



# **Implementing Basic Income: Lessons from a Policy Fiasco Analysis**

15th NABIG Congress, 12-15 May 2016  
University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

1

Jurgen De Wispelaere, University of Tampere  
Lindsay Stirton, University of Sussex

## Continuation of project on BIG implementation

- 2004: “The Many Faces of Universal Basic Income”, *The Political Quarterly* 75(3): 266–274.
- 2007: “The Public Administration Case against Participation Income”, *Social Service Review* 81 (3): 523–549.
- 2011: “The Administrative Efficiency of Basic Income”, *Policy and Politics* 39(1): 115–132.
- 2012: “A Disarmingly Simple Idea? Practical Bottlenecks in Implementing a Universal Basic Income”, *International Social Security Review* 65(2): 103–121.
- 2013: “The Basic Income Guarantee: Bringing Bureaucracy Back In”, *Political Studies* 61(4): 915–932.

# Policy fiascos: when policy becomes disaster ...



# Policy evaluation: success and failure

- ▶ Policy evaluation: a core component of policy-making
  - ▶ Evidence-based policy-making
  - ▶ Governance and the regulatory state
- ▶ Defining and measuring policy success is difficult
  - ▶ Success in the eye of the beholder?
  - ▶ Complexities of time, space and methods
  - ▶ Focus on process, program or political effects?

# Policy fiascos as a useful framework

- ▶ Policy fiasco: large-scale, avoidable policy mistakes, rooted in both omission/commission by decision-makers (Dunleavy 1995)
  - ▶ Not exceptional, common features of many policy areas
  - ▶ Not unpredictable, common, multidimensional but understandable causal pathways
  - ▶ Not unavoidable, we can prevent and/or reduce their impact by planning around them
  - ▶ Not accidental, results of decision-making processes

# Understanding policy fiascos

- Policy fiascos can have multiple origins: poor knowledge, poor planning, poor timing, poor implementation, or poor politics (Grabosky 1995)
- Sieber 1982: policy does not merely produce side-effects (externalities) but reverse effects
  - Reverse effects: policy choices produce the opposite effect as that which was intended
  - Intended policy always interacts in a complex policy environment, which is often ill-understood

# Basic income: (how to avoid) a policy fiasco-in-the-making?

- ▶ Three factors make it difficult to “control” basic income:
  - ▶ Residual Complexity: basic income may be a simple scheme, but nevertheless interacts in various ways with a complex environment
  - ▶ Scale Effect: basic income captures a target population at a scale that is typically untried and untested in most jurisdictions
  - ▶ Scope Effect: basic income constitutes a radical departure from existing policy pathways: difficult to predict/govern ripple effects

## Basic income: (how to avoid) a policy fiasco-in-the-making? (cont)

- ▶ Knowledge: wishful thinking and tendency to overgeneralise across cases (what can BI really do?)
- ▶ Timing: tendency to roll out/scale up programs too fast, without redundancies or contingency planning in place (Great Leap Forward)
- ▶ Planning/Implementation: insufficient budgetary and organisational resource commitment leads to policy overload or placation
- ▶ Politics: insufficient attention to (counter)constituency increases policy confrontation, provocation and reduces long-term stability



# Illustration A: basic income good for women?

- ▶ BI posits positive effects on women's opportunities in both household/labour market
- ▶ In a gendered labour market, could BI cause disproportionate withdrawal of women? (Robeyns 2000)
  - ▶ Women face lower pay/opportunities compared to men
  - ▶ BI allows for a household to direct part of its "labour" to child care without major financial penalty, but most likely person to pick this up would be women
  - ▶ BI negative effect on individual women over time (withdrawal penalty) as well as aggregate (reinforces structural gender inequality)

## Illustration B: basic income fetishism?

- ▶ BI advocates often give strong support for proposals that share some properties with a full BI as part of a pathway strategy (better something than nothing)
- ▶ Support for Partial BI/Sectorial BI/Participation Income may not generate the expected effects and rapidly erode existing support or policy attention, even amongst supporters
- ▶ An extreme case is the hailing of a BI that is legislated for but not funded as a major policy achievement (cf. Brazil) instead of recognising it as a case of being “lost in legislation”

# Illustration C: basic income and policy drift

- ▶ Policy drift is based on failure to update programs (Hacker 2004, 2005)
  - ▶ BI may be instituted initially by a broad policy coalition aimed at combatting poverty.
  - ▶ Significant savings also occur at the system level: e.g., reduction in some administrative costs, mainstreaming and harmonising of income support etc.
  - ▶ Over time the savings rationale becomes more important with some stakeholders and savings start crowding out necessary investment to fully implement the anti-poverty rationale: failure to update the BI
- ▶ Policy drift is likely when combined with rationale of “getting rid” of bureaucrats, who are traditionally important safeguards for program stability

# Conclusion: proceed, but with care!

- ▶ Avoidance of a “Great Leap Forward” strategy: radical change pushed through too fast with insufficient preparation (Moran 2001)
- ▶ Is basic income entirely different or still similar to existing schemes?
  - ▶ If basic income is really different, we simply don’t know enough about how it would work (or not work)
  - ▶ If basic income is similar, we must learn from both policy success and policy failure of existing programs and take lessons seriously
- ▶ Basic income design and implementation must proceed with care, attention to detail, critical perspective, and focus on interaction with policy/social/political environment

Thanks!

Comments welcome at  
[jurgen.dewispelaere@gmail.com](mailto:jurgen.dewispelaere@gmail.com)

Read our research on basic income implementation at:  
<https://uta-fi.academia.edu/JurgenDeWispelaere>