money and what inspired their decisions. The early findings of the Pilot suggest that lump sums in severely cash strapped pockets of economy have the potential to start the ball rolling towards a a new sense of income security.



## Launch of India Basic Income Coalition (iBIC)

The Coalition is formed by Indus Action, India Network for Basic Income, Project DEEP, WorkFREE, and BIEN Asia-Pacific Hub in March 2024. This has been a significant opportunity to



reach out to the national political parties in India advocating for UBI.



## Partnership with Basic Income and Care for Transgender Persons (TG-BIC) Hyderabad

BIEN APAC Hub joined the pilot to support its advocacy at a global level. TG-BIC stands as one of the pioneering UBI pilots held with

transgender persons. One participant from the project has been facilitated to attend the 23rd BIEN Congress in-person at Bath and share their UBI experiences.

## BIEN APAC Hub at the 23rd Basic Income Congress, Bath, UK

Asia-Pacific Hub's presence at the Main plenary and multiple sessions of the 23rd BIEN Congress has been a big occasion to showcase the work and collaborate with diverse UBI actors. In collaboration with the LatAm and Africa Hub of BIEN, the voices of the global South have been raised at the Congress.



## Letter to HH Dalai Lama on UBI through BIEN Japan

In a cherish able moment for BIEN APAC, a letter advocating for UBI as a Compassionate Living Assurance was presented to His Holiness the Dalai Lama reflecting the shared vision of dignity and freedom for all sentient beings. Heartfelt gratitude to our colleague Yoshihiro NORIKANE from BIEN Japan, for making this significant connection possible.



## Basic Income Explainer Malaysia (BIEM)

BIEN APAC, in collaboration with Prof. Geoffrey Williams, developed the [Basic Income Explainer](#) for Malaysia. This detailed guide explores the nuances of Universal Basic Income (UBI), its compatibility with Malaysian values, and practical funding strategies, including GST, carbon taxes, and PETRONAS dividends. It offers a clear comparison of UBI with existing welfare schemes and highlights its potential to foster financial security, social cohesion, and economic resilience in Malaysia.

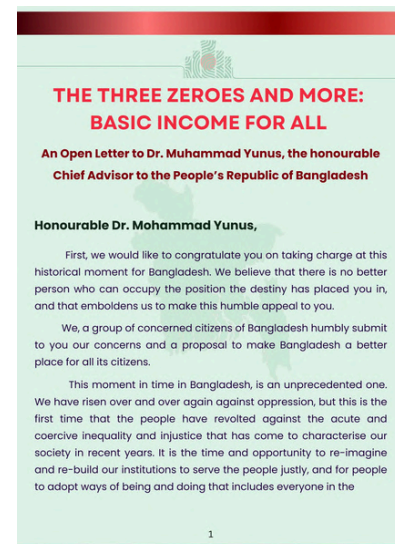
### MALAYSIAN BASIC INCOME What for?



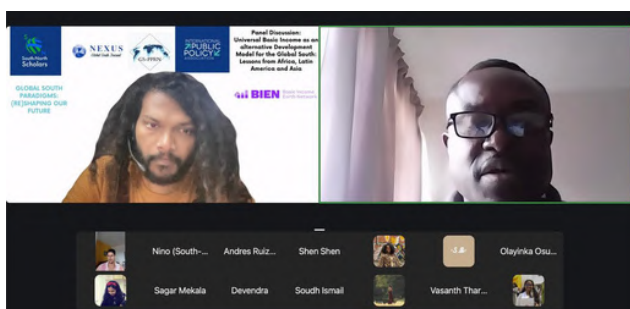
# what is happening in the hub?

## Three Zeros & More - Open Letter to the Chief Advisor to the Republic of Bangladesh

In collaboration with BIEN Affiliate ‘Bangladesh Basic income Network’ (BBIN) and Gram Bangla Unnayan Committee, an open letter addressed to the Chief Advisor to the Republic of Bangladesh has been written urging for a UBI in the country. Along with the social impact, economic cost analysis and financial simulations have been done in collaboration with Patrick Llewelin.



## Panel at the Global South Paradigms Conference with all three BIEN Hub Managers

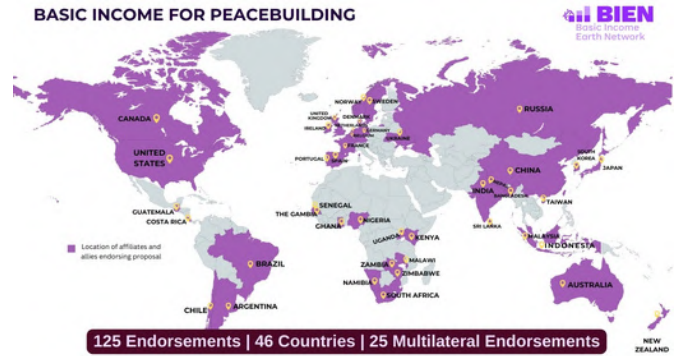


"In October 2024, BIEN's Regional Hubs from Africa, Latin America, and Asia-Pacific came together to present the panel 'Universal Basic Income as an Alternative Development Model

for the Global South' at an interdisciplinary academic conference "Global South Paradigms" convened by the Nexus Editorial Board and the International Public Policy Association's Global South Policy Process Research Network. Featuring insights from UBI pilots across regions, the discussion addressed colonial legacies in public policy and highlighted UBI's potential to foster equity and dignity. This collaboration reached a global audience of scholars from over 20 countries.

