Norwegian University
of Life Sciences

Master's Thesis 2019 30 ECTS
Faculty of Landscape and Society

Combining Basic and Maximum Income for Social and Ecological Sustainability

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Declaration

I, Pietro Cigna, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature**:** 

Date: May 15, 2019

Acknowledgements

Studying at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences has been an extraordinary experience, and this thesis is only the conclusion of a learning process for which I must thank several people. First, to those who organised the introductory week for us newcomers in Summer 2017. I felt welcomed primarily as a person, not only as a student, and this feeling has extended throughout the time I spent at NMBU. Second, to all professors who shared their knowledge with dedication and humility, spending time after class to discuss with students and treating us with respect and care. Third, to Erik Gómez-Baggethun, who supervised me in this research project, for his academic and human support, and for the time spent accurately revising and commenting on earlier drafts of this thesis.

In submitting this final work, I also thank those who concretely made it possible. To Prof. Shobhita Rajagopal and Prof. Motilal Mahamallik, who granted me a temporary affiliation to the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur (IDSJ), through which I was allowed to conduct research in India. To all those who accepted to participate to the research, for setting aside part of their time to answer my questions. To Manoj, who accompanied me during the field visits and translated the opinions expressed by non-English speaking respondents. To the Fritt Ord Foundation, whose stipend allowed me, in the last months, to fully dedicate to writing this thesis.

Last, I wish to thank my friends and my family. To Julie, Else-Mari, Abel, Olav, Liv Anna, Matt, Carolina, Tone, Maya, Tom, Mathias, Khaled and Mehrdad; life in Norway has been so enriching and intense with you. To Alis, for having shared with me a large part of this experience. To Ester, Giulia, Marianna, Ame, Jack, Eddie, Bruce, Andre, Emma, Anto, Ludo, Monica, Andrea and Rebecca; for the time and care dedicated to me and to each other, each of you in your own unique way. To Mugu and Roman, for never stop raising uncomfortable but essential questions, and for the endless walks in search of ourselves. To my grandmas, for their stories, for having loved me and having always supported what I felt it was important to do. To my brothers, mates for life. To my parents, for you gave me life, and the freedom to live it.

Abstract

The current growth-addicted economic system is neither socially, nor ecologically sustainable. Inequalities are rising worldwide, while the conditions necessary to support seven to ten billion people on planet Earth are being eroded by excessive natural resources use, waste production and pollution. Meanwhile, countries of the Global North have appropriated most benefits generated by economic growth, and countries of the Global South have carried most of the costs. The post-growth field of studies explores how societies can thrive without a growing GDP and how to move towards a more sustainable economic system. To pursue this objective, a Universal Basic Income – a state-provided unconditional payment covering one's basic needs – is proposed in combination with a maximum income – a cap on individual income. In this research, I explore the social and ecological sustainability of a basic/maximum income policy by examining the arguments for and against it, its effects on people's working habits and the desirable ratio between UBI and maximum income. I also investigate barriers and opportunities on the way to implement it at the national or international level to uncover its political feasibility. Data were collected by reviewing the literature and by selecting India, and more specifically the state of Kerala, as case study, and by conducting semi-structured and structured interviews with 60 people. Even though empirical results showed a lack of support for a basic/maximum income policy in India and Kerala, the proposal should not be abandoned but accompanied by additional instruments. I argue that a basic/maximum income policy with a ratio of 1:10 would promote social and ecological sustainability, but only if first implemented in the Global North, democratically supported, coupled with a cultural shift and with the possibility by states to address short-term shocks.

Keywords: UBI, maximum income, degrowth, post-growth, India, Kerala, sustainability policies

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“The world has enough for everyone's need,

but not enough for everyone's greed.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

1. Introduction

Moving towards an ecologically safe and socially just economy, one that operates within ecological limits while covering basic needs for all, has been suggested to be the main sustainability challenge for the 21st century (Raworth 2017). Currently, no country in the world manages to provide basic needs to its citizens while sustainably consuming its fair share of global resources (O'Neill et al. 2018).

Inequalities have exploded in most countries since the 1980's, with 1% of the world population now owning roughly as much wealth as the remaining 99% (Shorrocks et al. 2018). In OECD countries, the Gini coefficient referring to income increased from 0.29 in the mid-1980's to 0.32 in 2014 (OECD 2016) while countries with high growth rates such as India, China and Russia experienced even steeper rises in inequality (Alvaredo et al. 2018). Piketty (2014) showed that income inequality is following a U-shape in Anglo-Saxon countries (UK, US, Canada and Australia), in continental Europe and in several 'emerging' countries (e.g. India, South Africa, Argentina), with the lowest levels being experienced between the 1950's and the 1980's. According to the World Inequality Report (Alvaredo et al. 2018), at the global level, between 1980 and 2016, the top 1% captured 27% of the total growth in GDP while the bottom 50% only 12%. Compared to other regions, the rise of inequality has been slower in continental Europe thanks to welfare policies of post-war heritage.

Such sharp rise in inequality levels is threatening human prosperity at the global scale. According to Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), more unequal countries score lower in human development indicators, compared to more equal countries, even in cases where the former have a higher GDP per capita. For example, life expectancy in the US is one of the lowest amongst countries of the Global North, while its GDP per capita (adjusted per purchasing power) is among the highest. From an egalitarian standpoint, this is rather unjust. It means that if income was more fairly distributed in markets and redistributed by the state, citizens of unequal countries could experience a higher quality of life. At the same time, strong inequality fuels social conflicts. Again, according to Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), institutional and reciprocal trust, as well as social mobility, are lower where inequality is higher. Thus, in these countries, people are less prone to cooperate and are incentivised to envy the most well-off.

Similarly, in more unequal societies, the 'use' value of commodities is substituted by their 'positional' value, triggering excessive resource use through what Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) referred to as conspicuous consumption. In Veblen's (1899) theory, people

purchase commodities not necessarily because they need them but to catch up with the lifestyle conducted by those positioned higher in the social hierarchy. In this way, consumption goods become a status symbol, and people attempt to acquire social recognition by increasing the quality and quantity of what they own. Novelty is the primary driver of conspicuous (or positional) consumption (Jackson 2016; Pizzigati 2018). The richest are the first to purchase the latest items and, when these become popular, are the first to switch to even newer commodities, fuelling a linear flow that requires increasing amounts of natural resources to be sustained and generate large stocks of waste. To strong inequalities therefore corresponds a strong ecological impact.

This is exemplified by the fact that the ecological crisis is becoming more severe. Two thirds of the provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural services freely provided by ecosystems are declining (MA 2005), while four of the nine proposed planetary boundaries have already been transgressed (Steffen et al. 2015). The latest report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES 2019) emphasises that biodiversity loss is accelerating at unprecedented rates and the global response has so far been inefficient. Meanwhile, the Kyoto Protocol failed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and its successor, the Paris Agreement, did not set targets stringent enough to remain below the 1.5°-2°C increase in global temperature suggested by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (Bodansky 2016). Through exponential resource use and pollution, humankind is endangering its own survival on planet Earth.

For scholars in the field of ecological economics, the current situation does not come unexpected, as the endless pursuit of economic growth measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), primary policy goal of nearly all countries after World War II, is known to carry large social and environmental costs (Daly 2014; Jackson 2016; Raworth 2017). GDP merely measures the monetary value of goods and services exchanged in the market, but it does not distinguish between costs and benefits of production and consumption, nor it accounts for unpaid domestic work or volunteering activities (Fitoussi & Stiglitz 2012; Waring & Steinem 1988). Thus, GDP grows where more goods and services are sold or when the value-added of commodities increases. Due to these mechanisms, growth in GDP requires extracting and consuming more energy and natural resources (Jackson 2016), or increasing profits by shifting costs, usually lowering wages and polluting the environment (Daly 2014; Kapp 1978), or commodifying goods and services which previously were not meant for sale (Gómez-Baggethun 2014). Also, technological advancements have allowed capitalists to increase the

ratio of capital to labour, effectively appropriating a larger share of the income generated by growth (Karabarbounis & Neiman 2013). But, if pursuing infinite economic growth produces such social and ecological damages, why countries all over the world have so keenly done it?

Widespread support for economic growth was built on the presumption that increases in per capita income increase social wealth, and therefore people's well-being (e.g. Acemoglu & Robinson 2013). However, research shows that beyond a certain level of GDP, when basic material needs are satisfied, higher incomes do not significantly contribute to higher levels of well-being (Easterlin et al. 2010; Wilkinson & Pickett 2010). Layard (2005) reported that in the US the percentage of those who considered themselves as happy has stagnated and even declined since the 1970's, despite a steady GDP growth. Interestingly, over the same period of time inequalities have increased (Alvaredo et al. 2018). Thus, economic growth improves well-being only in its early stages; then, measures to keep inequalities at a low level are more important (Kallis et al. 2018).

Other findings also challenge the capacity of economic growth to reduce inequalities, a theory based on the work of Simon Kuznets (1901-1985). In 1955, Kuznets (1955) observed that inequalities tended to rise during the initial stages of GDP growth, but this trend used to reverse over time. Mainstream (Neoclassical) economists built on this model, the so-called Kuznets curve, to promote economic growth (Kakwani et al. 2000) despite evidence showing that inequality is reduced thanks to state intervention through taxation rather than to higher levels of GDP (Piketty 2014). India and China have had a much higher rate of GDP growth than Europe over the last four decades, but European countries have managed to keep inequalities at a lower level because of their comparatively stricter redistributive policies (Alvaredo et al. 2018). Also, the rates of inequalities are currently much higher than in the 1980's in most countries worldwide, even though the size of the global economy has experienced an eight-fold growth (WB 2019).

The model devised by Kuznets was then adjusted to predicate that economic growth contributes to reduce pollution (Stern et al. 1996). Pollution increases during the earlier stages of economic growth but it later declines, the argument goes, as people with higher incomes pretend a healthy environment, technologies become more efficient, and governments can employ larger tax revenues to protect nature. However, also in this case, empirical data point quite at the opposite. Apart from a few local cases where higher incomes were correlated with reduced emissions of air pollutants (Dinda 2004), at the global scale there is no evidence that

economic growth limits pollution or unsustainable material consumption and there is no empirical evidence of growing economies and declining GHG emissions (Peters et al. 2011) or material consumption (Wiedmann et al. 2015). Cross-panel data analysis revealed that, on average, to each percentage point of GDP growth it corresponds between 0.6% and 0.8% increase in CO_2 emissions (Burke et al. 2015), and 0.8% in resource use (Steinberger et al. 2013). Again, it is thanks to laws and regulations that environmental quality gets improved; for example, in schemes such as EU Emission Trading System (ETS), which allows firms to trade emission quotas, it is the legally imposed cap that reduces pollution, not the market (Gómez-Baggethun & Muradian 2015). Drawing on such empirical evidence, scholars involved in the post-growth and degrowth fields of studies (e.g. D'Alisa et al. 2014; Daly 1993) claim that both public and private actors should abandon the dogma of growth at all costs, and start developing tools to move towards a sustainable society, reducing inequalities together with human pressure on ecosystems.

Among their proposals is that of combining two policies, namely a Universal Basic Income (UBI) and a maximum income (Daly 1997; Videira et al. 2014). UBI is a payment periodically provided in cash to all on an individual basis, without requiring to fulfil any conditions or to perform any work, set high enough to cover one's basic needs (BIEN 2019). A maximum income is a cap on the amount of income that each individual can earn on a monthly or annual basis; it includes wages, and rents from physical and financial assets (Pizzigati 2018). Allegedly, these policies would both promote social and ecological sustainability in several ways including reducing inequalities, empowering workers at the expenses of capitalists and limiting excessive consumption (Alexander 2014). In addition, a maximum income would provide the resources to finance a UBI. While much research has been conducted on the two policies individually considered, little has been said on their effects if adopted at the same time.

Therefore, this research aims at investigating how a basic/maximum income policy would influence social and ecological sustainability, and what is the policy's political feasibility. Such objective is pursued by answering six research questions:

1. What are the arguments in favour and against a UBI?
2. What are the arguments in favour and against a maximum income?
3. What would be the effects of a basic/maximum income policy on people's working habits?

4. What should be the ratio between basic and maximum income?

5. What are the obstacles in implementing a basic/maximum income policy?

6. What are the opportunities in implementing a basic/maximum income policy?

India, and more specifically the state of Kerala, were selected as case studies; there, semi-structured and structured interviews were conducted with 60 respondents.

Discussing the empirical results together with the literature, I argue that a basic/maximum income policy with a ratio of 1:10 would promote social and ecological sustainability, while being economically sustainable. However, such a policy should be first implemented in the Global North, gather public support, be coupled with a cultural shift and with the possibility by the state to use monetary policy to address shocks in the short-term. In the present situation it seems very unlikely to be implemented, but the socio-ecological crisis we are facing could make it more urgent, or even inevitable, in the medium-term.

The following chapter introduces the ecological economics field of study, including post-growth and degrowth research, and trace the philosophical and empirical history of UBI and maximum income proposals. As well, it points at the current debates unfolding around the two policies. Chapter 3 provides background information about India and Kerala, explaining why they were chosen as case study. Chapter 4 describes the methodology used for sampling participants, collecting and analysing the data, while chapter 5 presents the results. Chapter 6 discusses them in relation to the existing body of knowledge on the topic, emphasising strengths and weaknesses of a basic/maximum income policy. Chapter 7 summarises the main arguments of the study and suggests a policy proposal combining UBI and maximum income.

2. Theory and Background

2.1 Post-growth and degrowth scholarship

The environmental and social unsustainability of economic growth has been extensively studied in the field of ecological economics (Daly 2014; Jackson 2016; Raworth 2017). Ecological economics differs from today's mainstream (or neoclassical) economic thinking by acknowledging a conflict between the scale of the economy and the physical limits of our planet, in terms of both natural resources availability and waste absorption capacity, and by questioning the ability of technology alone to reduce human pressure on the environment (Common & Perrings 1992). Scholars in this field of study consider the economy as a subsystem of the biosphere, and call for a transition towards a development paradigm that requires the amount of energy and materials extracted and consumed – i.e. the economic throughput – not to exceed Earth's regenerative capacity (Costanza et al. 1997). While agreeing on the need to analyse physical and not monetary flows, ecological economists and the scholarship concerned with growth and the environment disagree on the attitude to maintain in respect to GDP growth.

On one side are the growth 'agnostics', i.e. scholars who do not take position on what trend should GDP score in a post-growth scenario. Since the 1970's, drawing on the classical works of Nicolai Georgescu-Rogen and John Stuart Mill, Herman Daly (1993) argued for abandoning GDP measurements and developing a new indicator that distinguishes between the costs and benefits generated within the economic sphere. In her *Doughnut Economics*, Kate Raworth (2017) suggests that economists should remain agnostic about the desirable shape of the GDP curve, and focus on suggesting measures to improve human prosperity regardless of their effects on economic growth. Similarly, Tim Jackson (2016, p. 174) predicted that the 'economy of tomorrow' will have 'a considerably slower rate of economic growth and may already be heading towards a stationary or quasi-stationary state', but did not think that measuring GDP was essential in a post-growth regime. Last, van den Bergh (2011) coined the term 'a-growth' to define a political strategy that would be indifferent to GDP. In the opinion of these authors, although it is a flawed indicator of prosperity, GDP has gained dogmatic support and thus it would be easier to simply abandon it rather than arguing for its steady-state or degrowth.

On the other side are the growth 'atheists', mostly belonging to the degrowth movement. Drawing on the work of anti-capitalist radical thinkers such as Karl Marx, André

Gorz, Ivan Illich and Cornelius Castoriadis, the degrowth movement encompasses researchers from different disciplines, activists and practitioners which advocate for a massive downscale of production and consumption in countries of the Global North, to re-embed their economies within the biophysical limits of the planet (D'Alisa et al. 2014). In this way, countries of the Global South could regain control of their natural resources and independently design their future (Schneider et al. 2010). Degrowth supporters believe that reducing the economic throughput will also reduce GDP, and a reduction in GDP would hamper the capital accumulation which reproduces the violent and exploitative relations of the current neoliberal regime (Kallis 2017b).

Although a reduction in GDP would be a side-effect of a reduction in economic throughput, this should be welcomed by those aspiring for a more egalitarian world. However, in the present situation a reduction in GDP equals recession, which mainly affects the most vulnerable layers of society. Therefore, in a degrowth future, the mechanisms underpinning the economic system and the exchange relations should significantly differ from the present to be socially and ecologically sustainable. The degrowth movement is envisioning this scenario by developing on-field alternative practices (e.g. shared gardening, barter markets, time banks, consumer groups, local currencies) and designing policy proposals for political parties and for the public debate (Demaria et al. 2013).

2.2 A Universal Basic Income policy proposal

UBI is a policy proposal aiming to provide a 'periodic cash payment' to 'all on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement' (BIEN 2019, n.p.). According to the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN 2019), UBI is intended to be enough for a person to pay for basic needs, usually including adequate food, decent shelter and simple clothing. It is delivered without conditions attached – it is unconditional and based on the 'right' to exist –, meaning that people would receive it without having to do any work in exchange, or having to perform predefined activities (such as signing children for formal education or health controls). It is universal, as all would be entitled to it regardless of their socio-economic status, and individual, as the cash transfer would target each person and not the entire household (a smaller amount of money would eventually be provided for each child to their parents). Also, it is delivered on a periodical basis, usually every month. Finally, by definition UBI does not deliver the immediate means of existence, such as food or housing, but rather equips people with the liquid cash needed to purchase them. Although a 'pure' UBI must possess all these features, several

variants of the policy often fall under the broad category of 'basic income', even if they lack of unconditionality or universality. To understand why, it is necessary to address UBI's historical roots.

2.2.1 Brief history and variants of UBI

Proposals to ensure that every person was provided with enough means to conduct a decent life date as back as the 16th century, and have developed up to present time thanks to the contribution of philosophers, philanthropists, academics, and politicians moved by different reasons.

Between the 16th and the 18th century, supporting the poorest people in Europe started to evolve from a charitable act made out of Christian compassion to a common responsibility of society. Earlier, relief for poor people mainly came from individual charity or through religious bodies, but as the number of beggars flowing into cities increased, civil authorities were urged to step in (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). Thomas More (1516) was the first to suggest that the best way to prevent people from stealing was to provide them with some basic means of subsistence, as their misbehaviour was inevitably caused by poverty. Of the same opinion was Juan Luis Vives (1526), who, still drawing on religious motivations, asserted that public bodies must ensure to every poor man enough food, although in exchange for some work. According to Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017), support in kind (i.e. food) for the poor was first established in England around 1600 with the 'Poor Laws', while the Speenhamland district implemented the first cash transfer scheme in 1795. Through this scheme, poor workers were paid a cash benefit that summed to their income up to a threshold considered enough to survive. Despite attracting critiques from conservatories such as Edmund Burke, David Ricardo and Thomas Malthus, public measures to guarantee an income to the poor (and eventually not only to them) continued to be elaborated (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017).

