

Basic Income

ABLE Conference, May 2018



WHAT IS BASIC INCOME?

- Income sufficient to meet basic needs and live with dignity regardless of work status
- Provided by government, no strings attached
- Not new, or radical or hypothetical

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Four examples:

- Alaska sovereign wealth fund dividend (universal demogrant)
- OAS/GIS for seniors in Canada (part demogrant, part refundable tax credit)
- Child benefits (partial BI, RTC)
- GST credit (very small, available to single adults under 65, RTC)

WHAT IT IS NOT

- Social assistance (aka Welfare) is the opposite of a BI – highly conditional, insecure, inadequate, stigmatizing
- A magic wand that will fix everything but does unlock many other solutions
- A replacement for public services – it is a complement to them, and to labour standards, financial regulation.....

What's dignity got to do with it?

- Concepts of common wealth, common good, human freedom and dignity are part of all major faith traditions, incl. Indigenous (e.g. zakat, potlach)
- Human rights, FN treaties
- Evidence that fairness and cooperation are hard-wired in our brains as a social species

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

- From pilots, 1970s Canada and US and currently around the world; seniors' and children's program experience; other evidence (e.g., neuroscience)
- Patterns remarkably similar
- One key pattern is empowerment for those most economically excluded

WORK

- 1 of 3 major challenges – the ‘lazy’ myth
- Work is more than employment - BI supports work in all its forms (e.g., Ontario, WMF)
- No evidence of significant employment disincentive; more, and different, work options possible (e.g., Julia, Mark in ON; Shirley in Dauphin; villages in India)
- The most disadvantaged tend to benefit most (women, people with disabilities, minorities)

HEALTH AND EDUCATION

- Evidence of positive impacts on physical and mental health, social ties, empowerment, other indicators of wellbeing like fewer accidents/injuries
- Reduction in domestic violence and in alcohol & tobacco consumption

COSTING AND FINANCING

- 2nd of 3 challenges – ‘too expensive’ myth
- ‘Net’ cost is affordable (e.g., PBO \$76b is gross, not net; Coyne); things not free now – poverty, inequality, insecurity, desperation cost
- BI as economic stimulus (Bank of Canada)
- Redistribution of resources/getting results is key but is challenging;
- \$103b in tax breaks mostly favour upper income deciles; poverty gets deeper

FEASIBILITY

- 3rd of 3 challenges - not 'feasible' claim
- History tells us that most great ideas are 'naive' and not 'feasible' until we make them work (e.g., women's right to vote, abolition of slavery, pensions, airplanes and self-driving cars)
- So where, then, is our future headed?

WHY BI NOW?

Convergence of factors:

- Inequality/poverty/insecurity accelerating; human wellbeing suffering;
- Social unrest, 'tribalisms' growing; democracy threatened; the planet threatened
- The robots are taking our jobs; how do we buy what the bots produce?
- Many more...BI changes the paradigm, makes the future path more hopeful
- Many more....on this path, future looks

GOING FORWARD

- Imagine the work you do.
- Imagine how much more rewarding it could be if everyone was more financially empowered with greater income security and genuine options.
- I imagine that many of you also have evidence and experience that could help make that a reality.

THE PRIMER and
THE BASIC INCOME WE WANT



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