## UN-PBSO Endorsements

"An initiative of BIEN, the [open letter](#) to the UN Peacebuilding Support Office advocated for Universal Basic Income as a peacebuilding tool, emphasizing its potential to foster social cohesion, resilience, and equity while addressing root causes of conflict. The BIEN APAC Hub contributed by securing endorsements from 10 Asian countries and 2 Australasian nations. Impressively, every fifth endorsement of the 125 received globally came from the hub's region, showcasing the strength and dedication of the regional network to this transformative global effort."



## 'Basic Income for All' Roundtable in Nepal

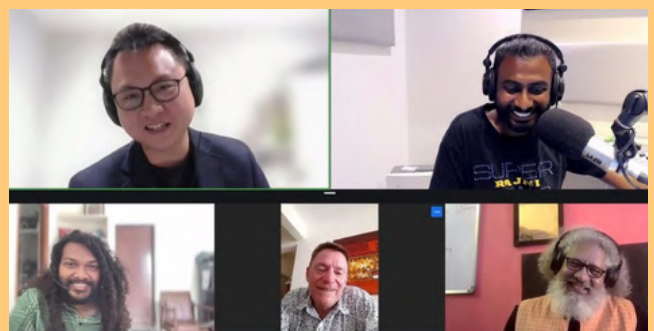
The Roundtable organised by BIEN APAC team along with Sankhya Solutions brought together over 40 attendees ranging from academics and activists with representatives from Kathmandu University, National



Indigenous Women Forum, Himalayan Environment and Life Protection (H.E.L.P) & various sections of Nepal's civil society. The discussion highlighted that though 43.1% of Nepal's social protection budget is allocated to cash transfers, only 10.12% population has access to it. The roundtable called for a UBI pilot in the country at the earliest. ([Watch](#))

## Can Malaysia Implement Universal Basic Income?

In conversation with Journalist Dashran Yohan on the Radio show 'Beyond the Ballot Box' of BFM 89.9. Seng Kiat, Prof. Geoffrey Williams, Dr. Sarath Davala and John Michael discussed the idea of UBI for Malaysia.



Listen to the [Podcast](#) 



## IndoBIG Network's Journey: Building the Case for UBI Across Indonesia

**Yanu Endar Prasetyo**  
Founder, IndoBig Network



The Universal Basic Income (UBI) movement in Indonesia has been gaining remarkable momentum, with sparks of innovation and inspiration lighting up across the country. The [IndoBIG Network](#), a collective dedicated to promoting UBI as a transformative solution, launched its [bi-weekly newsletter](#), a fresh voice in the discourse. It has become a must-read for UBI enthusiasts and policymakers alike. Packed with analysis, success stories, and global updates, the newsletter connects grassroots movements to the broader vision of financial security for all Indonesians.

But the movement isn't just confined to newsletters and intellectual discussions—it has entered the political arena. In Bojonegoro, East Java, a forward-thinking candidate for regency head has taken the bold step of incorporating UBI into their campaign platform. Branded as [“Bojonegoro Klunting”](#), this program promises direct monthly cash transfers to citizens, funded by revenue from the region's oil and gas resources. The candidate's catchy slogan, inspired by the cheerful sound of a transfer notification—“klunting”—has resonated deeply with voters, making UBI not just a policy proposal, but a promise of dignity and hope. Beyond Bojonegoro, the IndoBIG Network is amplifying its message through creative storytelling.



*Tagi Ngolo, Hau Nyao shows the struggles of fishermen from North Maluku. “We are more afraid of hunger than the fear of death.” (From Tagi Ngolo, Hau Nyao documentary film)*

Their latest venture, [a documentary film](#), captures the struggles and triumphs of fishermen in North Maluku. The film delves into how these resilient individuals are fighting to escape the clutches of poverty. By documenting their lived experiences, the IndoBIG Network not only showcases the potential of UBI but also challenges the audience to rethink societal norms about work, wealth, and welfare.