In the 19th century, what can now be considered a basic income started to be requested not only as a societal responsibility for uplifting the poor, but as a right of every person to benefit from the exploitation of common natural resources (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). In France, Thomas Paine (1796) proposed an unconditional state support for every adult, financed with the revenues generated by private land use. In this way, as it was society which allowed the establishment of private properties, society could collect and redistribute part of the profits generated to the entire population. Echoing Paine, Joseph Charlier (1894, p. 56)

stated that society should ensure that the elements of nature are equally enjoyed by everyone 'without usurpation by some people to the detriment of others', while John Stuart Mill, drawing on Charles Fourier's work, asserted that people must be compensated if they are denied access to land and resources (Mill 1848/1904; Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). At the end of 1800, a basic income had therefore assumed the form of a share on natural resources, a framing which influenced how it has been further developed up to present time.

For most of the 20th century, support for basic income came from the need to address the job shortage caused by the massive spread of automation and technological improvements. Already in between the two World Wars, Bertrand Russel recognised that 'modern technique' could allow everyone more leisure time as well as a 'certain small income, sufficient for necessaries', which would be beneficial especially for artists and 'those who are willing to engage in some work which the community recognizes as useful' (Russel 1918, p. 80-81). But it was after World War II that the interest for a basic income reached its first peak. The debate mainly took place in the US, where Robert Theobald proposed, in the early 1960's, to guarantee an 'economic floor under each individual' so that Americans were protected against rising unemployment caused by automation, and were able to do what they 'personally [feel] to be important' (Theobald 1966, p. 103). In the same period, Milton Friedman (1968) introduced a proposal similar to a basic income but conditional to unemployment, i.e. a negative income tax, considered a second-best option and supposed to replace most of US welfare programs. Drawing on a neoliberal narrative, he regarded negative income tax as a tool to further reduce the influence of the state on markets, while ensuring social stability to the system. Although never implemented, the negative income tax gained support from liberal economists such as James Tobin and remained in the American debate for the following decades (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017).

Meanwhile, European academics started framing basic income in a more radical way. In 1986, it was founded the Basic Income European Network – aiming to promote informed discussion and debate throughout Europe on the proposal of a universal and unconditional basic income – which components further elaborated the rationale for a UBI. Drawing on earlier understandings of how wealth originated from common natural resources, they emphasised that wealth is also produced by a collective effort of society, including the contribution of past generations, and should therefore be distributed accordingly (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). In addition, according to Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017), UBI is a powerful instrument to promote real freedom for everyone, by liberating people from the need to engage

in paid work. Discussion on UBI continued to expand and in 2004 the Basic Income European Network eventually evolved into the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), welcoming members from all over the world and marking the globalisation of the concept (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). However, as its history revealed, the broad concept of basic income is far from being accurately defined, and often encompasses variants which must be differentiated amongst.

Proposals often referred to with the expression 'basic income', but different from UBI, include universal basic services, universal basic dividend and the already mentioned negative income tax. According to its proponents, providing universal basic services requires the state to ensure to everyone free food, housing, local transports and internet access, in addition to public healthcare and education (Portes et al. 2017). In other words, it can be considered a UBI delivered not in cash but in kind (food) or services (transport). Instead, as proposed by former Finance Minister of Greece Yanis Varoufakis (Parkins 2017), a universal social dividend would be provided in cash, like a UBI, and it would result from the distribution to the entire population of a share of the profits made by corporations. In this way, the additional income accruing to the individuals would not be fixed at a level sufficient to pay for basic needs, but it would vary according to the revenues generated in the economy. Last, a negative income tax is a cash transfer targeting only those without income. Differently from common unemployment schemes, with a negative income tax people without an income would be provided with enough money to pay for basic needs as long as they need it. If they start making an income either by getting a job or by a self-developed business, the support would be progressively reduced but still remain in place until the individual income can take care of basic needs. People would be sure that their basic needs are always covered, as for UBI, but those with a sufficient income would never receive it (Friedman 1968; Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). The negative income tax is the one which has mostly been experimented on field, mainly in the US and Canada between 1960's and 1980's (Bregman 2017; Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). However, of these variants UBI remains the most debated in post-growth and degrowth scholarship and therefore also the correspondent of 'basic income' throughout this research.

2.2.2 UBI experiments and their limitations

Although most arguments both for and against UBI are speculative and cannot be proven empirically unless the policy was implemented on a large scale, the experiments conducted on

field in the last decades might contribute to better understand what effects it might actually cause.

The first experiments of the 21st century deliberately referring to a basic income guarantee took place in Namibia, India and Finland. None of these was universal at the state level, but the schemes in Namibia (ca 1,000 beneficiaries) and India (ca 6,000 beneficiaries) were directed to the entire population of the targeted villages and therefore can be considered universal at the local level (Haarmann & Haarmann 2012; Standing 2013a). The Finland scheme was not universal as it targeted 2,000 unemployed people, but it was unconditional as beneficiaries were free to use the money as they wished (Kangas et al. 2019). Cash transfers in Namibia and India, provided respectively in 2008-2009 and 2012-2013, were considered successful as they allegedly improved people's living conditions, reduced poverty and promoted a stronger sense of social solidarity and trust within communities (Haarmann & Haarmann 2012; Standing 2013a). Preliminary results from the Finnish experiment, which was conducted in 2017-2018, reveal improved individual well-being indicators but no significant difference in the capacity of beneficiaries to find a job compared to that of the control group (Kangas et al. 2019). Nonetheless, international media largely presented the experiment as a failure (Goldman 2019; Nagesh 2019; Tarquini 2019). Empirical evidence seems therefore to support the conclusions drawn from similar experiments conducted in North America in the past century.

Over the 1970's and 1980's, five large negative income tax experiments were conducted in the US and Canada. Per definition, none of these was universal since they were targeted at the poorest layers of the population, and, in addition, the amount of money provided to each individual was lower for those married than for singles (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). The Canadian 'Mincome' scheme was conducted between 1975 and 1978 in Dauphin (Manitoba province), while the four experiments in the US were run in different periods between 1968 and 1980 in several states (Bregman 2017). In both cases, people slightly reduced their working time while quality-of-life indicators related to health, education and economic stability improved (Widerquist 2018). Especially in the US, the results triggered a debate which led to the proposal in 1972 of the Family Assistance Plan, a public assistance program presented by President Nixon, aiming to establish an almost unconditional negative income tax for all Americans. However, the plan was never approved by the Parliament and was soon abandoned, as well as other attempts to experiment with basic income guarantees (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017).

While no other similar schemes have been conducted, other two cash transfer programs are worth mentioning for their international resonance. The first is the Alaska's oil dividend through which, since 1982, the state of Alaska has provided to its residents an annual share on the revenues generated by oil sales (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). The dividend has never been high enough to entirely cover individuals' basic needs but it has genuinely been universal, unconditional and a real example of a UBI that redistributes the wealth generated from common natural resources. The second is the *Bolsa Familia*, a scheme introduced in 2003 by the former President of Brazil Lula da Silva. Although not being universal – it targeted the poorest 26% of the population – nor unconditional – families had to ensure that their children attended 85% of school classes and had to regularly bring them to healthcare facility for controls – the cash transfers allowed people to diversify their diet and increase spending for children's education and clothing (Hulme et al. 2012). *Bolsa Familia* resembles more a traditional welfare scheme than a UBI, but it showed that direct cash transfers could achieve good results in terms of poverty reduction even though it did not require people to fulfil strict conditions (Hulme et al. 2012). But, are the conclusions of these experiments useful for the UBI debate?

As interesting as it could be to observe people's behaviour when receiving different forms of cash transfers, analysing results of basic income experiments can only deliver conclusions of limited validity for several reasons. Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017) point out at least four of them. First, none of the experiments conducted so far was universal at the state level; therefore, the effects on large-scale social cohesion and on the adjustments in the labour market – in terms of people working habits – cannot be assessed. Second, all basic income experiments are influenced by the context in which they are conducted, making the results problematic to be generalised. The living conditions in rural India at the beginning of the 21st century significantly differ from those in Finland, or from those in North America in the 1970's. Third, per definition, experiments last for a limited period, allowing researchers to observe short- but not long-term effects of the scheme. Fourth, people did not deal with the consequences of how the basic income schemes were funded. Participants to the experiments were all net beneficiaries while there were no net contributors. In addition, Widerquist (2018) emphasises that the researchers involved in planning and conducting basic income experiments are often those already interested in UBI, and thus may be biased in favour of it. Although, because of all these reasons, empirical results from experiments will always have limited validity, they have triggered a debate which is increasingly spreading worldwide.

UBI seems to be experiencing a momentum, as it is being discussed in many countries both in the Global North and in the Global South. Already in 2016, Swiss citizens were asked to vote on the proposal of establishing a UBI at the national level (von Elm 2017). While this was rejected by 77% of the voters, the fact that UBI proponents managed to organise a referendum on the topic gathered international attention. Meanwhile, UBI is being discussed at the European Union level, with the Green European Foundation having recently dedicated a special issue to the topic (GEF 2019), and in some of its member states. The Netherlands are running pilot experiments, as well as the city of Barcelona (McFarland 2017), and new research has recently been published in the United Kingdom (Reed & Lansley 2016). An American NGO, Give Directly, is planning in Kenya the largest UBI pilot ever conducted, which will target ca 16,000 people over a period of twelve years (Widerquist 2018). Sikkim, a state located in Northern India, has recently announced it will launch a UBI scheme by 2022 (Masih 2019). A further example is that of Y Combinator, an American firm which, concerned with the effects of automation, plans to conduct a UBI experiment lasting between 3 to 5 years and involving 1,000 individuals (McFarland 2017). As it is clear that UBI will remain on the headlines for some years to come, it is also clear that those advocating for and against it do so for contrasting reasons and with different strategies which have to be carefully understood.

While some scholars support UBI on the basis that it would revive economic growth, some others promote it exactly for the opposite reason, that is, on the assumption that it would slow down GDP growth, and hence decrease the energy and material intensity of the economy. Those in the first group, for example Bonciu (2018) and Davala et al. (2015), assert that an additional input of cash to the entire population would increase aggregate demand, and trigger savings and investments which would generate new economic activities and boost the existing ones. Also, by ensuring to everyone the possibility to train and acquire new skills, UBI would allegedly improve productivity and therefore further fuel economic growth. The second group includes researchers such as Kallis (2017a), Alexander (2014), Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017), who agree on that, with a UBI, people would regain sovereignty over their time and be free to engage more in voluntary or care activities which do not involve monetary transactions. In this way, activities which have been commodified – such as child or elderly care – because people need to dedicate most of their time to making an income, will exit the market sphere to a larger extent and reduce economic growth in terms of GDP, together with its associated environmental impacts (Alexander 2014). A second argument draws on the argument that, as GDP measures the added value of commodities sold in the market, its growth occurs also by

saving costs of production through lowering wages and shifting costs to the environment (Daly 2014; Kapp 1978). With a UBI, people would not be forced to accept low-paid jobs, as they would not be economically damaged if the firm decides to move somewhere else instead that complying with environmental regulations or paying the full cost for exploiting natural resources (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). Empowering people through UBI, the argument goes, would therefore slow down or reduce economic growth, and thus reduce the need to further unsustainably extract and consume natural resources. Same as there are opposing understandings on the effects on GDP of a UBI policy, controversies remain on how it should be implemented and how it should be paid for.

2.3 A maximum income policy proposal

A maximum income is a cap on the amount of income each individual can earn on a monthly or annual basis; it includes wages, and rents from physical and financial assets (Pizzigati 2018). Physical assets include houses and land, while financial assets refer to bonds, obligations or other financial instruments. A maximum income would therefore limit how much individuals can earn, but not how much they can own – it is not a limit on wealth. Differently from individual income, individual wealth also includes savings, and the monetary value of physical and financial assets, not only the revenues these assets provide. However, according to Pizzigati (2018), capping income would limit the rents that individuals can extract from assets and eventually the revenues from their sales, thus reducing also individual wealth.

A policy establishing a maximum income would either set a legal ceiling, or levy a 100% tax on the income exceeding a certain threshold. In the first case, the maximum income is applied through a legal instrument. If the ceiling is set at, for example, $1 million per year, the law would not allow individuals to receive wages or own assets that jointly provide them more than $1 million per year. In the second case, the instrument is economic. If the threshold is again defined at $1 million per year, individuals will be allowed to earn as much they can through wages and rents, but the portion of income exceeding $1 million per year would be seized by the state through a 100% tax. Since tax collection has been centralised at the national level, states have preferred economic rather than legal instruments to tackle higher level incomes, and therefore unlimited wealth accumulation by the richest.

Different taxes have therefore been developed over time, such as levies on personal income, inheritance and properties (Atkinson 2015). Personal income tax targets income earned by individuals on an annual basis, and in most countries it is implemented through (more or

less) progressive marginal rates. Progressive because the share of income extracted through the tax increases at the increasing of income – i.e. the more income people have, the higher the tax they pay. And marginal because higher rates are not applied to the whole income, but only to the portion exceeding the threshold defined by law; for example, in Italy everyone pays a 23% tax rate on the first €15,000 earned per year, but pays a 43% tax rate on the income exceeding €75,000 per year (Bruni & Castello 2010). Therefore, the rich pay a higher tax rate only on the portion of income which actually makes them richer than others. Nonetheless, since the neoliberal reforms of the 1980's, in some cases tax systems have also become structurally regressive. For example, in the UK and in the US, taxes on salaries are now higher than taxes on rents from investments, benefitting those who own money to invest at the expenses of those who can only sell their labour to earn an income (Piketty & Saez 2007). Besides personal income tax, inheritance taxes target the wealth, expressed in monetary values, transferred as a bequest to individuals, while property taxes are paid on physical assets such as land and houses (Atkinson 2015). Although it is the combined effect of these taxes that prevents rich people from accumulating excessive wealth over time, particular focus has historically been placed on personal income tax and on top marginal rates.

2.3.1 Brief history of progressive taxation and variants of maximum income

The top marginal rates paid through personal income tax by affluent people between 1940's and 1970's in several countries were much higher than nowadays. And the reduction of these rates over time has occurred along with the rise of inequalities described in the introduction (Piketty 2014). According to the World Inequality Report (Alvaredo et al. 2018), in rich countries the average top marginal rates fell from 70% in the 1970's to 42% in the mid-2000's. Considering also earlier decades, the trend is even more striking. In France, the top marginal rate was 90% on the eve of World War II, 70% in the early 1980's and 40% in 2007 (Alvaredo et al. 2018; Pizzigati 2018). In the UK, it was 97.5% in 1945 and 40% already at the end of the 1980's (presently it is 45%) (Alvaredo et al. 2018; Pizzigati 2018). In Italy, it went from 82% in 1974 to 43% in 2007 (Atkinson & Piketty 2010). In New Zealand, it was 77% in 1945 and 33% already in 1989 (Atkinson & Piketty 2010). In a country of the Global South like India, on which it will be elaborated more in the next chapter, the top marginal rate fell from 97.5% in 1973 to 30% nowadays (Alvaredo et al. 2018; ClearTax 2019). In the US, it was 91% in 1963 and 39.6% in 2016, at the end of Obama's administration (Pizzigati 2018). And it is in the US that a president attempted to establish a fully developed maximum income. In 1942, F.D. Roosevelt proposed a 100% top marginal rate for incomes above $25,000 (about $375,000

today), which was eventually rejected by the Congress[1] (Twiname & Sharp 2014). Despite Roosevelt did not see his proposal materialising, the idea of a maximum income has not been abandoned.

Since Rousseau (1762/1964) claimed that no-one should be wealthy enough to buy somebody else's workforce, several scholars have been advocating for a maximum income, further suggesting that it could be designed as a multiple of the minimum wage. In this way, rich people (e.g. CEOs) could increase their income only by increasing that of the poorest (e.g. lowest paid workers in a company) (Ramsay 2005). Sam Pizzigati, an American researcher based in Washington, DC, is probably the most prolific author on the topic. Pizzigati (1992; 2018) has long been proposing a maximum income set 10 times higher than the minimum wage. Of the same opinion is Maureen Ramsay (Ramsay 2005), from the University of Leeds (UK). Herman Daly, former consultant at the World Bank, supports a maximum income linked to the minimum wage at a ratio of 20:1 'to be conservative' (Daly 1997, p. 203). A maximum income is also supported in the degrowth movement by scholars such as Alexander (2014), Andersson (2012) and Kallis (2015), who suggests that a maximum income should be set at no more than 30 times the minimum.

Although not directly advocating for a maximum income, other sustainability researchers have argued for making current taxation systems more egalitarians. Kate Raworth (2017) and Tim Jackson (2016) called for more progressive taxes and higher top marginal rates, as well as Anthony Atkinson (2015) who proposed, in the UK, to rise the top marginal rate to 65%. In his bestseller *Capital in the 21st Century*, Thomas Piketty (2014) suggested a global tax on wealth to disclose the striking inequalities worldwide and create pressure for wealth to be fairly redistributed. Maximum income is not, therefore, the only tax reform proposed to address the current social and ecological challenges, but it is increasingly gaining space in the public debate of some countries.

2.3.2 Maximum income experiments and current debates

Differently from UBI, looking at empirical evidence to test arguments for and against a maximum income it is difficult, as the history of progressive taxation revealed that no large country has ever implemented a 100% top marginal rate. Only Cuba and Egypt have a similar policy in place but their cases are little informative for two reasons (ForesightCuba 2016; Safi

[1] Nonetheless, by the end of World War II the Congress increased the marginal rate up to 94% for incomes above $200,000 (Pizzigati 2018).

2015). First, the policy implemented in both countries is a maximum wage, i.e. a cap on individual salaries which does not include rents and other forms of income. Second, it targets only a fraction of the total number of workers – in Cuba only those employed by the state, while in Egypt only those working in the public banking sector. In the case of Cuba, a third reason should also be mentioned: Cuba's economy is based on the public supply of services and in-kind goods, with income and cash transfers playing a marginal role in the economy. Between 1959 and 2014, the maximum wage (around $30 per month) was almost equal to the minimum because salaries were strongly equalised by the state (which employs 90% of the population) (ElUniverso 2014; Garcia 2017; Glendinning 2008). Although since 2014 doctors' pays – the highest in the country – were doubled (ForesightCuba 2016), it seems excessive to compare these figures to the maximum income proposals discussed so far, which aim at curbing excessive wealth accumulated by few individuals. In the case of Cuba, doctors could not have been accumulating much wealth from the income they have earned between 1959 and 2014, and the present wage ($64 per month) does not allow them to conduct a lavish lifestyle (ElUniverso 2014). In the case of Egypt, according to (Safi 2015) the maximum wage allegedly caused top-level bank managers to leave their positions in search for better remuneration in the private sector, but no data are retrievable in support of this claim. Empirical evidence on the effects of a fully developed maximum income is therefore lacking.

