

A Transformative Experience

My Journey to the UK and the BIEN 2024 Conference

Taking my first international flight was an emotional and transformative experience. As I prepared to leave Hyderabad, I was overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude for how far I had come. From the challenges I faced growing up as a transgender person in India to becoming an advocate for marginalized communities, this trip symbolized not only personal growth but also the recognition of my work on a global platform.

The layover in Delhi was a moment of reflection, where I considered the many people who had supported me on this journey, both personally and professionally. As I waited for my connecting flight to the UK, I took a quiet moment to offer prayers of thanks to God for giving me the strength and opportunities to continue my advocacy. My heart was full of excitement and nervousness, knowing that I was not only representing myself but the countless marginalized voices for which I have fought. Landing in the UK filled me with a deep sense of accomplishment.

As someone who had never seen an airport in my life, attending the BIEN conference has truly been the beginning of my journey to explore new horizons. Without the unwavering support of my BIEN family, I would never have been able to set foot in the UK. I am incredibly grateful to Anweshi Research Center, whose efforts transformed my dreams into reality, and to my gracious host, Ms. Maria, who welcomed me into her home in Bristol. This entire experience has been nothing short of a rollercoaster ride, filled with excitement, challenges, and growth. The warmth and encouragement I received from my BIEN family at every stage of my trip, from planning my journey to returning safely to India, have been remarkable. It is a testament to the strength of the community that BIEN fosters—a true family in every sense.

Day 1: Global Conversations and Groundbreaking Discussions

The first day of the BIEN 2024 conference was nothing short of awe-inspiring. As I arrived at Bath University, I was struck by the magnitude of the event—scholars, activists, and policymakers from all over the world had gathered to discuss basic income and its potential to revolutionize societies. It was humbling to be among such distinguished company, all united by the shared goal of advocating for social justice and economic equity.

The opening sessions set the stage for the day's discussions, focusing on the urgent need to address global wealth inequality and the climate crisis through unconditional basic income (UBI). One of the most impactful sessions for me was centered on cash-based social policies in India. Listening to experts talk about how UBI could uplift millions of vulnerable people in my home country was both enlightening and validating. It reaffirmed the importance of my work in advocating for financial inclusion for marginalized communities in India, including transgender individuals.

Later in the day, we watched documentaries highlighting basic income experiments in India and Dhaka. These visual stories vividly highlighted the real-world impact UBI could have on improving the quality of life in low-income communities. As someone deeply involved in advocating for human rights, it was a powerful reminder of how UBI could provide not only financial relief but also dignity and empowerment to marginalized groups.

The most inspiring part of the day was the session on "**Basic Income for Peace.**" The discussions explored how UBI could be a transformative tool in regions affected by conflict and instability, with case studies from Ukraine, Palestine, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. These examples highlighted how economic security could contribute to peace and development, a concept that resonated deeply with me. By the end of the day, I felt energized and hopeful about the potential of UBI to bring about lasting social change in India and beyond.

Day 2: Diverse Perspectives and Cultural Exploration

The second day of the conference was filled with a range of perspectives on the potential of UBI to address inequality across different cultures and regions. The morning began with a captivating film screening of three short films from South Africa, including one titled "**A Decent Path.**" These films highlighted the powerful role that UBI could play in transforming lives, particularly for people who have historically been marginalized due to race, poverty, and systemic injustice.

One of the most impactful sessions for me was on basic income pilot programs for **Indigenous communities in the Global South.** Hearing about the specific challenges these communities face due to historical exploitation, land dispossession, and lack of access to resources was a profound learning experience. The potential for UBI to provide not only economic security but also restorative justice for Indigenous peoples was a concept I had not fully explored before, and it opened my eyes to the broader implications of basic income beyond the transgender person and LGBTQ+ communities.

I had the opportunity to witness roundtable discussion titled "**Sowing the Seeds of Stability**" which explored the need for basic income for farmers, farmworkers, and food producers in the UK. Given my involvement with women farmers in Telangana through organic farming initiatives back home, this conversation hit close to home. I found myself drawing parallels between the challenges faced by farmers in India and those in the UK. The discussions emphasized how UBI could provide a safety net for those in agriculture, allowing them to continue their work without the constant worry of financial instability, which is critical in both rural India and the UK.

The day ended with a delightful walking tour of Bath with fellow conference participants. Bath's historic architecture, combined with the lively discussions from earlier in the day, made for a perfect blend of cultural and intellectual exploration. I connected with other activists and researchers during the tour, exchanging ideas and stories about our respective work. The beauty of the city and the conversations I had with other attendees made this an unforgettable day, leaving me with a sense of camaraderie and global solidarity.

Day 3: Empowering Marginalized Communities

The third and final day of the conference focused on gender empowerment and how UBI could be a significant change for marginalized genders. As someone who has dedicated my life to advocating for the rights of transgender persons, this day was particularly meaningful to me. The discussions delved deep into how UBI can empower women and transgender individuals, offering them the financial freedom to make choices about their lives, education, and careers without the constraints of poverty or societal discrimination.

One of the most personal and deeply moving moments for me during the conference was the discussion on basic income pilot programs for transgender individuals in Hyderabad, India. Presenting the transformative impact of these initiatives was not only inspiring for me but also affirmed the importance of such work to many in attendance. The response from the audience was overwhelmingly supportive, with strong advocacy for extending basic income to marginalized communities, particularly the transgender population. This session felt intensely personal, as it resonated deeply with the work I have been dedicated to in India—promoting financial inclusion and securing the rights of the transgender community. I firmly believe that the implementation of such programs in the future will significantly alter the fate and future of communities that have long been overlooked and treated as invisible in society. The potential to bring about real, meaningful change through basic income initiatives is undeniable, and I am more committed than ever to seeing these efforts come to fruition.

Another impactful session that day was on **food security** and how UBI could help dismantle the systems that perpetuate poverty and inequality. As someone who has collaborated with marginalized communities, I found this session to be particularly important in understanding the broader implications of basic income on social justice. UBI is not just about providing financial support but about addressing the root causes of inequality, particularly in access to food, education, and healthcare.

The closing ceremony of BIEN 2024 was a bittersweet moment. It marked the end of three transformative days, but it also symbolized the beginning of a new chapter in the fight for basic income and social justice. Watching the handover to the BIEN 2025 team, I felt a deep sense of gratitude for having been part of this global movement. I left the conference feeling empowered, inspired, and ready to continue advocating for the communities I serve.

A Journey of Transformation: Personal Growth and Professional Purpose

Reflecting on this trip, I realize it wasn't just about attending BIEN 2024—it was about personal growth and reaffirming my purpose. From my first international flight to participating in insightful discussions, this journey was a milestone in my life. It strengthened my belief that basic income is not only an economic issue but a human rights issue, with the potential to uplift marginalized communities, especially transgender individuals.

Speaking about the basic income pilot program for transgender persons in Hyderabad was transformative. The audience was deeply moved by the real-life stories of transgender people finding stability through financial support. The session highlighted that beyond financial inclusion, mental health services, legal aid, and vocational training are critical for lasting success. I also realized the importance of data collection and transparency to measure the program's success and scale it further.

Overall, the project received overwhelming support, with many recognizing its potential for systemic change. The session underscored the need for collaboration with local governments to make basic income for transgender people a permanent part of social welfare policies. For Anveshi and INBI, continued dialogue with global organizations and stronger partnerships will be key to sustaining and expanding our work.

This experience has left me more committed than ever to advocating for basic income, social justice, and gender empowerment, ready to return to India and push forward initiatives for a more equitable society.