This growing tapestry of UBI efforts is weaving together local innovation, political action, and compelling narratives. It signals that Indonesia might be on the cusp of something extraordinary—a movement that could redefine economic justice for millions. As the IndoBIG Network continues to advocate, inspire, and educate, the dream of universal basic income is no longer just an idea. It’s becoming a movement, one step closer to reality.

# Call for fellows

## BIEN APAC UBI Summer Mentorship 2025

- Join the upcoming BIEN Asia Pacific Hub's Mentorship Programme and learn from those involved with UBI Piloting, Research, and Advocacy.
- In collaboration with Tyler Prochazka and Yanu Endar Prasetyo.
- Please fill the [interest form](#).



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# Call for papers

## BIEN 24th Congress - 2025

### Submission Categories:

- Basic Income & the Solidarity Economy
- Environment & Fair Transition
- Race & Ethnicity & Gender & Care & Vulnerability
- Pilots & Experiments & Policies & the Welfare State And Related Topics
- Social Movements & Grassroots & Activism

 **BIEN** Congress 2025

# BASIC INCOME & SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

New Horizons for Social Protection

Universidade Federal Fluminense  
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# Publications from the Hub

Click on the images to read the articles 

18 PERSPECTIVES | 7th SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2024

**DR SARATH DAVALA**  
Sociologist and Chair of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIN)

**PROFESSOR GEOFFREY WILLIAMS**  
Economist and policy specialist

**A BASIC income is cash paid by the government to every woman, man and child individually, unconditionally, every month, in the same characteristic amount, paid in cash to individuals, households, universal to everyone in the country and without any conditions.**

While the first four elements are more common, the most radical element in the basic income paradigm is "unconditional". It is an entitlement and a right. No need to provide evidence that you are deserving or qualified to receive it, and no need to demonstrate specific outcomes in order to continue receiving it.

It is an unconditional working people and their families all over the world are rapidly moving

towards more serious income insecurity than they have experienced in the past.

When this predicament of working people is interpreted as not merely a sign of economic distress, but as a signal that the current economic model requires human resources to be distributed in a more and more equitable manner.

This results in fewer jobs and low-quality, low-paid work.

This reality is often hidden, at least partially, in national statistics. A broad categorisation of formal and informal sectors does not give a clear picture of the quality of jobs.

Other so-called formal sector jobs are on informal and short-term contracts.

Even within the public sector, which is used to be the bastion of stable jobs, informal employment arrangements are quietly creeping in.

The second pandemic was a natural experiment, like a laboratory trial, of what income insecurity and in many cases income loss could do to working people and their families. The informal employment contracts directly

break down, forcing governments to make direct cash transfers to larger sections of the population.

Within the next decade or so, income insecurity will likely be endemic in all societies and we need to find a lasting solution to this predicament.

A universal basic income is the answer to this situation and must be seen as part of the social infrastructure rather than a solution to a specific problem.

Experience around the world shows that it can improve or be necessary to fix an appropriate amount at the national level. Effective universal basic income starts at a modest level, the dependent of the political economy and the income needs of people will eventually dictate the optimum level that is ideal for any context.

What is really important is to accept a universal basic income as a necessary part of the social architecture and create the essential building infrastructure to make universal cash transfers possible.

Many ask the question as to why a universal basic income should be universal.

A century of modern welfare has taught us that any kind of targeting is bound to be arbitrary and it is not only expensive to administer but more importantly it stigmatises the recipients and violates human dignity.

As a matter of principle, every person resident of a country should be entitled to a basic income. Whether everyone will accept it and receive it is a different question. It is about a voting right, just because everyone is entitled to vote, after a certain age, it does not automatically mean that everyone votes.

If the government wants, it can ask the rich to voluntarily give up their rights. Or, through administrative and fiscal measures, discontinue the uptake by those who think they do not need it.

In Malaysia, the Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah and Sumbangan Asas Rahmah (Sara) have benefited some 10 million recipients or 40% of the adult population with the Sara payments paid monthly.

This shows the inevitable and welcome direction Malaysia is moving towards universal basic income.

## Basic income is inevitable

**■ The world is rapidly moving towards more serious income insecurity than ever**

**■ Income insecurity will likely be endemic within a decade or two and we need to find a lasting solution**

**■ Every normal resident of a country should be entitled to a basic income**



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MALAYSIA / 7 h ago

**Dr Mahathir says 'treachery' label would also apply to his DPM in 2018**

MOST READ

## WHAT YOU THINK

### Universal basic income (UBI) is a kind of freedom more effective than ad hoc welfare systems — John Michael and Geoffrey Williams

✉   

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Monday, 04 Nov 2024 2:03 PM MYT

NOVEMBER 4 — A Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a form of social empowerment that has five core characteristics: it is paid in cash, to individuals, on a regular monthly basis and is universally available to everyone without conditions.