Nonetheless, in the last decade a debate around the topic has entered the public sphere of many European countries and of the US. In 2013, Switzerland held a referendum on the proposal to implement a maximum income tight to the minimum wage with a ratio of 12:1. It was rejected with 65% of the voters against it (Hooper 2013). In the UK, the Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn flirted with the idea of a 20:1 ratio between the maximum income and the minimum wage (Mason 2017). In Germany, a survey conducted in 2016 revealed that the majority of the population backed a legal maximum wage (TheLocal 2016). In other countries, the debate has been centred on making current tax systems more progressive. In France, former President Holland proposed to rise top marginal rates to 75% (Birnbaum 2012), but then failed to implement the policy once elected. In the US, recently elected deputy Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez has called for a 70% top marginal rate to reduce the extreme income inequality of the country (Pramuk & Schoen 2019). As the proposal of establishing a maximum income spreads, or at least strong progressive taxation, the questions remain on how to implement it effectively.

Should a maximum income be designed to promote or prevent further economic growth? As in the case of UBI, different positions held. On the one side, researchers such as

Ramsay regards maximum income as a tool which would revive economic growth ‘by reducing poverty and welfare expenditure, raising living standards and boosting consumer demand for products in general consumption categories’ (Ramsay 2005, p. 208). On the other, scholars in the degrowth community (e.g. Alexander 2014; Kallis 2017a) propose a maximum income to slow the path of wealth accumulation which triggers investments and fuels growth measured in GDP terms. Despite different motivations in favour of maximum income, there is agreement that the policy would be an instrument to redistribute wealth from the richest to the rest of society. Therefore, it has also been proposed in combination with the UBI earlier presented.

3. Case study

India and the federal state of Kerala are used as case study. India is a suitable country for analysing a basic/maximum income policy because of the ecological and social problems it is facing, In turn, Kerala offers an interesting case for two reasons. First, it has an outstanding history of redistributive and egalitarian policies. Second, these redistributive policies have led to high levels of human development – e.g. 94% of literacy rate against 74% of India, and 75 years of life expectancy at birth against the 68 of India (CENSUS 2011) – despite low rates of economic growth.

3.1 Inequality and environmental degradation in India

India spreads over more than 3 million km^2 in South Asia, seventh country per territorial extension worldwide, with a population of around 1.3 billion people, second only to that of China. Its GDP per capita is roughly $7,800 per year, quite unevenly distributed as the Gini index is 0.34.

The high rates of economic growth experienced by India since 1951 (6.2% as average annual GDP growth) have largely been achieved by sacrificing the ability to live in a healthy environment. In 2017, annual concentration of $PM_{2.5}$, a measure of air pollution, averaged at 91 $\mu g/m^3$, nine times higher than the threshold recommended as safe by the World Health Organisation (10 $\mu g/m^3$) , which also reported that 9 out of 10 most polluted cities in the world are in India (WHO 2019). Only in the year 2017, 1.2 million deaths were attributed to pathologies caused by air pollution (Balakrishnan et al. 2019). In addition, almost 50 million people live on contaminated groundwater, more than 12,000 km of rivers are heavily polluted and commercial plantations are expanding at the expenses of forest lands inhabited by indigenous populations (Narain 2018). In the last decades, governments have launched several programs to improve environmental condition but none of them have so far achieved relevant results. This is exemplified by the fact that, in the list of countries ranked per Environmental Performance Index, a measure of environmental health and ecosystem vitality at the global level, India moved from the 141st position in 2016 to the 177th in 2018 out of 180 countries (CSE 2018). And, as in many other countries worldwide, environmental damage has gone hand in hand with persisting poverty and rising inequalities (Laurent 2015).

Since some deregulation in industrial policies was implemented in the 1980's, and structural reforms were required by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World

Bank (WB) in 1991 to finance increasing India's external debt (Siddiqui 2010), income inequality has steadily increased. According to the World Inequality Report (Alvaredo et al. 2018), in 2014 the richest 1% of the population captured 22% of the total income generated in the country, while the share of the richest 10% was 56%. Of the total income generated since the 1980's the richest 0.1% has captured more than the bottom 50%. Data published by the Hay Group (2015) show that the pay gap between mid-higher and mid-lower level employees have increased 52% between 2008 and 2014. In addition, the International Labour Organisation (ILO 2018) points out that the share of generated income appropriated by labour has declined from 38.5% in 1981 to 35.4% in 2013, meaning that capitalists have increased their wealth at the expenses of workers.

Economic development has improved the quality of life of millions of Indians, but poverty still affects a large share of the population. Nowadays, about 80 million people are labelled as extremely poor and the income of almost 300 million does allow them to reach the poverty line (WB 2015); 75% of these people live in rural areas (Breitkreuz et al. 2017). However, as measuring poverty entails debatable methodological choices, there is no consensus that these figures are consistent with the real situation. Patnaik (2007) claimed that the government and international financial organisations, such as the IMF and the WB, underestimate poverty rate to support their agenda, downplaying data that express worsening trends, like calories intake, unemployment, farmers' debts and suicide rate. Analysing data from 2004-2005, she estimated that 87% of the rural population lived below poverty line, against the 28% reported by the government. In addition, according to Kothari (2014, p. 1), '[r]oughly three out of four Indians suffer from deprivation of at least one of the following basic needs: adequate and nutritious food, safe drinking water, sanitation, energy, gainful and dignified employment, education, health care, and adequate shelter'. In India, the current levels of poverty and inequality are a consequence of the global neoliberal economic regime as much as of national deliberate political choices.

Income tax rates underwent extensive changes since India gained independence from the British in 1947. The marginal tax paid by people in the highest slab amounted to 97.5% in 1973, falling to 50% in the mid-1980's (Alvaredo et al. 2018), and to 30% at the present time (ClearTax 2019), to which it should be subtracted tax exemptions on net wealth ensured to the rich by the state (Golder 2018). In 1983, the richest 1% of the population owned just 6% of the total wealth of the country, and the richest 10% about 30% (Alvaredo et al. 2018). Interestingly, the process of defining income tax rates is centralised at the union level and the regional states

have little decisional capacity to this regard. However, instead of curbing the wealth amassed by the rich, in the last decades the central government of India has attempted to reduce inequality and poverty by reinforcing economic growth and lifting up the poor through several welfare schemes.

3.2 Main social welfare schemes

Of India's social welfare programs, two are particularly relevant for the sake of this research: the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). The Public Distribution System guarantees to the households a fixed amount of food grains every month, either for free or for a subsidised price (Balani 2013). Depending on how each state government implements it, food grains can be supplied only to people classified as living below the poverty line (BPL) or also to those above poverty line (APL); for households in the latter category food items would be costlier, but still below market prices (Khera 2011). Although this largely varies depending on the state considered (Khera 2011), it is widely recognised that PDS is plagued by corruption and inefficiency, and researchers are divided between those in favour of strengthening it because of its achievements (e.g. Kumar et al. 2015) and those proposing alternative measures (e.g. Standing 2012).

In the last decade, the central government had already attempted to support the PDS role in tackling poverty through another large-scale scheme: the NREGA. The NREGA was devised in 2006 to provide every household in rural India with at least 100 days of employment per year, paid at a minimum wage (Varinder & Kannan 2013). The scheme follows the 'right-based' approach, meaning that every household is entitled to benefit from it irrespective of its income, and it is similar to job guarantee schemes of Keynesian inspiration, occasionally discussed also in countries of the Global North (Lowrey 2018). Like the PDS, the NREGA has performed with different degrees of efficiency and success depending on the regional state considered, but some flaws were structural. Among these were the failure in providing the stipulated days of employment per year (average annual working days have remained well below the threshold of 100), the problem of delayed payments, and the rigidity of the program in adapting to the economic and social situation of each state (Varinder & Kannan 2013). Therefore, also the NREGA future is being discussed among researchers and decision-makers, who are considering the option of supporting or even substituting it with alternative measures (Ravallion 2019). Proposed alternative measures to both PDS and NREGA include unconditional cash transfers, i.e. schemes through which people receive money from the state without having to perform work in exchange and that easily resemble a basic income.

3.3 India's experiments with basic income and current debates

In India, the Self-Empowered Women Association (SEWA), with the support of the UNDP and UNICEF, conducted two major pilot experiments of unconditional basic income. The first was carried out for the whole 2011 in New Delhi, targeting 100 households living below poverty line (BPL), and the second for 12 to 18 months across 2011-2012 in a rural area of Madya Pradesh, targeting almost 6,000 individuals regardless of their economic condition – i.e. it was universal (Khosla 2018). In New Delhi, the basic income was provided as a substitute of the Public Distribution System (Gangopadhyay et al. 2015), while in Madya Pradesh in addition to it (Standing 2013b). In both cases, the results were encouraging (Khosla 2018; Standing 2012). On average, alcohol consumption did not increase, while food quality and intake improved, as well as health, sanitation and housing conditions. Children in the targeted samples were more likely to attend school and adults to shift from wage labour to self-employment, starting new businesses. Beneficiaries also became less dependent on debt to finance their expenses. Although the experiment conducted in Delhi involved a small sample, that in Madya Pradesh was large enough to trigger a public debate on basic income at the national level.

Since the conclusion of the pilot experiment in Madya Pradesh, researchers and policymakers have discussed the implications and the convenience of implementing a basic income. In July 2017, several scholars gathered for a debate, later published in a Symposium Issue of the *Indian Journal of Human Development* (Sharma 2017), which showed no consensus amongst them about the way forward but revealed the relevance of the topic. Meanwhile, the Economic Survey 2016-2017, a document released every year by the Indian Ministry of Finance, dedicated a whole chapter on the proposal of a UBI (Subramanian 2017), and the Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India, Arvind Subramanian, foresaw that at least two Indian states will implement basic income policies by 2020 (Khan 2018). The first expected to implement it is Sikkim, a small state of roughly 600,000 citizens located at the feet of the Himalayan range, which has recently announced that it is willing to adopt a Universal Basic Income by 2022, paid through tourism revenues, hydropower sales and by cutting some existing social welfare programmes (Masih 2019). However, the roll-back of existing subsidies and support programs is causing the most heated debates in relation to UBI (Byatnal 2018).

3.4 Specificities of the 'Kerala model of development'

Kerala was selected as case study for this research because its development path, at least until the end of the 1980's, has substantially differed from that of the rest of India, allowing researchers to coin the expression 'Kerala model of development' (Parayil 1996). Kerala is located in South West of India, it has a population of about 33 million people (Figure 1), and it was established as a state in 1956. During its first decade (until the end of the 1960's) Kerala's growth rate in income per capita averaged at around 2.2% per year, while between 1970 and 1988 it remained almost stagnant (0.40% per year) (Subrahmanian & Prasad 2008). Nonetheless, over this period of time, key human development indicators including literacy rate, life expectancy, child mortality rate, female-male ratio improved, along with a reduction in the level of inequality (Oommen 2014; Sreeraj & Vamsi 2016). These achievements followed people's protests and social turmoil, which required the government to implement redistributive and egalitarian policies such as partial land reform – it excluded commercial plantations –, compulsory and free education, extensive public healthcare and public distribution system, old-age pension schemes and allowances for disabled people (Oommen 2014; Sreeraj & Vamsi 2016). Since the 1980's, among all Indian states Kerala has always had the highest Human Development Index (HDI) (Singariya 2014).

Figure 1. The image shows the territory of India and, in red, that of the state of Kerala.
Source: Wikimedia commons, by Uwe Dedering.

The experience of Kerala can also be considered unique because of the key role that migration flows had and currently have in shaping the economic and social context of the state. In Kerala, migration represents a double-side phenomenon: that of skilled and unskilled workers moving abroad, and that of unskilled workers moving to Kerala from other states of India. Of the two, outwards migration has contributed the most to the development of the state because of the large remittance economy it created. Large-scale migration started in the 1970's with the booming of the oil industry in the Gulf countries, which attracted mostly unskilled labour (Zachariah et al. 2001). Since 1998, the Centre for Development Studies of Thiruvanthapuram has been conducting extensive surveys to identify the impacts of migration, and the results cannot be overlooked. In 2018, more than 2 million Keralites were living abroad (around 6% of the population) and, although their number has been reducing since 2013, the total remittances have continued to increase, from 13,652 crores Rs in 1998 to 85,092 crores Rs in 2018 (almost 20% of the Net State Domestic Product) (Rajan & Zachariah 2019). Kerala's economy remains therefore largely dependent on remittances from abroad (Kannan 2005).

3.5 Kerala's present challenges

With the economic reforms aiming to increase private investments and liberalise the economy implemented in the early 2000's, the government abandoned the 'Kerala model of development', earlier a significant example of a state which managed to score high on human development indicators despite low rates of economic growth. Between 1989 and 2010, Kerala's Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) growth per capita has sharply increased at an average of 5.38% per year (Oommen 2014), mainly driven by the service sector fuelled by remittances from abroad. Economic growth has probably helped in further reducing the percentage of people living registered as BPL from 31% in 1994 to 8% in 2012 (WB 2017), but human development indicators in Kerala the 1970's and 1980's were high even though those living BPL accounted for 40 to 60% of the population (SPB 2017).

In addition, high rates of economic growth have not solved the chronic lack of employment, and have come at the expenses of the environment, of welfare programmes and of income equality. The Gini coefficient increased from 0.34 in 1983 to 0.47 in 2010 (Sreeraj & Vamsi 2016), higher than that of India as a whole, while the share of state budget devoted to PDS, healthcare and education has been drastically reduced (Oommen 2010). The remittance economy has largely benefitted the construction sector (Vineesh Prakash et al. 2017), increasing land pressure on an already densely populated area – Kerala has an average

population density of 860 people/km^2 – and jeopardising the ecological balance of the territory, as the floods of 2018 demonstrated (Adam 2018). Lastly, Kerala has one of the highest percentages in India in terms of total unemployment rate, 12.5%, and of young unemployed, almost 22% ('Kerala suffers worst' 2019). Coupled with the strong dependence on remittances from abroad, high unemployment rates urge the state to create a 'vibrant domestic economy' (Rajan & Zachariah 2019, p. 64), eventually reinforcing supporting schemes which are already in place.

Of the programs devised by the Kerala government since the 1990's, two are particularly relevant for our discussion. The first relates to the implementation at the state level of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian constitution. These amendments, enforced in 1994, aimed at promoting decentralisation and were put in practice by the Kerala government in a radical way, by deciding to transfer almost 40% of the state budget to the local self-government units, named *panchayats* (Véron 2001). Through this strategy, local decision-making processes were significantly empowered and political bodies at the local level have had more resources to address problems within communities. The second scheme is called *kudumbashree*, and it aims at empowering women by involving them into small self-help groups established at the neighbourhood level (Raghavan 2009). Women can pool money to start cooperative entrepreneurial activities that generate income, or ask for individual loans to develop individual businesses. These two policies show how in Kerala the historical tradition of a redistributive and egalitarian state is still alive, arguably making it more likely than other Indian states to adopt a UBI and to favour a maximum income.

4. Methods

Qualitative and quantitative tools were combined to analyse the results, while a sheer qualitative approach was employed for defining samples and collecting data. However, the quantitative section of the analysis (i.e. pie and bar charts) should be considered carefully as the data collection and sampling techniques employed belong to qualitative methods.

4.1 Data collection

Data were collected by reviewing academic and 'grey' literature on UBI and maximum income, and by interviewing a total of 60 informants in India over November and December 2018, using structured and semi-structured interviews. All respondents freely decided to participate to the research, they were informed about its content prior to the interview, and were asked to give written consent for their opinions to be processed. A copy of the informed consent form was left to them in case they wanted to exercise their rights at a later time. To be part of the sample, people had to meet one of the following criteria: i) the person has the capability to facilitate or hinder the implementation of a basic/maximum income policy, *or* ii) the person would end up with a higher income if a basic/maximum income policy is implemented. Those meeting the first criterion were referred to as 'key informants', while those meeting the second as 'regular informants'. In most cases, the 'key informants' group included people with higher incomes than those considered 'regular informants'.

Participants from each category were identified by combining two methods: a purposive sampling and a snowball technique. By using purposive sampling, the researcher can include in the sample people whose opinions and experience are considered relevant to answer the research questions, while with the snowball technique respondents in the initial sample are asked to indicate other people who could provide useful insights for the objective of the research (Bryman 2015). In this study, through purposive sampling I identified a preliminary group of respondents which was later expanded, through the snowball technique, once I started to conduct the interviews and collect more contacts from the participants. As for 'key informants', initial respondents included researchers at the Centre for Development Studies (Thiruvananthapuram), representatives of the major political parties and activists from local NGOs. For 'regular informants', three low-income communities were selected, within which participants were asked to participate to the study and eventually indicate other people to interview.

The ‘key informants’ group was composed by a sample of 31 people with different background and working for a diverse set of institutions and organisations. This included two members of an advisory board to the state of Kerala, six professors and researchers from public universities and research centres, three activists from NGOs, two employees in governmental organisations, two trade unionists, nine members of all the major political parties, including one Member of Parliament at the state (Kerala) and one at the union (India) level, and seven higher education economics students.

The ‘regular informants’ group included 29 respondents, mostly belonging to three communities located in the south of Kerala. The first community comprised only women, performing different jobs under a *kudumbashree* scheme in Karakulam, nearby Thiruvananthapuram. The second corresponded to a village located on the coast, Anchuthengu, mostly inhabited by fisherfolks. The third was a clam collectors’ community living on the banks of the Vembanad lake, nearby Alappuzha. 27 informants belonged to one of these three communities, while the remaining two respondents were interviewed at Centre for Development Studies (Thiruvananthapuram), and in the village of Kovalam.

4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

Data from ‘key informants’ were collected through semi-structured interviews, a method which allows researchers to ask some core questions and then direct the interview following the respondents’ answers (Bryman 2015). In this way, respondents are free to ‘step off the path’ traced by the researcher and point out issues which were not predicted, eventually enriching the results. The interview guide was composed of twelve core questions for ‘key informants’ and five for ‘regular informants’, which were revised and finalised after conducting nine pilot interviews. The pilot interviews (seven with ‘key’ and two with ‘regular informants’) were then included in the official data set because the required adjustments did not change the meaning of the questions, but simply made them more understandable for respondents unfamiliar to a basic/maximum income policy proposal. I conducted and voice-recorded face-to-face interviews in English with 29 respondents, while 3 preferred to reply to the proposed questions by e-mail. In two occasions, two respondents were interviewed at the same time due to time and space constraints, but their answers were noted down separately for the analysis. The interview guide was sent to all respondents in advance, so that they could familiarise themselves with the topic and the questions.

