

Report on the 19th BIEN Congress Hyderabad, India

Representatives from Basic Income New Zealand Bella Moke, Meleissa Selwyn-Rika, Iain Middleton and Gaylene Middleton travelled to Hyderabad, India in late August 2019 to attend the 19th World Basic Income Congress.

Although there were the academics, researchers, authors, and advocates participating, the real heart of the event were the recipients of Basic Income from various countries who shared their experiences. It confirmed, that if we are serious about real care for all in our country, BASIC INCOME must be applied.

Denis Anam Otieno: Basic Income recipient (Give Directly Project - Kenya) told us:

"I am a married man and a father. I am three years into the 12-year programme, which is committed to giving an unconditional small payment to every person in my village who is 18 years and over. Every person receives the same amount regardless of any other earnings. In my household, my wife also receives her own money. Prior to the programme, I was the single income provider and as such I made all the financial decisions. Being also on the programme, my wife now has a say in how we run our household. It is a good thing! Basic Income gives us the ability to do what we would like for our family. I have noticed that more children go to school.":

Director of the "Give Directly Project", Caroline Teti says the initiative has been successful in the following ways:

- * Relationships have changed between men and women - domestic violence has reduced
- * Extremely positive results have been the experience of individuals, communities, and women
- * Communities become empowered
- * People are able to make choices about their lives

Three women recipients from the Basic Income trials in India described to the Congress Assembly the following changes that they had experienced:

- * "I used to cover my face. Now I take off my veil and look at people face to face"
- * "I have economic freedom"
- * "I can do anything"
- * "It has changed my life. People talk to me nicely"
- * "A while after I began on the programme, I bought two goats. I was then able to buy another two.

In four years, I now have fourteen goats and four buffalos. I have a business now making condensed milk and I loan others money at no interest just so they can succeed too"

- * "In one year of being on Basic Income our village decided to pool our money and establish a collective. Now we have a fishing business in our village which we all work"

Jenner Van Dranen a recipient from the Ontario BI Trial in Canada, which has now been cancelled, told us:

"I was working four jobs just to survive. I wanted to be a photographer, but this was not possible as I barely made enough to cover my rent. Getting from one job to another often meant I would be late and then I would get stressed. When I won entry into the programme through a ballot it was great to be assured that at least my rent would be paid. I was able to give up two jobs. I took up my photography.

Her comments of the experiences of those on the programme included:

- * improved mental health
- * improved physical health
- * a lift in confidence
- * ability to plan for the future
- * some went to school
- * more got work
- * some paid their debts
- * a reduction in medication
- * a determination to eventually go off the programme. Recipients could see a future for their own self-sufficiency.

The initiative was funded by the state government of the time. Unfortunately, with a change of government, the programme was stopped. After only three months mental anguish, anxiety and stress were high again. A family who were on the programme are now back to how they were before. A single person is now worse off.

Karen De Jooste a Member of Parliament in South Africa told us that in a BI trial comprising 6000 individuals that after three rounds of statistical surveys were completed results showed:

- * better nutrition
- * better health
- * more cataract operations performed
- * reduced child labour
- * improved education
- * more hours worked
- * more savings

The Congress papers were discussions from peacetime applications of Basic Income. However, there was one session on Basic Income in Post-Conflict Scenarios. Diane Bashur from San Diego State University, but originally from Syria, spoke about a proposed BI pilot project for Syrian refugees. International Aid agencies have begun to question policies focused on in-kind aid, vouchers, prescribed spending and think instead of providing a BI. Patrick Brown from Queen's University Belfast also talked about how BI could be a transformational tool for post-conflict societies. Patrick's focus was the BI possibilities in Northern Ireland following the troubles. Selvi Satchithanandam from Basic Income Sri Lanka talked about the possibilities of using Basic Income to overcome problems following conflict in Sri Lanka.

Peter Brake from New Zealand, a long time BI advocate, spoke on using GST to fund a BI in India. During the Congress the following are some comments we heard from participants:

- * Basic Income is absolutely affordable
- * POVERTY is created by separating People from Resources
- * Do you think you know better than me about my child than I do - NO! NO! NO!
- * If you think to help a workforce such as us farmers you throw initiatives at us - NO! NO! NO!
- * End Political Patronage
- * Give income to landowners to work the land
- * The greatest disservice to people is to say they would waste the money
- * Trust the wisdom of human beings

CHANGE represented through BASIC INCOME giving:

- * DIGNITY
- * CHOICE
- * EMPOWERMENT

Aseman Bahadori from Sanktionsfrei (Sanctions-free), Germany described how their organisation, working with the University of Wuppertal, was using private donations to set up a scheme to boost welfare benefit payments as necessary so that the recipients would receive the same amount of money as they would if they were receiving Basic Income payments. This is possible in Germany without the need to change any laws or regulations. University experts would monitor the trial from 2019 until 2022. This was of interest to us as BINZ, working with Massey University, had attempted to set up a similar scheme. However, in New Zealand it may have been necessary to change regulations to stop WINZ treating any extra make up payments as extra income and reduce the benefits paid by WINZ. Our proposal fell through when the private funder withdrew support.

It was very encouraging to receive several complimentary comments from Congress participants from as far away as Norway and South Africa about our BINZ Facebook page which committee member Karl Matthys updates daily. People felt our page was up to date and reliable.

Talking BI for four days was exhilarating. We can repeat the experience this year closer to home as the Congress for 2020 is in Brisbane, Australia, Monday 28 September to Wednesday 30 September.

Watch videos from the Congress at:

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