Beyond these foundations a UBI has a wider impact by promoting individual choice, freedom to make

COMMENT by Lee Seng Kiat and Prof Geoffrey Williams

## Magic of a universal basic income

**HEALTHCARE**, education and social infrastructure are usually universal benefits that we all automatically benefit from.

However, it is rather strange that in our society there is resistance to the idea of providing a basic income to all citizens universally.

Targeted benefits are the opposite of this. While it seems perfectly sensible to target very limited resources only to those that need them most, these tend to be unpopular policies.

Rooted in a mindset of scarcity, they sow suspicion, breed one-upmanship and are rife with criticism.

Similarly, means-tested cash transfer programmes also tend to be unpopular, leading to envy and a sense of something for nothing.

If cash transfers were made into a universal benefit, like a basic income, this perception may be different. So how would this form of universality work its magic?

With universality, we are no longer divided into two camps of "deserving" and "undeserving". There is no social stigma against recipients, no political tension, no complex and intrusive applications to the government and no inspectors

keeping a watch over you.

Many argue that the government has no place determining between the deserving and the undeserving anyway.

If giving cash to the "rich" does not sit right with you yet, consider the administrative cost savings that come with universality. How many man hours would be saved from trying to discriminate between rich and poor people if we simply included everyone?

Instead of suspicion, basic income would efficiently disburse an agreed amount to all, directly to their bank accounts or MyKad, without any middlemen or room for wastage, leakages and corruption.

Targeted benefits can feel debilitating when you are paid for being poor and when that payment is reduced when you progress through hard work to a marginally higher income. Instead of disincentivising progress, basic income does away with all disincentives by being universal.

By boosting social mobility without tinkering with anyone's social status, there is no more one-upmanship — everyone gets it.

Universality is only one of five tenets of basic income. It also must be

regular or monthly — paid in cash not tokens — vouchers or food parcels, paid to individuals not heads of households and above all it must be unconditional.

These ideas are quickly gaining ground in Malaysia. Under Budget 2025, the unity government announced a significant boost to the *Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah* (STR) and *Sumbangan Asas Rahmah* (Sara) initiatives next year.

Total allocations increased to RM13 billion from RM10 billion and will benefit nine million people or 60% of the adult population.

Financial assistance under the Social Welfare Department (JKM) will rise to RM2.9 billion from RM2.4 billion, enabling higher monthly welfare payments for the underprivileged.

A total of 4.1 million households will receive Sara cash transfers compared with 700,000 recipients this year, with a RM100 monthly benefit credited directly to their MyKad.

The maximum household assistance will increase to RM4,600, compared with RM3,700 previously. Combining all forms of assistance, no one in Malaysia needs to have an income of less than RM1,100 per month.



With universality, we are no longer divided into two camps of 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. — ADIB RAWI YAHYA/THE SUN

Including STR, Sara and JKM, a poor household with three children is eligible to receive over RM13,000 annually, compared to RM11,000 last year. Senior citizens living in poverty, will be eligible for over RM10,000 in aid annually, compared to RM8,000 last year. This is before accounting for additional aid from state governments, Zakat or from foundations.

The progressive reforms of welfare assistance will still need to embed the basic principles of regular payments, paid in cash to individuals on a universal and unconditional basis, but Malaysia has already begun this journey and has the chance to be a leader in the world, creating magic from a universal basic income.

**Lee Seng Kiat** is a volunteer coordinator for the Basic Income Earth Network and **Prof Geoffrey Williams** is an economist and policy specialist. The views expressed are those of the authors. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

# UBI on screen



## Unconditional - Documentary Film

'Unconditional' tells the story of two inspiring policy experiments in Bangladesh and India, which turned traditional social policymaking on its head.

Told through the stories of pilot participants, with contributions from their community organisers, this 30 - minute documentary sheds light on the power of 'UBI plus' and points towards a future where unconditionality is the foundation stone of social policy.

*A film by Neil Howard, Simon Wharf, Vibhor Mathur, Sarath Davala*

Click here to watch the film:  
<https://vimeo.com/1005450201/8207e5d8c9>

To know more about the pilot featured in the film click on the following links:

### **CLARISSA Cash Plus :**

<https://clarissa.global/resource/clarissa-cash-plus-innovative-social-protection-in-bangladesh/>

### **WorkFREE UBI+:**

<https://www.work-free.net>



# BIEN Hubs Team

## John Michael

*Asia Pacific Hub Manager*

johnmichaelk2018@gmail.com

johnmichael@basicincome.org

## Wolfgang Wopperer-Beholz

*Hubs Manager*

wolfgang@basicincome.org

## Neil Howard

*Hubs Coordinator & BIEN EC Member*

nph28@bath.ac.uk

## Chris Nwafor

*Africa Hub Manager*

nwaforcu@gmail.com

## José Brito

*Latin America Hub Manager*

josewhellison@gmail.com



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