The interview guide for semi-structured interviews (Annex I) started with the informed consent form and ended with a table which respondents had to fill in with their personal details; between the two were the core questions, further divided into three sections. The first section focused on the proposal of implementing a UBI policy. Respondents were asked how much money people need every month to pay for their basic needs (housing and food) (Q1), if it would work in the context of Kerala and why (Q2), who should be given this money (Q3), what would be the effects on people's working habits (Q4), and if they could point out where the money for such policy should be made available from (Q5). The second section collected data on a maximum income proposal, with questions on whether it would be perceived fair or not to set a cap on income (Q6), if they expected it would reduce inequalities and environmental damage (Q7 and Q8), and at what level this income cap should be set[2] (Q9). In the last section, respondents were asked about a combined basic/maximum income proposal. It included questions on whether they would support it (Q10) and what would be the perceived obstacles (Q11) and/or opportunities (Q12) in implementing such policy. A brief explanation of the two policies (UBI and maximum income) was provided after the informed consent form, before starting the interview, to ensure that respondents gained broader understanding of what the research focus was.

4.1.2 Structured interviews

The guide used to interview 'regular informants' followed the same scheme but the questions were formulated in a more accessible language, after cleaning for jargon and technical concepts (Annex II). After the pilot interviews, I decided to erase the sections inquiring about maximum income and the combined policy, as I felt they were too abstract topics for most 'regular informants' to discuss them with confidence[3]. As for the section on UBI, the question investigating the effects of a basic income policy on people's working habits was split into two. One asked how the respondents expected to respond if they were guaranteed a basic income by the state (Q4), and the other how they expected other people would respond in the same case

[2] In an initial draft of the interview guide, I asked participants to suggest a ratio they deemed acceptable between basic and maximum income. However, for many respondents it seemed abstract to think of income inequality in terms of ratios; therefore, I calculated it by dividing the basic (e.g. 15,000 Rs) and maximum income (e.g. 300,000 Rs) figures they suggested, and then asking them to confirm the resulting ratio (for the e.g., it would be 1/20). In some cases, they decided to change it and go for a lower or higher ratio. Nonetheless, few respondents were more comfortable in directly talking about income ratios and thus this strategy was not necessary.

[3] 'Regular informants' were sampled because they would benefit more from a basic rather than a maximum income policy, so removing the latter did not affect the quality of data.

(Q5). The interview guide ended with the table which respondents had to fill in with their personal details.

The structure followed in the interviews to 'regular informants' was less flexible than the one used with 'key informants' for different reasons. First, the former were far less familiar with the topic, and therefore their opinions regarding basic income were shorter and less motivated than those of 'key informants'. Also, in five cases at least two people were interviewed at the same time because they were working or sitting together, reducing the space for each of them to possibly elaborate more their answers. Finally, the need to have a simultaneous translation further impeded a fluent conversation with them, and reduced the amount of qualitative data collected. Because of these technical difficulties, most interviews with 'common people' were not voice-recorded and their answers were registered in my field notes.

4.2 Data analysis

To analyse the results, I first made a list of arguments in favour and against UBI and maximum income detected in the literature. Then, I transferred 'regular informants' answers into a database and personally transcribed the recordings of interviews with 'key informants'. While answers from 'regular informants' were summarised using quantitative tools, transcripts from 'key informants' were coded and analysed through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

4.2.1 Data coding

Transcripts were coded in two stages. In the first stage, I read through each informant's transcript, extracting quotes from their answers to the questions in the interview guide or to the research questions. Then, answers to sharp questions – i.e. which required a 'yes' or 'no', such as Q6 (Annex I - 'Do you think it is fair to limit how much money people can earn per month?') – were divided from those resulting from more elaborated questions (e.g. Annex I - Q11 - 'What do you think are the barriers to implement a basic/maximum income policy?'). In the second stage, all answers to each elaborated question were grouped so that those reoccurring across informants could be gathered and labelled in a single category. For example, if several respondents used different words to say that people will spend their basic income money for alcohol, junk food or luxurious consumption, these answers were all grouped under the category 'People can spend this money for something bad for them'. Opinions which did not directly answer questions in the interview guide were kept aside and then used to further enrich

the results. At the end of the coding procedure, both sharp and elaborated answers were summarised in tables which acted as the starting point for the analysis.

4.2.2 Quasi-quantification of qualitative data

Results were analysed by applying a method referred to as quasi-quantification of qualitative data. According to Bryman (2015), this approach allows to count and provide numeric figures to qualitative data in alternative to use expressions such as 'many', 'frequently', 'rarely', 'often' and 'some', which sound imprecise. Sharp answers, from interviews with both 'regular' and 'key informants' samples, were presented in pie charts to show how many respondents were in favour or against basic and maximum income, and what effect a basic income would have on people's working habits. To grasp the difference in their answers, separate charts were made for each sample. Elaborated answers from interviews with 'key informants' were summarised in bar graphs, in which each bar revealed the number of people who expressed opinions falling in the same category. Bar graphs were used to analyse reasons in favour or against basic and maximum income, reasons supporting sharp answers on modified working habits, and perceived obstacles in implementing the combined policy. In addition, for the two purely quantitative answers, i.e. the amount of money needed each month to pay for basic needs and the suggested ratio between basic and maximum income, the mean value was calculated. Finally, each quantitative and quasi-quantified figure was followed by a qualitative explanation and analysis of the findings, which allowed answers to questions in the interview guide to become answers to the research questions.

5. Results

5.1 Synthetizing the debate on basic/maximum income

5.1.1 The case for a UBI

- **It would promote freedom:** UBI would provide real freedom to all, as people could decide in which activities to engage (or not) regardless of the economic return they get. Part time jobs and volunteering would be incentivised, as well as taking a break for personal reasons or to look for better positions (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). People would regain control over their time and become more independent from market forces (Davala et al. 2015).
- **It would fix market failures:** current salaries do not adequately reflect the contribution of a job to the well-being of a society, but simply how much that position is required in the market. From this, it results that some jobs are overpaid while some others are underpaid (Buch-Hansen & Koch 2019). A UBI would address this flaw by ensuring that people are not forced into any job, and therefore that wages can adjust to fairly compensate for the psychological or physical effort needed for working (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). In addition, UBI would also remunerate the unpaid reproductive work carried out at home (mostly by women, and in fact this is a key argument of feminist scholars) which is essential in supporting the productive system, but that markets fail to recognise (Alexander 2014).
- **It would be more efficient that other welfare/workfare schemes:** most current welfare schemes require much bureaucratic work and funds to be established, to identify the potential beneficiaries and then to verify that the support given is used appropriately. Applicants have to provide proofs of their 'needy' condition and often submit to humiliating procedures (Bregman 2017). Also, targeted schemes tend to exclude people who may need support but cannot demonstrate it (Standing 2012). Finally, and especially in countries of the global South, funds are diverted in the bureaucratic process because of corruption and only a fraction reaches beneficiaries (Davala et al. 2015). UBI could address these flaws by being provided to everyone without having to check their eligibility, and by being transferred directly to their bank accounts without the need of intermediaries.
- **It would eradicate poverty:** UBI would remove absolute poverty by providing to everyone a minimum economic floor on which to stand – a limited amount of money enough to pay for basic needs (Davala et al. 2015). Also, while those benefitting from standard unemployment schemes risk to become poorer by being forced to accept a low-paid job, a

UBI ensures that any wage earned through work adds up to the total income and the individual has a net gain (Widerquist 2018).

- **It would promote social justice and reduce inequalities:** as for those supporting a universal social dividend, a UBI can be considered a measure to redistribute the wealth commonly generated in a state from innovations and natural resource use. According to Widerquist (2018), those who own resources owe a share of their profits to those who do not as a compensation. In this way, UBI would reduce inequalities by ensuring a more just redistribution of the revenues generated by enclosing and privatising the commons (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017).
- **It would promote social solidarity:** as a consequence of reducing poverty and inequalities, a UBI would also strengthen social solidarity in two ways. First, 'people who feel secure themselves are more inclined to be tolerant towards others' (Davala et al. 2015, p. 32) and, second, as everybody would receive the same cash transfer from the state, the social stigma often carried by targeted support policies would disappear (Bregman 2017).
- **It would reduce emissions and resource use:** according to Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017), UBI would allow people to decide to work less and prefer more leisure time instead of more income to spend on material consumption. If people work less, also production is likely to get reduced, further diminishing the material and energy required by the economic system. With a UBI, the focus would shift from the quantity of commodities produced to their quality and contribution to society.
- **It would promote technological and social innovation:** UBI would allow people to train, study, get relevant experience and improve their skills regardless of their initial economic means, and without worrying about how to provide for themselves in the meantime (Davala et al. 2015; Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). By liberating space for human creativity, UBI could promote both social and technological innovations that can be applied outside the market sphere, or which may take time before providing economic returns (Widerquist 2018).
- **It would improve the quality and fairness of democratic processes:** according to Santens (2018), UBI would effectively give everyone the same opportunities to participate to the democratic life of a country, regardless of their economic condition. It would allow people to get elected and engage in politics, especially in public positions which are little remunerated such as those in local councils, without having to do additional work to meet basic expenses.

- **It is a necessary condition for the survival of the capitalist system:** this is the neoliberal rationale for a UBI. As automation and artificial intelligence continue to erode the available jobs and the wealth generated increasingly accrues at the top of the social pyramid, a UBI would ensure that people manage to live even if they do not get their fair share of the income generated (Ford 2018; Hughes 2014). In addition, UBI would reduce public spending by replacing all other welfare schemes and benefitting at the same time all individuals regardless of their initial income (Matthews 2014).

5.1.2 The case against a UBI

- **It justifies the dismantling of the welfare state:** UBI serves as a justification to replace services currently provided by the state with cash that would be spent to purchase the same services from private actors at market prices (Davala et al. 2015).
- **It is unfair and unjust:** UBI is unjust as it provides people with an income, without requiring them to perform any activity in exchange. This is unfair according to some, as able-bodied people would be allowed to live at the expenses of others (Elster 1986).
- **It causes free riding and productivity loss:** when provided with a UBI, people would stop working and be idle (Davala et al. 2015). This would cause massive losses in productivity and remove the incentive to develop new technologies and innovations that fuel the economic system (Annunziata 2018).
- **It would not be efficient in tackling poverty:** this argument is especially raised in countries of the Global South where there are problems of supply (Davala et al. 2015). If local markets are not able to provide enough food and services or are highly susceptible to shocks then, the argument goes, ensuring cash transfers to people would not address their needs and improve their living conditions. In addition, and this is valid also for countries of the Global North, UBI is inefficient as it may be wasted on alcohol, on other 'bads', or on superfluous goods rather than be spent for basic necessities, and it is delivered also to rich people who do not need it (Rector & Teixeira 2018; Widerquist 2018).
- **It would be too expensive:** providing every individual with a basic income on a monthly basis would be too expensive for the state (Annunziata 2018).
- **It would cause inflation:** by increasing people's income without a specular increase in production, a UBI would induce prices to rise causing inflation. Therefore, people's real purchasing power and living conditions would not be improved (Flassbeck 2017).
- **It would make people more dependent from the state:** once accustomed to receiving UBI, people would not be able to sustain themselves without it and would increasingly

become dependent from the state (Davala et al. 2015). If, for any reason, the cash transfer is interrupted, people would not be able to cope with the new situation of scarcity because they would have not developed resilience mechanisms (Rector & Teixeira 2018).

- **It would cause 'welfare migrations':** if UBI is not implemented globally, people would increasingly try to migrate to countries which apply the policy in order to benefit from it (Howard 2006). Therefore, the long-term sustainability of the policy would be threatened.

5.1.3 The case for a maximum income

- **It would reduce inequalities:** Pizzigati (2018) argues that putting a cap on annual income also reduces individual wealth over time. This because luxury items such as big houses, jewellery, super-cars and yachts, which the rich own more than the rest of the population, carry large costs to be protected and maintained. With a capped income, the costs of taking care of these assets would become unsustainable and the rich would be forced to sell them, renouncing to part of their wealth. And, other things equal, a reduction in rich people's individual wealth causes a reduction in the level of inequalities.
- **It would promote social justice:** a maximum income would promote social justice in three ways. First, it would reduce the power of the rich to make other people relatively poorer by driving up prices for commodities (Pizzigati 2018). Second, in a society wealth is produced out of common effort, technological improvements, research financed with public funds, natural resources' use, inheritance, and therefore the rich are not entitled to capture most of it as they currently do (Ramsay 2005). Third, as states recognise that poverty may not be deserved, and have developed mechanisms such as minimum wages to ensure that no one is underpaid, then also wealth may not be deserved, and there should be mechanisms, such as a maximum income, to prevent people from being overpaid (Bregman 2017).
- **It would reduce emissions and resource use:** as rich people dispose of more income, they consume more luxury goods and services, thus generating more emissions and requiring more natural resources to sustain their lifestyle (Daly 1993; Raworth 2017). Also, without a cap on income, there is no limit to positional consumption. Positional consumption induces people to purchase new and expensive items not because they need them, but because through these items they can show off their wealth and social position (Jackson 2016). The rich were the first to buy a car, but when cars started to be purchased also by the middle class, the rich moved to having two cars, or a limousine, or a yacht, or a plane. This triggers a race to own more positional goods which never stops, because what is sought is not utility but status, and one's status is relative to that of others (Hirsch 1977). As people

are induced to consume more and faster to imitate the rich, the exploitation of natural resources and the emissions produced increase (Jackson 2016).

- **It would be more efficient:** when people accumulate too much wealth, additional income does not significantly improve their well-being anymore (Easterlin et al. 2010). For example, $1 million of income is likely to contribute more to society if it is paid through taxes and invested by the state to provide public services, rather than kept by a rich individual and reinvested in the financial sector or used to increase positional consumption (Walker 2016).
- **It would improve the quality and fairness of democratic processes:** wealth and political power often are linked for two reasons. First, in many countries electoral campaigns are privately funded and those who can afford to donate more are the rich. Therefore, political parties have a manifest interest in indulging the wishes of the affluent class rather than those of the rest of the population (Pizzigati 2018). Second, unlimited income have facilitated the creation of large monopolies and transnational companies which, under the threat of withdrawing investments and causing (current or future) job losses, lobby national states to keep lax environmental regulations and workers' rights (Slob & Weyzig 2007). A maximum income would therefore contribute in reducing the disproportionate political power that the wealthy have obtained at the expenses of citizens, and improve the fairness of democratic processes.
- **It would fix market failures:** as emphasised for UBI, market salaries fail in rewarding the social contribution of a job; they only indicate how much a position is required in the market (Buch-Hansen & Koch 2019). Therefore, a maximum income would prevent the market from excessively rewarding individuals for a job which, in some cases, may not even be useful for the society as a whole. For example, Bregman (2017) points out that nowadays many well-paid positions, such as those in the banking and financial sectors, do not create wealth but simply shifts it around, filling the pockets of the few at the expenses of those of the many.
- **Allowing incomes to grow without limits is morally unacceptable:** Robeyns (2016, p. 2) asserted that 'it is not morally permissible to have more resources than are needed to fully flourishing in life', especially in a world where these financial resources could alleviate extreme poverty. Drawing on earlier positions of John Stuart Mill and John Lock, Daly (1993) further added that wealth is used to exploit other people when it is not limited (Buch-Hansen & Koch 2019).

5.1.4 The case against a maximum income

- **It would reduce the aggregate wealth of a country:** according to the trickle-down theory (Aghion & Bolton 1997)**,** wealth trickles down from the rich to the rest of society, benefitting everyone. By reducing individual wealth, a maximum income would also reduce the wealth of the entire population of a country (Papworth 2009).
- **It would cause rich people to emigrate:** if a country implements a maximum income, its rich citizens would migrate to states offering more favourable tax conditions. As the affluent class normally includes also, among others, managers, lawyers and doctors, Thompson (2012) suggested that if a country wants this kind of people to leave, a good way to do so is by establishing a maximum income.
- **It would increase tax evasion:** a maximum income would encourage rich people to hide their money abroad or in tax heavens, therefore increasing tax evasion and reducing states' revenues (Greenhouse 1996; Thompson 2012).
- **It would remove the incentive to work hard and innovate:** by impeding people to increase their wealth without limits, a maximum income would remove incentives to work harder and take risks (Papworth 2009; Thompson 2012). And taking risks is what drives innovation and technological improvements, which in turn enhance productivity and progress (Greenhouse 1996).
- **It would cause inflation:** according to Greenhouse (1996, n.p.), a maximum income 'might heighten pressures to raise pay for low-paid workers'. Similarly, Thompson (2012) argued that if the revenues of maximum income are redistributed to the rest of the population, average prices would rise with income and there would be no net gain for society.
- **It would not be fair:** Papworth described the proposal of a maximum income 'repugnant' (2009, para. 4) and the policy itself as 'institutionalised envy' (2009, para. 3). He argued that, as 'wealth is not limited', everyone can make more money by 'work[ing] harder; tak[ing] more successful risks; us[ing] information more efficiently and effectively than others' (2009, para. 4). Therefore, no state has the right to cap the income of its citizens.

5.2 Results from the India/Kerala case study

5.2.1 Support for UBI and arguments in favour/against it

Sharp answers provided by 'regular informants' to Q2, asking whether or not people should be given money for free, and Q3, asking who should get this money, were summarised in Figure 2.

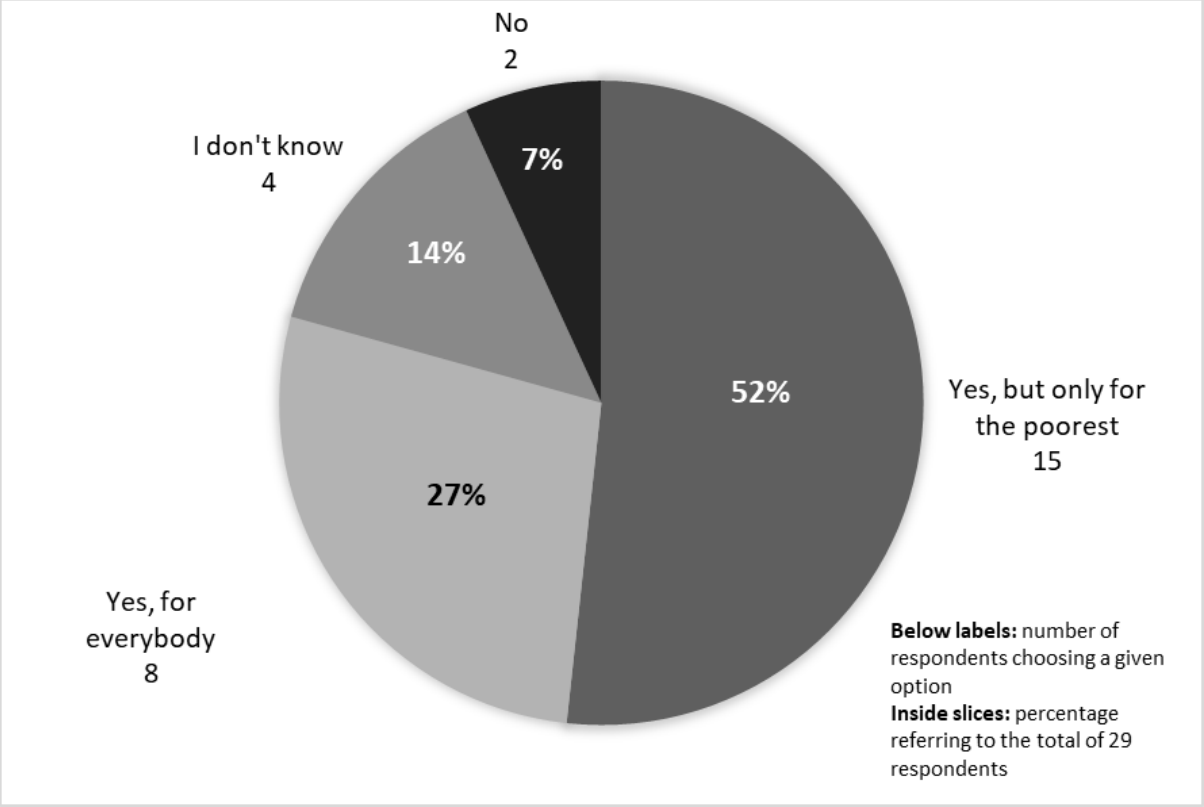

Figure 2. The pie chart presents the opinions expressed by 'regular informants' about the proposal of implementing a UBI.

In the 'regular informants' group, 23 respondents (79%) backed the proposal of implementing a basic income. 8 (27%) were in favour of a universal and unconditional scheme, while 15 (52%) stated that cash transfers should target the poorest. By saying 'the poorest', respondents referred to people living BPL but not only to those holding the BPL card provided by the government. This because they claimed that the targeting system was flawed, and many BPL card holders have a higher income than others who live BPL but do not have the card to certify it. 7 respondents (23%) supported UBI as a tool allowing them to save some money, which they struggled to do, and to reduce the need to get into debt to pay for ordinary and extra-ordinary expenses.

Of the remaining respondents, 4 (14%) did not express an opinion while 2 (7%) were against the proposal, both because they believed that a UBI without controls on how money

are spent would make people lazy and idle. Nonetheless, of those opposing it, one believed that the state should provide a basic income by ensuring decent jobs to everyone, while the other that the basic income should be given to all but at least requiring people to do some social work in exchange. Therefore, the first preferred an employment guarantee scheme while the second rejected the unconditionality which characterises UBI.

Figure 3 summarises the answers provided by 'key informants' to Q2 ('Do you think that giving this[4] amount of money every month to everybody would be a good way to alleviate poverty and empower people?') and Q3 (Who do you think should be provided with this[1] basic income?').

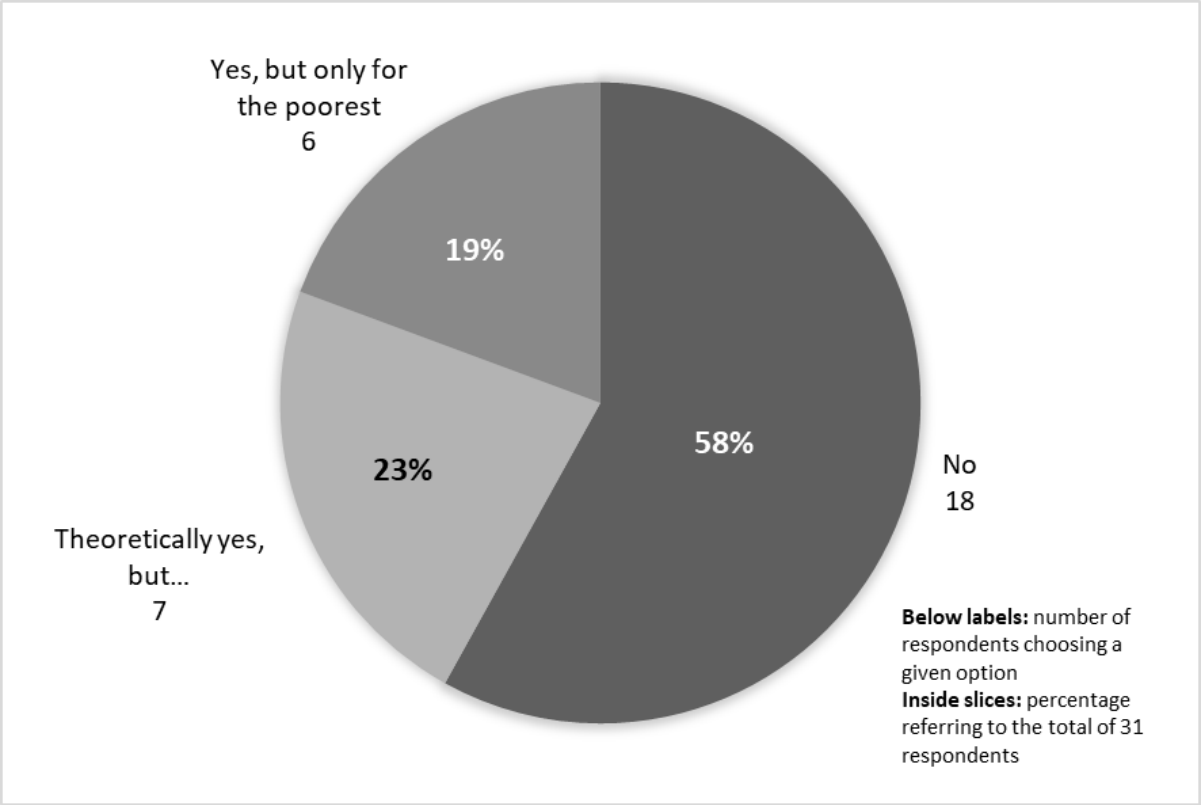

Figure 3. The pie chart presents the opinions expressed by 'key informants' about the proposal of implementing a UBI.

Differently from 'regular informants', most 'key informants' opposed or had strong reservations about a UBI proposal. 18 respondents (58%) entirely rejected the policy, while 7 (23%) believed that theoretically it could reduce poverty and empower people, but in practice they were worried it could have more negative than positive effects. Only 6 respondents (19%)

[4] 'This' refers to the answer provided to Q1, i.e. 'How much Rs per individual do you think people need on average to have a decent house and buy food per month in Kerala/in the part of India where you are from?'. Results obtained from Q1 are presented later in the chapter.

supported a non-universal basic income policy targeting the poorest. Figures 4 shows the main motivations provided by ‘key informants’ against UBI.

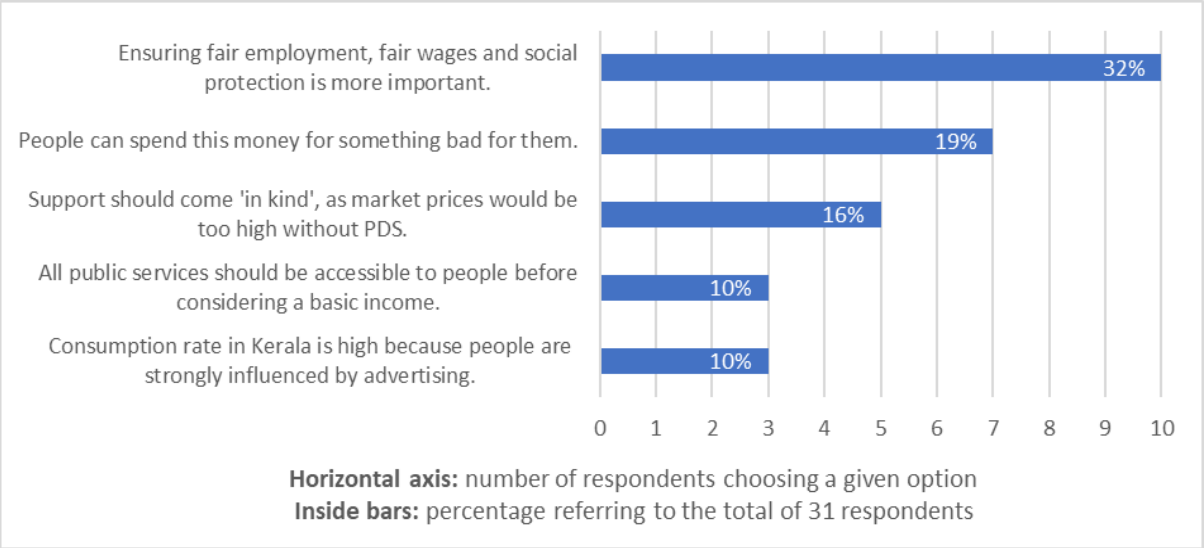

Figure 4. The bar graph presents the main motivations provided by ‘key informants’ against UBI.

The argument most frequently mentioned (32%) by respondents was that the state of Kerala should provide the basic means of living to its citizens by ensuring to everyone a decent job, a fair wage and sufficient protection against unemployment and poverty. In this way, economic activities would prosper and people would be provided with an adequate share of the income generated. Supporters of this argument did not see UBI as a sustainable economic policy because it would hinder the long-term economic development of the state. Among them, two clearly stated that people prefer to work rather than receiving money for nothing because they feel they are contributing to the development of society, while other two that the current social support programs should be fixed in order to be more effective, but not abandoned because they are the outcomes of past social struggles.

The following motivation in terms of frequency (19%) was that people would waste the money received, either by increasing alcohol consumption or by complying to social expectations; for example, they would offer more expensive gifts at weddings, funerals and other celebrations, as well as they would spend more in organising such events. A similar argument, shared by fewer people (10%), emphasised that Kerala is very much influenced by Western culture and people tend to purchase more consumption goods to acquire higher status among their peers. Therefore, people would generally care more, for example, for having a new smartphone rather than improving the quality of food they eat; or they may switch to buy luxury items as soon as their basic needs are covered.

Other respondents (16%) argued that 'in kind' transfers, such as those provided through the PDS, are better than basic income because they protect people from fluctuations in the market price of basic commodities. If PDS was replaced with UBI, people would have to pay higher prices for food and UBI should be constantly adjusted to match market prices, increasing the chances that in the short-term it may not be enough to purchase the items needed. Also, one informant noted that if local markets are not fully developed, then food security would be threatened and people would hold cash they cannot use.

On the same line of thought were those (10%) who feared UBI could substitute public health and education, and argued that all public services should be accessible to people before even considering implementing a basic income policy. In their opinion, providing people with a UBI would not increase equality as the best schools in Kerala are private and too expensive for students from lower-class families. And the same holds when comparing private and public hospitals. Therefore, if the state spent large resources for UBI instead that improving public services, it would just crystallize inequalities as they currently are.

Then, few more arguments were raised by no more than one respondent. First, on how women would be affected by UBI. One informant said that men would appropriate the money delivered to their wives, while another that a basic income would increase the pressure on women to leave paid jobs outside of the household and remain at home; and this would cut off their possibility to create social networks and engage in public life. Other motivations against UBI included: i) as UBI is a concept that originated outside of India, institutions would need to be built for people to accept and support it; ii) whatever money given to people should come under the condition that they should be reinvested; iii) in India, if people do not have an income it is the family who take care of them, so a basic income from the state is not needed; and iv) society in Kerala is very unequal, so it is unfair to provide everyone with the same state support.

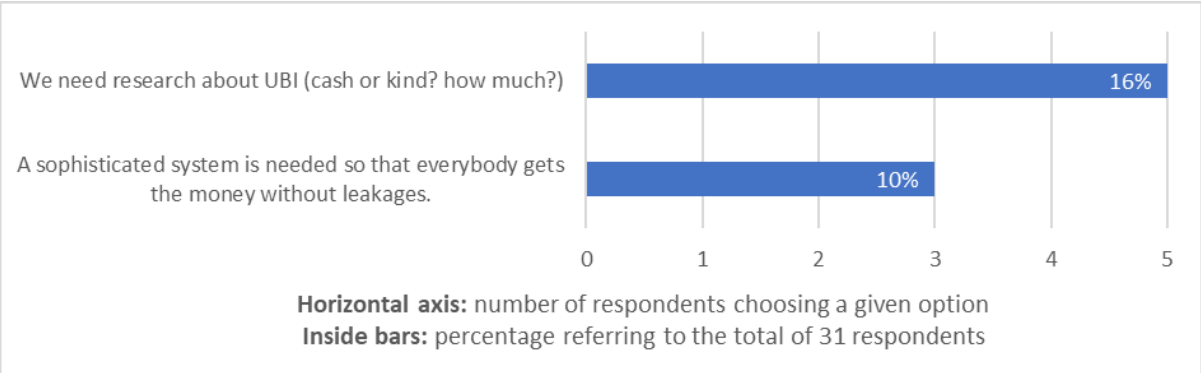

Figure 5. The bar graph presents the main technical difficulties perceived by 'key informants' regarding UBI.

Moving to the group of 'key informants' who theoretically agreed with a UBI policy but with reservations (23%), Figure 5 shows that 16% of 'key informants' believed that the existing body of scientific literature on UBI does not provide enough evidence to support the policy in the context of Kerala. In their opinion, much more research is needed to understand what the effects of UBI would be compared to the expansion of PDS into a more universal and extensive scheme, such as the Universal Basic Services proposal presented in chapter 2. Similarly, much research would be needed to define the exact amount of money that enables people to pay for their basic needs. 10% of respondents also noted that a sophisticated system is needed to ensure that everyone receives the basic income without delays and leakages, as some kind of bureaucratic work would still remain to be performed to transfer the money. Two more reasons were mentioned by only one respondent: that implementing a UBI would inevitably require cutting on other social security programs, likely triggering a public turmoil, and that there is no guarantee that if everybody gets a higher income, the state practice becomes more sustainable; by consuming the additional income, people could actually impoverish the natural resources on which they depend.

Finally, Figure 3 showed that 19% of 'key informants' favoured an unconditional basic income but only targeted at the poorest. The motivations provided to support this proposal were diverse and the only one shared by at least two respondents was that people would not waste the money received, using them only for basic necessities. Other arguments mentioned by only one respondent included that basic income would be efficient, being directly delivered to the beneficiaries without intermediaries; that having a guaranteed income allows poor people to organise their lives better, to think long-term and improve their conditions; and that, if local communities have strong bonds, a basic income would encourage volunteering for the common good as people could dedicate more time to it without losing income.

5.2.2 Support for maximum income and arguments in favour/against it

Figure 6 summarises sharp answers provided by 'key informants' to Q6 ('Do you think it is fair to limit how much money people can earn per month?'). As for UBI, the majority of 'key informants', 16 respondents accounting for 52% of the total, opposed the proposal of establishing a maximum income. 9 respondents (29%) were in favour of it, 5 (16%) theoretically supported it but with reservations and one (3%) did not provide any answer. 'Key informants' motivated their opinions while answering to Q6, but also to Q7 ('Do you think establishing a maximum income would reduce inequalities?') and Q8 ('Do you think

establishing a maximum income would be good also for the environment?'). Main arguments against maximum income are presented in Figure 7.

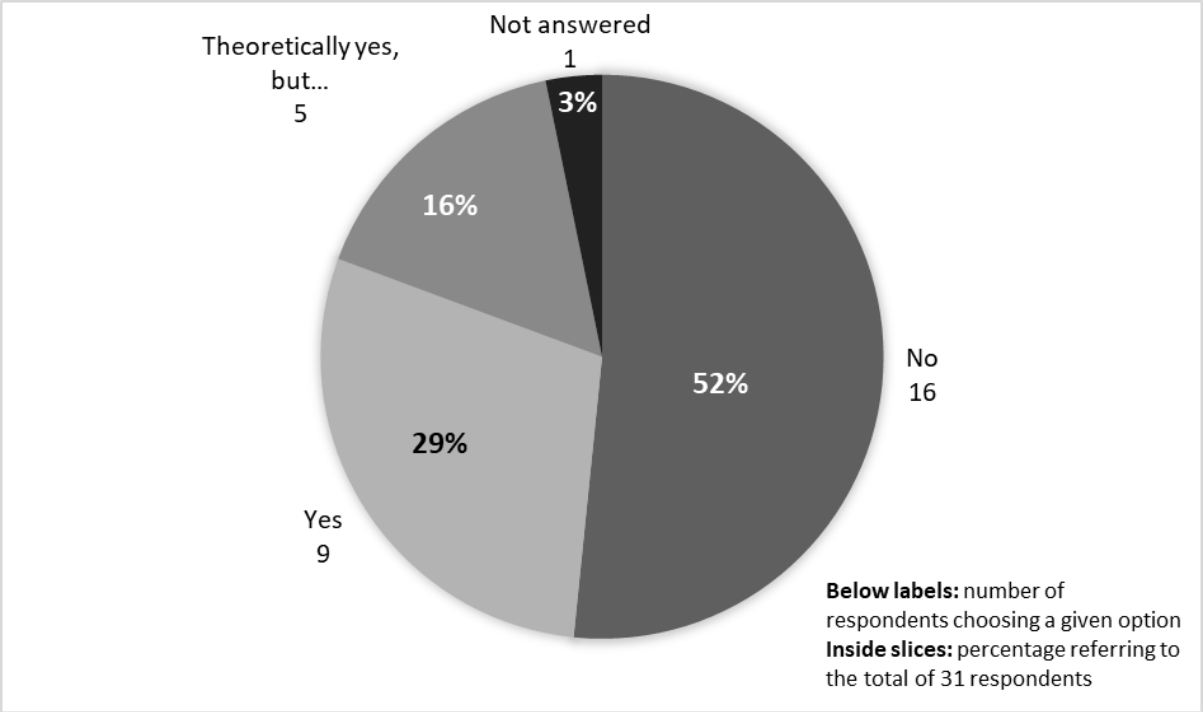

Figure 6. The pie chart presents the opinions expressed by 'key informants' about the proposal of implementing a maximum income.

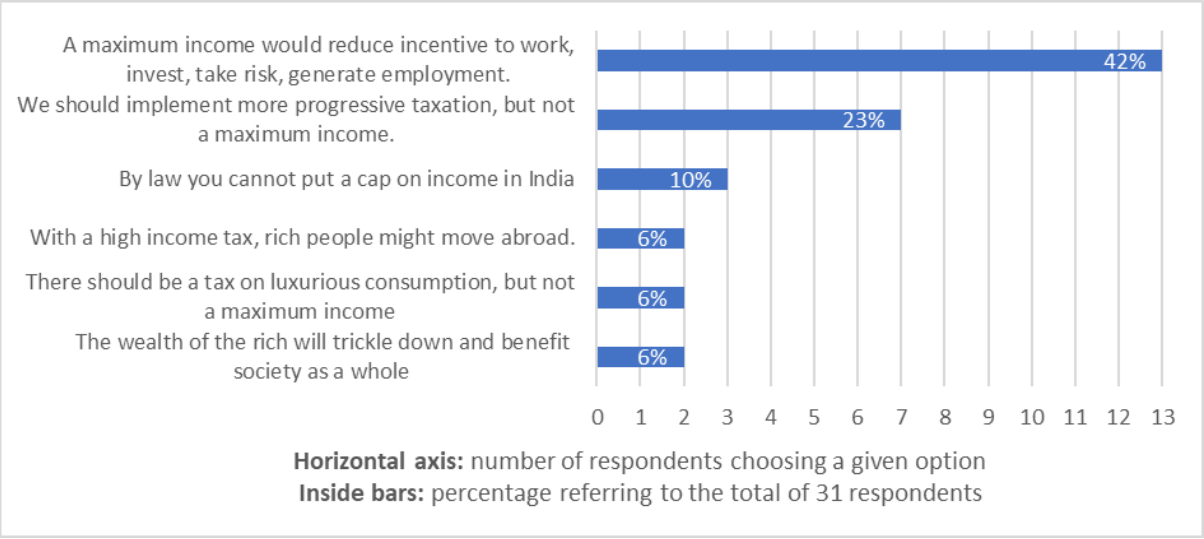

Figure 7. The bar graph presents the main motivations provided by 'key informants' against maximum income.

The motivation shared by most respondents (42%) emphasised that a maximum income would reduce the incentive to work hard to increase personal wealth. As soon as individual income reached the cap, rich people would have no reason to make further investments and take risks, which are prerequisites for entrepreneurship, technological innovation and the economic development of the country. And a reduction in the sum total of investments would

reduce the capacity of the system to generate employment for the millions of Indians who still need it to exit poverty or to improve their living conditions. In short, a maximum income would undermine the foundations of the present economic system.

A second line of arguments stressed the importance of increasing tax revenues from affluent people, but not implementing a maximum income as it would be an excessively radical policy. Much consent among 'key informants' (23%) gained the proposal of making current personal income tax rates more progressive, while 6% of respondents believed that a tax on luxurious consumption should be established. One respondent also noted that a high tax on financial assets should be implemented, so that rich people are incentivised to invest their money into the real economy and do not speculate on financial markets.

Other motivations were shared by less respondents. 10% argued that a cap on income is not allowed by the constitution, as India is ruled through a combination of capitalist and socialist policies and it is not a purely socialist country. Therefore, in their opinion, the state is not allowed to seize a large portion of personal income by setting a 100% top marginal rate. Then, 6% of 'key informants' mentioned that rich people might move abroad if their income is heavily taxed. One added that, in the past, public revenues increased after reducing the share of income that the rich had to pay, because they were less likely to evade taxes. 6% of respondents also believed that the wealth of the rich would 'trickle down' and benefit society as a whole. Three arguments were eventually mentioned by only one respondent: first, that money should not be taken away from the rich, but rather everybody should be given the same opportunities to increase their income; second, that a better way to reduce inequalities would be to give workers the possibility to have a say in factories' management; and third, that the rich should be given options to donate part of their income for charitable purposes as, in the past, taxing individual income and accumulating it at the state level led to authoritarianism.

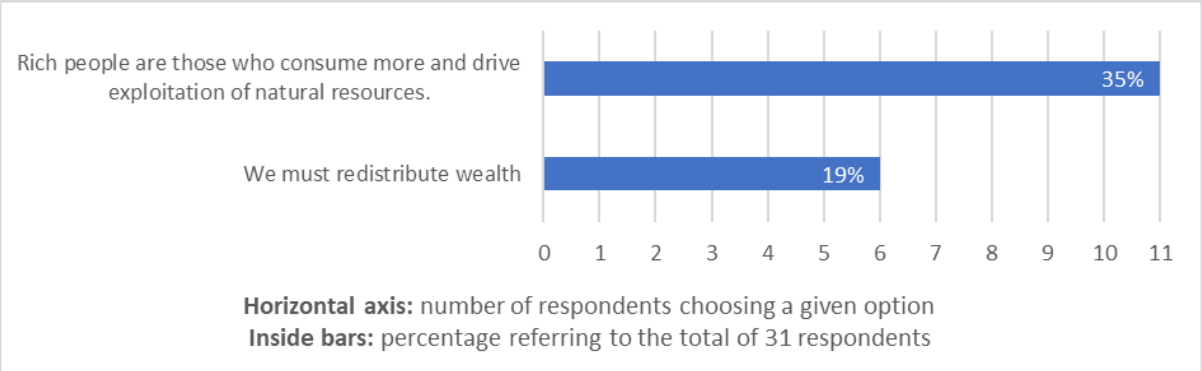

Figure 8. The bar graph presents the main motivations provided by 'key informants' in favour of maximum income.

Figure 8 presents arguments in favour of a maximum income policy, which were formulated by both those who fully supported it (29%), and by those who theoretically agreed with the proposal but had reservations about it (16%). 35% of respondents believed that the rich consume a lot to flaunt their wealth, meanwhile producing more waste than the rest of the population. They spend huge amounts of money in useless consumption because their income is larger than their capacity to use it. Also, through both personal consumption and the reinvestment of excessive income, rich people further increase the exploitation of natural resources and the degradation of ecosystems. A maximum income was therefore considered by respondents an effective tool to improve environmental quality (answer to Q8).

The second main motivation for a maximum income, shared by 19% of 'key informants', was that the present level of inequality in India is too high and that wealth must be redistributed (answer to Q7). A maximum income would provide the state with additional funds to tackle poverty and improve the overall living conditions in the country; at the same time, it would invite people who are already wealthy to be contented with what they have and not strive to earn more. According to one respondent, a maximum income would also remove the perverse celebration of billionaires who own the same income of tens of millions of their fellow Indians. Other arguments related to the topic and mentioned by only one respondent were that there should be a cap on wages (which is only one component of income) in the private sector as well as there is one in the public sector, and that wealth disparity should be tackled because it is the outcome of competition and past encroachments.

As for respondents who expressed only a weak support for basic income, they were primarily concerned (13%) with the fact that the richest individuals in India massively evade taxes and do not comply to the laws without being prosecuted. Therefore, a maximum income might not be effective in increasing state revenues from taxation. As in the case of UBI, income was also criticised by one informant for not being a solid indicator of individual wealth, and capping it would not significantly reduce inequalities. Finally, another respondent noted that a maximum income policy would work only if coupled with massive public spending to improve the social and natural environment of Kerala and India, which could convince the rich to remain in the country rather than moving to a state with more favourable tax rates.

5.2.3 Expected effects of a basic/maximum income policy on people's working habits

Regarding the effects of a UBI policy on people's working habits, main answers provided by 'key informants' to Q4 (If everybody was given [*answer from Q1*] Rs every month… Do you

think they would stop working? Would they work less? Would people change their current job?) were summarised in Figure 9 and Figure 10.

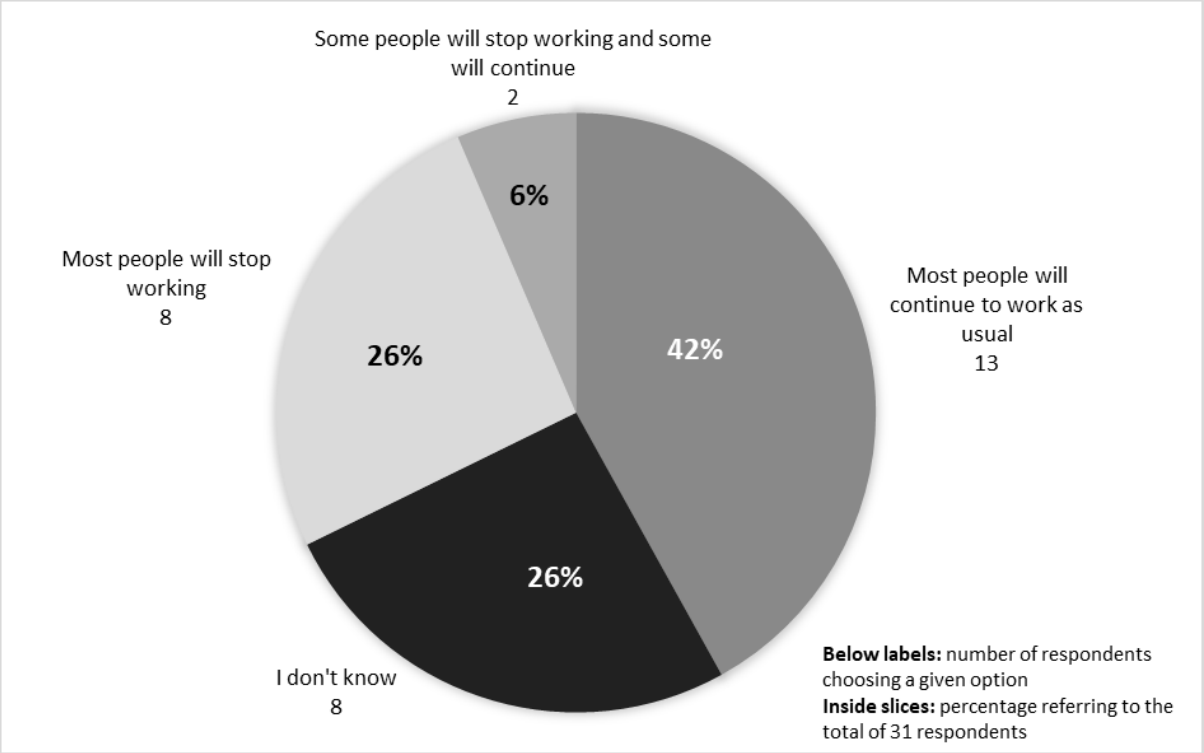

Figure 9. The pie chart presents how 'key informants' believe that 'regular informants' would change their working habits if receiving a basic income.

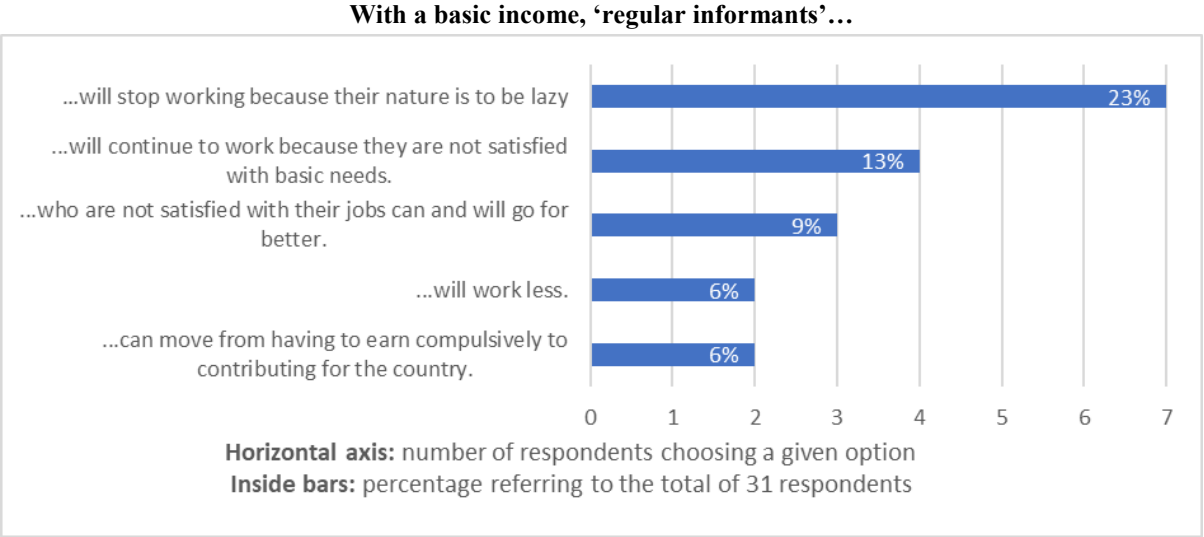

Figure 10. The bar graph presents the motivations that 'key informants' mentioned in support of their claims about how 'regular informants' would change their working habits if receiving a basic income.

In the 'key informants' sample there was no absolute majority for any of the options mentioned in the interviews. 13 respondents (42%) stated that basic income would not affect people's willingness to work and the majority would continue to work as usual. 8 (a significant 26%) did not express an opinion, saying it was too difficult to predict how people would react to the policy. Other 8 respondents (26%) argued that most people would stop working if they

were guaranteed a basic income, and 2 (6%) expected some people to leave their jobs while other to continue as usual.

Arguments mentioned in support of these answers provided a clearer picture of 'key informants' opinions on the topic. 23% of respondents claimed that people would stop working because their nature is to be lazy and, if they were provided with a basic income, they would have no incentive to work. Opposingly, 13% believed that people will continue to work because a basic income would only cover the expenses for basic needs, while people are never satisfied with the minimum and always strive for more. Thus, they will use the additional income to improve their living condition. 9% of respondents argued that a basic income would allow people who are not satisfied with their current job to look for and eventually move to more gratifying positions. Similarly, 6% regarded basic income as an instrument to free people from the obligation to earn compulsively to survive, and through which they could perform paid or non-paid activities that effectively contribute to the wellbeing of society. Another 6% of respondents believed that people would not stop working, but rather work less. Finally, one respondent said that a basic income would reduce illegal and damaging jobs (e.g. poaching).

Referring to their personal behaviour, no respondents in the 'regular informants' group said that a basic income would make them stop working and be lazy (Figure 11). 24 out of 29 (83%) answered that they would continue to work as usual even if they were provided enough income to pay for primary necessities. The most mentioned reason for it (23%) was that basic income would allow them to make or increase savings. The remaining 5 respondents (17%) said that with a basic income guaranteed by the state they would work less; they considered it a relief, as they were working too much and still struggling to meet all expenses.

However, when asked about how other people would behave if they were guaranteed a basic income, the answers provided were slightly different (Figure 12). The number of respondents who believed that other people would continue to work as usual went down to 16 (55%). 6 respondents (21%) could not foresee a clear trend and said that some people would continue to work as usual while others would stop. 5 (17%) claimed that most people would stop working and 2 (7%) that they did not know how people would react to a basic income policy. In addition, among the 29 respondents, 21% said that old-age people would stop working and 13% that some people would work less. Lastly, one female informant argued that women would continue to work as usual and men would stop, while a male informant argued the opposite, that men would continue as usual and women would stop.

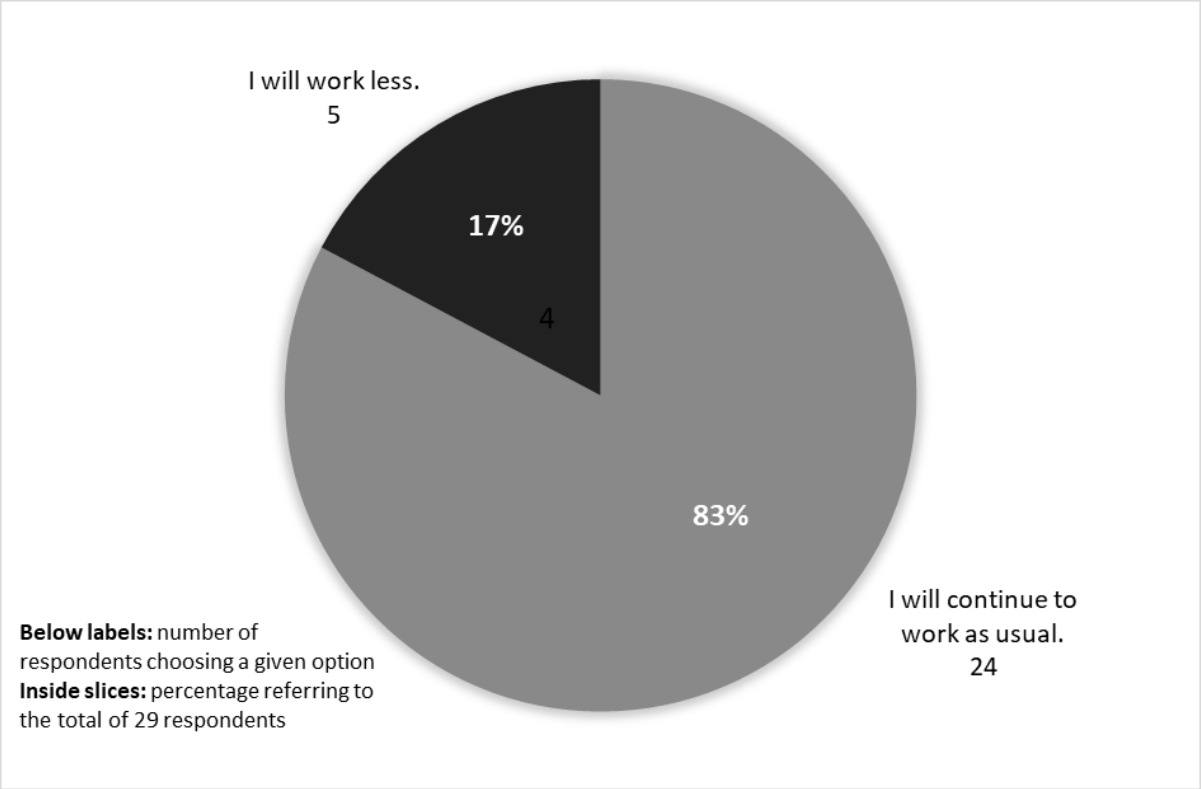

Figure 11. The pie chart presents the statements made by 'regular informants' about how their working habits would change if they were provided with a basic income.

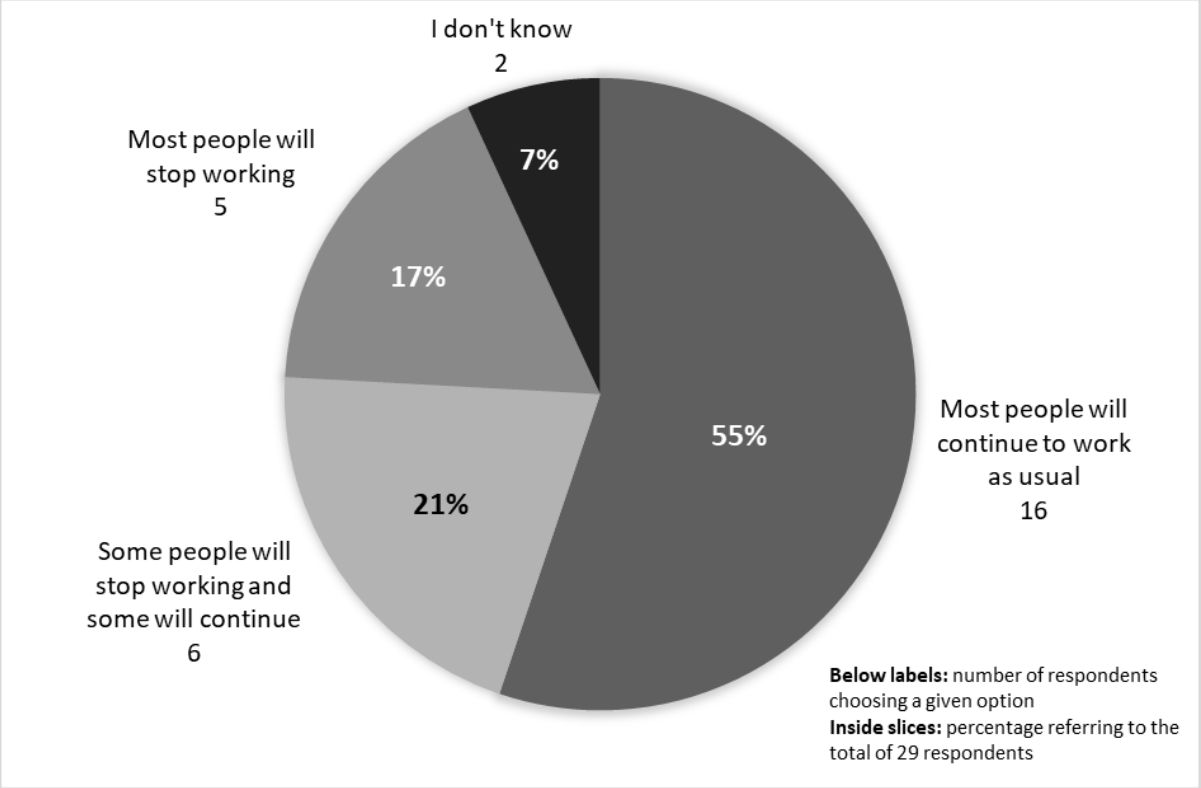

Figure 12. The pie chart presents the statements made by 'regular informants' about how others' working habits would change if they were provided with a basic income.

Overall, the majority of 'regular informants' claimed that neither themselves nor other people would stop working if they were provided with a basic income.

As for maximum income, Figure 7 showed that 42% of 'key informants' opposed it on the ground that it would reduce incentive for rich people to work hard. Therefore, in their opinion, also a maximum income would have consequences on people's working habits. More specifically, rich people would work less if their income was capped.

5.2.4 Scenarios for basic/maximum income ratios

When asked about how much money they believed people need every month to pay for basic expenses in Kerala (Q1[5]), in most cases respondents preferred to provide a figure referring to the household (two adults and two children) rather than to the individual, arguing that it was more realistic and appropriate for India. In the remaining cases, the amount of money needed for one child and one adult were doubled to analyse them with the other values (in 80% of these cases, the amount of money assigned by respondents to each child was half of that assigned to an adult). However, several respondents warned to carefully consider the figures provided as, for example, house rents largely vary between urban and rural areas, and households who own properties do not even have to pay for rents. The same amount of money could be more than enough for a family living in a rural area but insufficient for a family of the same size living in Kochi, the economic capital of Kerala.

Nonetheless, the answers provided emphasised different perceptions between 'key informants' and 'regular informants'. All respondents in the 'regular informants' group (29) answered to Q1, and the average amount they considered enough to pay for the basic expenses of a household per month was 13,000 Rs. The median was 12,000 Rs so there were not many outliers on both sides of the distribution. As for 'key informants', only 24 of them provided a figure while 7 argued that a number would have been too simplistic and not a valid 'scientific' measure for the reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph. Those who answered regarded that the average income needed by a household for monthly basic expenses was 19,000 Rs and the median 15,000 Rs, a value that signals the presence of outliers on the higher end of the distribution. Therefore, compared to 'regular informants', 'key informants' believed that households would need a slightly higher basic income to provide for monthly expenses.

[5] Q1 was the same for 'key informants' and 'regular informants', and asked 'How much Rs per individual do you think people need on average to have a decent house and buy food per month in Kerala?'.

In the second section of the interview, the 14 'key informants' who fully or partially supported a maximum income policy (Figure 6) were also asked to suggest a ratio between basic and maximum income. Of these 14, only 8 provided such ratio while the other 6 argued that more research and political discussion was needed to define it appropriately. The 8 suggested ratios for basic/maximum income were 1:4, 1:5, 1:10, 1:12, 1:16, 1:20, 1:30 and 1:50[6]. Thus, if a policy proposal was based on the mean value of the ratios mentioned by respondents, a maximum income would be set at 18 times more than the basic income.

5.2.5 Barriers for implementing a basic/maximum income policy

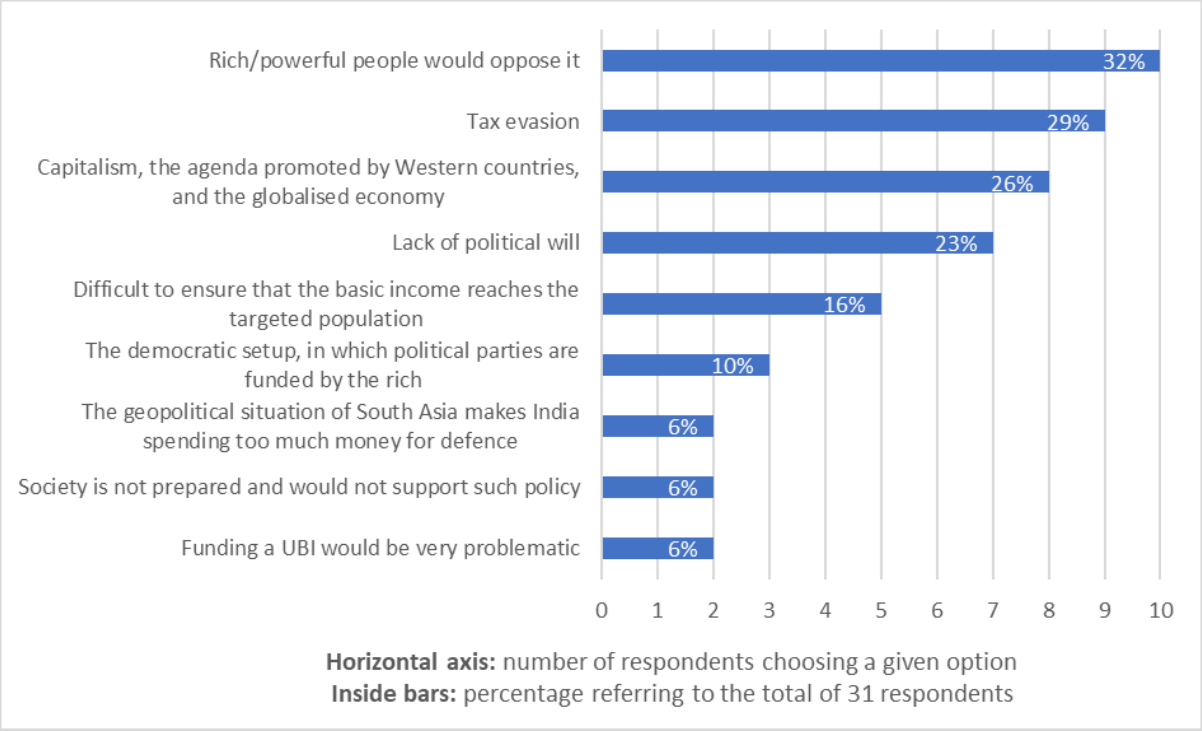

Figure 13. The bar graph presents the main barriers to a basic/maximum income policy perceived by 'key informants'.

A first evident barrier for implementing a basic/maximum income policy is the lack of support shown by people who occupy influential positions, such as those included in the 'key informants' group sampled for this research. UBI was supported by only 27% of them (Figure 3), while a maximum income got full support only from 29% of respondents and weak support from 16% (Figure 6).

In addition, through Q11 ('What do you think are the barriers to implement a basic/maximum income policy?'), 'key informants' were asked to identify the barriers that a

[6] When the ratio resulted from dividing basic and maximum income was not directly mentioned by respondents, the basic income figure used for the calculation was not that aggregated at the household level but that indicated for one individual adult. Otherwise, an individual maximum income would have been divided for a household basic income, invalidating the results.

basic/maximum income policy would face if proposed to the legislators. The main barriers they mentioned were summarised in Figure 13.

Four obstacles were raised by at least 20% of respondents. The most frequently mentioned (32%) was that rich and powerful people would oppose a policy that sets a cap on the income they can make. Through lobbying activities, they would put pressure on government and parliament to abandon the proposal. A second main obstacle was tax evasion (29%); respondents felt that the state has little capacity to verify that the rich pay the share of taxes they should, and eventually fine those who concealed part of their income. 26% of respondents directly blamed capitalism and Western countries for impeding countries in the Global South to independently devise and implement policies that address the socio-environmental challenges caused by free trade and globalisation. According to this argument, until the Global North will continue to promote the current neoliberal regime, there is no possibility to implement policies such as a basic/maximum income. Lastly, 23% of respondents noted that currently there is no political will to push for a basic/maximum income policy in the context of Kerala and India. In their opinion, it is simply not being discussed in the political sphere.

Other five barriers were shared by less than 20% of respondents but by more than one informant. Referring to UBI and similarly to the motivations against it mentioned earlier, 16% of informants argued that it is difficult to ensure that everybody would receive the cash transfers they are entitled to without leakages. Another 10% emphasised that, in India, political parties have little incentive to implement policies that penalise the rich, as the rich are the main financial contributors to political parties. Then, three obstacles were mentioned each by 6% of respondents. The first referred to the unstable geopolitical situation of South Asia, where India does not have good relations neither with Pakistan nor with Bangladesh and therefore its defence budget absorbs vast financial resources that cannot be allocated for development purposes. Second, respondents argued that society is not prepared for such policy and would not support it. Third, funding UBI would be too expensive; and whatever revenues were generated by a maximum income, they would not be sufficient to provide a basic income to the whole population of Kerala (or even of India).

Finally, two more obstacles were mentioned by only one respondent but are worth reporting. One informant argued that economic policies and income tax have been taken away from the states and centralised at the union level. Therefore, single states cannot decide whether or not to have a particular tax depending on its effect on ordinary people. The other obstacle is

that the state is benefitting the wealthiest people in the country at the expenses of the rest of the population, by giving them large tax concessions every year. The respondent argued that if the state was collecting these taxes from the rich, resources for welfare schemes could be massively increased.

5.2.6 Opportunities for implementing a basic/maximum income policy

'Key informants' did not see many favourable opportunities for implementing a basic/maximum income policy. Only two factors that could somehow support the public discussion of the proposal were mentioned. One respondent noted that more and more people are starting to recognise the great injustices generated by the current neoliberal economic system; therefore, they may start backing radical policies such as basic/maximum income. Another respondent emphasised that there cannot be unlimited economic growth on a finite planet and, since we are approaching ecological limits by exhausting natural resources and producing excessive waste, societies will soon have to find alternative strategies to ensure their survival and wellbeing. And a basic/maximum income might be included in these new strategies.

6. Discussion

6.1 Opposition to a basic/maximum income policy in Kerala and India

The results revealed little support for a basic/maximum income proposal. More than half of 'key informants' opposed both UBI and maximum income, and none of the two was fully backed by more than 30% of respondents. Many 'key informants' theoretically favoured the policies, but expressed strong reservations about what they would cause once implemented and therefore preferred alternative options (e.g. UBI targeted at the poor or more progressive taxation). Even in the 'regular informants' group, support for UBI was not straightforward. While only about a quarter of respondents believed that a basic income scheme should be universal, more than half argued that it should be targeted at the poorest. The arguments brought against the policies were similar to those identified in the literature, but more specific to the case of Kerala and India.

The main motivation for which respondents opposed a basic/maximum income policy was that it would hinder the economic development of the country. UBI was considered a tool to fight poverty but not an economic strategy to empower workers at the expenses of capitalists. Most respondents believed that ensuring fair wages and full employment was far more desirable than providing a guaranteed income to everyone, as a productive and efficient economy would deliver prosperity not only to the current population of Kerala, but also to the future generations. Similarly, maximum income was mainly criticised for reducing incentives for the rich to reinvest their capitals into productive activities that generate wealth and employment. Rich people would also move to countries with more favourable tax rates, further diminishing the private capitals available for economic development. But what does economic development means? It is legitimate to think that, in the present context of growth-enhancing policies all over India, economic development equals economic growth. Thus, according to those who participated to the research, a basic/maximum income policy should be rejected because it would hinder the economic growth of Kerala and India.

In addition, even if a basic/maximum income policy encountered public support at the national level, implementing it would still be difficult because Indian politics is deeply influenced by external factors. One is that countries of the Global North still set the development path, and promote neoliberal narratives preventing countries in the Global South to expand the role of the state at the expenses of the market. 26% of 'key informants' argued that, in the current strongly interrelated economic system, a country in the Global South that

first implemented a basic/maximum income policy would inevitably risk becoming less competitive and being wiped out of the global market with dire consequences for its population. And such dire consequences could not even be mitigated by increasing public spending, as most of these countries were imposed budget constraints to benefit from development programs supported by the IMF. By directly blaming Western-promoted capitalism, globalisation and the hegemonic power of Global North countries, these respondents pointed at the huge obstacles that Global South countries face in attempting to independently devise and adopt innovative economic policies such as basic/maximum income. If the time of colonial military occupation has ended, not the same can be said for a more subtle form of control, namely the present economic and cultural colonialism often emphasised by degrowth scholars (Latouche 2015).

A second external factor mentioned by few respondents is the unstable geopolitical situation of South Asia, which press countries to spend vast financial resources for their military apparatus. In 2018, India scored fifth worldwide in the list of countries ranked by military expenditures, with a defence budget of around $60 billion (SIPRI 2018). India has been permanently engaged in an armed conflict with Pakistan on the contended region of Kashmir since 1947 (Choudhury 2019), and recently clashed with Bangladesh (Bala 2017) and China (Woody 2018) over borders' disputes. These events show that multilateral mechanisms for peace and international cooperation, such as the *fora* established by the UN, still fall short in ensuring that conflicts are managed without recurring to weapons, and thus countries are not willing to reallocate funds from destructive to constructive sectors. In addition, as military power is largely coupled with economic power, countries may fear that cutting their defence budget could reduce their importance in the global community. Therefore, other countries would face the same problems of India when confronted with the proposal of reducing military expenditures in favour of increasing public spending for welfare schemes.

In these conditions, it seems very unlikely that a basic/maximum income policy could be implemented in the case of Kerala and India. Beside the opposition expressed by the majority of respondents, basic income is indeed being debated in the political sphere, but it is far from having the public support needed to be approved; and its universality is challenged by the high level of inequality in the country. Meanwhile, maximum income is not even being publicly mentioned as a policy to redistribute the wealth generated, and no political party or trade union is advocating for it. Does this mean that the proposal of implementing a basic/maximum income should be abandoned?

6.2 Limitations of the study and reinforcement of a basic/maximum income proposal

To answer this question, it is first necessary to emphasise the main limitations of the study. First, the size of the sample was too small to generalise the results. Overall, only 60 people were interviewed, accounting for a tiny fraction of the total population of Kerala or India. Thus, there is no statistical evidence that the opposition to the policy expressed by most respondents could be ascribed to the other residents of the country. Second, informants were not randomly selected and the sample did not ensure equal representation to different categories of people; for example, women were under-represented compared to men. Third, most respondents were not familiar with the topic and their answers might have been different if they had more time to think about it. Although all 'key informants' received the interview guide in advance, not all of them actually read through it. As for 'regular informants', it was difficult to grasp whether those who believed that a basic income should be provided to everyone meant everyone in their community of reference (e.g. village or co-workers) or everyone in the country. For these reasons, the answers provided by respondents should be treated carefully. They can illuminate issues not previously detected in research but not be generalised to a broader population.

Therefore, if a basic/maximum income proposal were to be abandoned, it should be because the research had revealed its fallacies in promoting social and ecological sustainability; but these fallacies were not detected. Surely respondents detected controversies on the consequences a basic/maximum income scheme (e.g. on women's labour or on consumption rates), but these do not question the egalitarian and redistributive property of the policy, rather the side effects linked to cultural habits to be considered in the planning stage and eventually addressed once the policy is implemented. Actually, as emphasised in the previous paragraphs, the policy was mainly rejected because it would hinder the economic growth of Kerala and India. And this is exactly why a basic/maximum income policy is proposed by degrowth and post-growth advocates: because it would most likely shift the focus from GDP to new composite indicators of well-being. A basic/maximum income policy should not be abandoned, but carefully planned. The arguments detected in the literature and occasionally mentioned by respondents revealed the potential of the policy in promoting social, ecological, and even economic, sustainability.

6.3 Basic/maximum income and social sustainability

First of all, a basic/maximum income policy would promote social sustainability by reducing inequalities. UBI would ensure to everyone a firm floor to stand upon, improving the conditions

of the poorest and of the middle class which, in most countries, have captured little of the wealth generated by globalisation (Atkinson & Piketty 2007; Atkinson & Piketty 2010). For the unemployed, a basic income would constitute a net gain as people should not renounce to it if they find a job while, for those employed, it would allow more savings and reduce the need to get into debt, as emphasised by 23% of 'regular informants'. At the same time, a maximum income would keep inequalities at a low level by limiting the profits accruing to the richest part of the population. Where, in the decades between 1950's and 1970's, top marginal rates of tax systems were as high as almost working as a maximum income, such as in India (97.5%) or the US (91%), the level of inequalities were significantly lower. In India, in 1983 the richest 1% of the population captured only 6% of the national income, and the richest 10% about 30%. Now, the richest 1% captures 22% of the income generated in the country, and the richest 10% about 56% (Alvaredo et al. 2018). In the US, in 1970 the richest 1% captured around 7% of the national income and the richest 10% around 30% (Piketty & Saez 2003). Now, the richest 1% captures 20% of the income generated, while the richest 10% about 47% (Alvaredo et al. 2018). Therefore, even though there might be other factors to consider, to a strong progressive taxation system corresponded strong economic equality. This reveals that progressive tax rates, and even more a maximum income, hold huge power in keeping inequalities at a fair level.

In addition, a maximum income would likely trigger what Pizzigati (2018) referred to as a 'cascade effect' on prices. With a capped income, the costs of protecting and maintaining too many physical assets (e.g. houses, private jets) would become impossible to be sustained by affluent people, and the revenues they can extract from financial markets (e.g. dividends or shares' appreciation) would be limited by the cap, making useless to own assets that are not remunerative. The rich will be incentivised to sell the assets they have in excess, generating a large supply that would drive down prices and benefit everyone else. Along with income, a basic/maximum income policy would therefore indirectly target the unequal division of wealth – i.e. what Piketty (2014) considers the main cause of the current inequalities – and nurture public requests for redistributing it more fairly through specific taxes (e.g. on financial transactions, luxurious goods, large properties) (Pizzigati 2018).

Finally, a basic/maximum income policy would reduce inequalities by redistributing resources from the richest to the marginal regions of a country. A basic income is often criticised for being an imprecise measure of the basic costs of living of different areas; for example, living in a city usually costs more than living in the countryside because wealth and investments tend to concentrate in cities, thus driving up prices. But, according to Van Parijs

and Vanderborght (2017), if a basic income was set at the same level throughout a country, it would work as a powerful redistributive tool from the 'centres' of capital accumulation towards the peripheries, which would receive a share of the wealth they contribute to produce. Afterall, cities heavily depend on the countryside for the resources they need to be sustained (e.g. food, energy, materials) and for the waste they need to dispose (Rees & Wackernagel 2008).

By reducing inequalities, a basic/maximum income policy would then contribute to social sustainability by promoting a sense of belonging and solidarity in the population of a country. This because research shows that lower levels of inequality are associated with higher levels of trust among people (Gould & Hijzen 2016). With a basic/maximum income in place, those whose income will increase (net beneficiaries) are likely to feel that they are getting a fairer share of the total wealth generated, while those whose income will be reduced (net payers) will benefit from living in a safer society and will receive the same state support as any other citizen. If basic income is sponsored as an individual entitlement to the revenues from the use of common natural resources, people would feel that the now privately captured revenues from natural resources belong to everyone and therefore should be managed sustainably. As emphasised by one respondent, a maximum income would also eradicate the perverse celebration of the extremely rich; a celebration which often hides envy, depicting billionaires as those who worked hard and deserved their wealth, and beggars as lazy free riders who do not contribute to society.

Social sustainability would also be promoted by a basic/maximum income by strengthening democratic processes. Presently, since politicians depend on public votes to be re-elected, they tend to indulge the interests of wealthy people who in exchange promise to invest and generate jobs in the country (Pizzigati 2018). And these employment opportunities are eventually presented by the same politicians as successful economic growth which benefits everyone. A maximum income would thus prevent rich people from gaining too much political influence at the expenses of the rest of the population, and their investments in a country to become too important for a government to risk losing them (Ramsay 2005). As for UBI, it would give everyone the same opportunities to participate to the democratic life of a country (Santens 2018). People could dedicate more time to getting informed, and engage in political parties or other associations which contribute to making people's voices heard in the public debate. Also, with a basic income, people could decide to candidate themselves in the elections regardless of their economic background. And, as the quality of democratic processes

improves, the level of social conflict between elected representatives and their voters would most likely be reduced.

The last way in which a basic/maximum income policy would promote social sustainability is by liberating people from the obligation to engage in paid work. In the current economic system, anyone is allegedly free to decide in which activities to engage according to their talents and passions. Nonetheless, this is true only in theory as people need an income to pay taxes and purchase basic commodities, such as food, that can no longer be produced on common land which has largely been privatised over time. And income is not provided to everyone according to their talents and passions, but to their availability to perform the jobs required in the market regardless of the social contribution these jobs produce (Buch-Hansen & Koch 2019). Thus, freedom is only apparent and people are forced to make an income however meaningless or exploitative their job is. A basic/maximum income would deliver real freedom for all, capping the grief of those who care mostly about profits at the expenses of people and of the environment, and incentivising people to seek and cultivate their talents without worrying if these will be remunerative in monetary terms (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017).

6.4 Basic/maximum income and ecological sustainability

As for ecological sustainability, a basic/maximum income policy would mainly promote it by breaking the vicious cycle of overaccumulation of capital, which occurs when the surplus-value appropriated by capitalists would not return any profits if reinvested because the costs of production are too high compared to the expected revenues (Marx & Engels 1967). In this case, capitalists are incentivised to drive down costs of production either by lowering wages or by automating human labour through technology. As the first option has not proven completely feasible because wages cannot be excessively reduced, fossil-fuel operating machines have largely replaced workers, increasing the aggregate energy and material consumption of the economic system (Das 2018). In addition, credit to sustain production bears interests that must be paid back, and companies are forced to constantly expand production and innovate not to lose their competitive advantage in the market (Jackson 2016). Thus, energy and material consumption are destined to grow as long as there will be excessive surplus accumulated by capitalists. A maximum income would therefore directly hamper unlimited increase of resource use while UBI would rise the reserve price of labour, forcing capitalists to further reduce capital accumulation by decreasing the surplus appropriated at the expenses of workers.

A basic/maximum income policy would then promote ecological sustainability by limiting personal consumption both in absolute and relative terms. If set at an appropriate level, a maximum income would impede people from purchasing resource-intensive and polluting commodities, such as private jets, yachts, unnecessary large number of cars, and from owning several houses which occupy land and remain empty most of the year causing the phenomenon of 'ghost towns' (e.g. alpine towns which multiply their residents only during the ski season) (Pizzigati 2018). Thus, a maximum income would reduce energy and material use in absolute terms while increasing efficiency. This argument was also shared by 35% of respondents in the 'key informants' group, who emphasised that the rich are those who consume more resources. In relative terms, a basic/maximum income would limit the race for positional consumption (Jackson 2016). On the one side, those with the highest incomes would not be able to keep increasing consumption to show off their wealth; on the other, the equalising power of UBI would likely shift the way in which people seek social recognition in their community. As basic needs would be ensured to everyone, people might start measuring each other on the base of the contribution they provide to society rather than on the consumption goods they possess.

Similarly, with a basic/maximum income policy in place people can decide to work less and dedicate more time to less resource-intensive activities. Few respondents in the 'regular informants' group (17%) argued they would work less if a UBI was implemented; and also a maximum income could incentivise rich people to devolve more time to non-paid activities once having reached the cap, since any additional effort put in their job will not increase their income. From a degrowth perspective, an increase in spare time coupled with a guaranteed economic floor could lead to communitarian activities such as shared gardening, barter markets, time banks and consumer groups, that promote more sustainable lifestyles (D'Alisa et al. 2014). People could become less dependent on the market while developing new forms of exchange based on non-monetary values. Thus, a reduction in the time spent doing a job – considering it as a paid activity – could be compensated by an increase in other types of less resource-intensive activities.

6.5 Basic/maximum income and economic sustainability

A major cause of concerns among detractors of a basic/maximum income policy is its economic sustainability, as they argue it would reduce the incentive to work. A UBI would allow the unemployed to stop looking for a job and the lazy to leave their current position to be idle, while a maximum income would discourage the rich to reinvest their money or further try to

improve their remuneration. Had a basic/maximum income these consequences, most people would then stop working and there would be no assurance of the provision of enough basic commodities to sustain present societies. However, this argument reveals a narrow-minded perception of human nature, which regards people as selfish and utility maximisers, and does not account for their social network and the satisfaction gained from performing meaningful jobs. Also, basic income experiments conducted in different countries (e.g. Finland, Canada, Namibia and India) do not provide empirical evidence to back such claim (Bregman 2017; Standing 2013a); nor do the empirical results of this study. 42% of 'key informants' and 55% of 'regular informants' believed that most people would continue to work as usual even if they were provided with a UBI – in both cases it was the most selected option – and the share of those who answered that they would continue to work as usual rose to 83% when 'regular informants' referred to themselves. Thus, there is no evidence that a large portion of the population of Kerala, or of other countries, will drastically diminish their working time.

Nonetheless, the economic system will likely look quite different if a basic/maximum income policy was implemented. As emphasised earlier, a basic income would give workers more bargaining power at the expenses of capitalists, and allow them to reject exploitative or 'bullshit jobs' to use the expression coined by anthropologist David Graeber (2013) to refer to jobs which are considered meaningless even by those who perform them. By liberating people from the obligation to earn a salary to live, and thus to accept whatever occupation is available in the market, wages and job offers will automatically adjust to reflect how much a position is really needed by society (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). For example, jobs in the farming or health care sector will most probably offer higher wages as societies can hardly go on without them; while others which do not meaningfully contribute to society but serves the interests of capitalists – Graeber (2013) makes the example of corporate lawyers – are likely to disappear, as the rich could hardly be able to attract skilled people by offering high salaries if their income is capped. Therefore, it is hard to think that nobody will be willing to perform activities (again, such as farming) essential for human survival; but it is reasonable that in the new economic system wages would reflect the social contribution of a job and not how much this is required in the market. In this way, although theoretically being a tool to reduce inequalities in disposable incomes (i.e. after tax and transfers are accounted for), a basic/maximum income policy would likely reduce the gap also among market incomes (i.e. incomes before tax and transfers), something that Zamora (2019) deems essential to eradicate the roots of inequality.

Finally, a basic/maximum income policy is economically sustainable as it would cause little or no inflation for at least three reasons. First, the additional income provided to the beneficiaries would not come from printing more currency, rather from redistributing money which are already existing but concentrated in the hands of the richest. Thus, the aggregate money supply would not change. Second, as UBI would cover only basic commodities whom demand is largely inelastic, it is unlikely that it would cause the price of such commodities to rise. Those with low income either spend it entirely for food and other basic commodities, or receive state support to purchase the food they need to survive. If they were receiving a basic income, this will be spent for the same commodities as before while any additional income from paid work would allow them to make savings or purchase non-basic commodities. Therefore, the demand for basic commodities will remain the same as before the introduction of UBI. Nonetheless, due to the redistributive character of the policy on a spatial scale, a UBI could have inflationary pressure in areas where prices are lower than others (e.g. marginal regions *vs* big cities). In this case, the purchasing power of people residing in marginal regions would simply be equalised to those living in the richest areas of the country (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). Last, a basic/maximum income policy could increase the price of non-basic commodities, as more people would be able to afford them. But a maximum income would make sure that prices remain into a tolerable range and do not rise excessively.

6.6 Unsolved controversies of a basic/maximum income policy

Despite these arguments reveal the potential of a basic/maximum income policy in promoting social, ecological, and economic sustainability, some key issues remain to be considered while designing it, as controversies about its effects were highlighted by respondents as well as detected in the literature.

As for UBI, should it replace or add to existing welfare schemes? Matthews (2014), following Friedman (1968), argue that existing welfare schemes are inefficient and benefit only a share of the total population at the expense of others. Thus, they consider UBI a tool to further reduce the interference of the state in markets. Of a different opinion are Alexander (2014) and Hulme et al. (2012) who, while accepting that targeted programs such as unemployment allowances would be removed, support UBI only in a context of fully developed basic public services, such as health and education, and in some cases even in addition to 'in kind' transfers. From an egalitarian stand, it is acceptable that other forms of cash transfers would disappear if UBI was implemented, but the same cannot be said for public services which should be

provided by the state free of costs. In the case of India, the right-wing government in power between 2014-2019 has been repeatedly attempting to substitute the current welfare schemes with direct cash transfers, often facing resistance from the population (Byatnal 2018). The executive's rationale for a UBI resembles that of liberalised markets supporters, which regard giving money to people as a way to allow them to autonomously fulfil their needs directly in the market (Singh 2019). But this way of thinking is dangerous as the choices of the actors in the market are driven by profits, and not by people's well-being. For example, if expenses for public health care are diverted directly to people through a UBI, and people are supposed to use that money to get medical treatment in a private hospital, there is no assurance that private actors would act for the real benefit of the patients instead that for their own profit. Therefore, a UBI should be considered in addition and not in replacement of basic services, as also 10% of 'key informants' emphasised.

In countries where the supply of basic commodities is not fully developed, replacing 'in kind' transfers or job guarantee schemes with UBI might be problematic. Again in the case of India, 16% of 'key informants' believed that the PDS should not be abandoned in favour of UBI because market prices for food would become too high for most of the people. One respondent also noted that the present welfare schemes in Kerala resulted from past social struggles, an element that cannot be overlooked when trying to build public support for UBI. Indeed, beneficiaries of the basic income pilot in New Delhi reported they preferred receiving money rather than food grains because they could have a more varied diet and even buy better-quality food (Khosla 2018). But, where the supply side is not as well developed as in Delhi, people preferred to receive food as the same grains provided through the PDS might not be accessible in the local markets (Byatnal 2018). Nonetheless, Standing (2012) argued that in areas where the production of basic commodities such as food can largely be improved, an influx of cash would boost local economies and create a supply that previously was lacking. A similar argument could be made for the NREGA. On the one hand, the NREGA may be more popular than a UBI as workers can feel they are contributing to the development of the country by building new infrastructures (e.g. roads, wells). On the other, a UBI could address the flaws so far detected in the NREGA by requiring a much lighter bureaucracy and by encouraging people to develop self-employed activities and be more self-reliant. People may resist UBI because they are risk averse but, according to Davala et al. (2015), they may change idea if it proves to be more effective than other existing welfare schemes.

A UBI policy may also have contrasting effects on women's behaviour. In the academic literature, one of the arguments supporting UBI emphasises that it would work as a tool to remunerate unpaid care work, which at the global level is still mostly performed by women. In this way, women (and men as well) would get an economic return for the additional hours spent during activities which are not considered 'job' by the market, but are essential to sustaining the social and economic system. Also, by receiving UBI at the individual level, women who are financially dependent on their husbands and have little possibility to get an employment – e.g. for reasons related to culture or religion – would be allowed to leave the household without fearing of not being able to sustain themselves. This rationale seems supported by the basic income experiment conducted in Madhya Pradesh in 2011-2012, which showed that women benefitted more than men from the scheme, by starting small businesses and feeling more independent (Standing 2013a). However, a 'key informant' noted that in the context of Kerala a UBI may actually disempower women. Providing a payment for care and household work could increase the social pressure for women to remain at home, since UBI would replace the income they can make by engaging in cooperative activities or paid employment. This would limit 'their exposure to the public and their ability to create social networks other than those immediately available to them by virtue of family connection or immediate neighbour connection' (interview with a 'key informant'). Thus, especially in countries where gender roles still strongly influence the division of labour, it must not be taken for granted that a UBI would empower women in the short-term.

Especially from an ecological perspective, another matter of debate is the effect of UBI on the consumption of superfluous commodities. Providing unemployed or low-income people with additional money would most likely improve their economic security and increase their consumption of basic goods. But what would it cause on the middle class, namely on those who would experience the benefits of a basic income but not the disadvantages of a maximum income? It is reasonable to think that they may invest the additional money in starting self-employed activities or in improving the quality of their productions (e.g. farmers could invest in efficiency or take the entrepreneurial risk of shifting to organic cultivation), but people can as well decide to purchase more superfluous commodities, increasing the aggregate level of emission and material resource use. As one 'key informant' emphasised, there is no assurance that providing people with additional income would make the overall practice of a country more sustainable; by consuming more, people might even impoverish the state. Similarly, 10% of respondents noted that in Kerala, but the argument can be generalised to most if not all

modern societies, people regard consumption as a status symbol and through it they express their social position.

As for the consequences on people's willingness to contribute to society, the debate polarizes between those believing that the basic human nature is to be lazy and those who consider people as social beings. The former claim that with a basic income nobody will be willing to work anymore and watching TV would become their main occupation, while the latter that people find meaning in contributing to society and therefore UBI would not cause people to be idle. Since none of the two propositions can be proved true on a large-scale, it is likely that some people will decide to live a basic life out of the guaranteed income, thus completely depending on the work of others. In this case, would society accept and tolerate it? The answer depends on the aim of a UBI policy. If it is intended to redistribute the wealth commonly generated by technological advancement and natural resource use, then nobody should question what others do with their basic income. People who work more will be compensated for their increased effort by a higher income which allow for increased consumption. If instead, a basic income is mainly considered a tool to develop individual entrepreneurship or boost consumption, idleness would be less accepted and people would be incentivised to re-enter the job market. In this scenario, clarifying in advantage which rationale underpins UBI is key to ensure that those who decide to keep on working would not turn against those who decide to dedicate to other activities.

In the case of maximum income, should it be enforced by law or voluntarily adopted by firms? Ramsay notes that the maximum income proposal is powerful exactly because of its non-voluntary nature, and therefore it is the state who should legislate about it from the beginning (Ramsay 2005). Of Ramsay's opinion are also Pizzigati (2018) and Corbyn (Mason 2017), who suggested that firms which do not apply a 10:1 (for Pizzigati) or 20:1 (for Corbyn) maximum to minimum income ratio must not be granted commissions by the public sector. In this way, wage gaps will be reduced and it will be politically easier to establish a maximum income by law.

Also, wouldn't rich people move to other countries with their wealth if a maximum income is implemented? Although 6% of 'key informants' believed that this would be the case, research on the effects of top marginal rates on migration emphasised that 'only a tiny minority' (Pizzigati 2018, p. 83) of people changed their residence along with an increase in their tax burden. This because, Pizzigati argues, wealth is often coupled with status, social recognition,

privileges which are not easily transferable abroad. One respondent further emphasised that if a state ensures that public services are freely available and promote a clean and healthy environment, then rich people would be incentivised to remain in the country despite higher taxes. Nonetheless, Ramsay (2005) suggests that controls on capital movements should be implemented to ensure that no large portions of wealth are transferred abroad.

The last controversy unfolds around the role of the state and questions whether it should be trusted in implementing a basic/maximum income policy. As such a policy would significantly change the current economic system and encourage people to take decisions that drastically change their lives (e.g. leaving a job and investing in a new business, or dedicating full-time to unpaid care work or volunteering), a basic/maximum income cannot be implemented as a temporary measure; it needs time to manifest its beneficial effects on ecological, social and economic sustainability. This requires a high level of agreement among political parties to ensure that the democratic alternance does not compromise the stability of the policy – or at least that another cross-party consensus is needed to change it. Indeed, building such a broad support for a basic/maximum income policy is difficult in the initial stage, as well as it is difficult that political parties do not change opinion over time. One 'key informant' also noted that a basic/maximum income policy would transfer huge financial resources from private to public hands and that, in the past, this concentration of wealth at the state level often led to the rise of authoritarianisms. Therefore, the state 'apparatus' (i.e. government, parliament, political parties, local bodies and their administrative branches) might fail in ensuring the stability of the policy in the long term.

These controversies show that the effects of a basic/maximum income are not entirely predictable, and that the policy should be carefully designed to promote social, ecological and economic sustainability through the mechanisms presented earlier in this chapter. Whatever government or parliament is willing to seriously engage with a basic/maximum income proposal, it should consider that the effectiveness of the policy largely depends on addressing these controversial matters of debate.

7. Conclusion

The 21st century globalised society faces massive social and ecological challenges. Data referring to several countries worldwide show that, after a reduction between 1945 and the end of the 1970's, inequalities have steadily increased since the 1980's, revealing that states have failed in redistributing the benefits generated by increased resource use and technological advancements Meanwhile, attempts to reduce human impacts on ecosystems, formalised in international pleas and agreements (e.g. Paris Agreement, Convention on Biological Diversity) since the Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, has not managed to stop land and water pollution, GHG emissions and biodiversity loss (Gómez-Baggethun & Naredo 2015).

However, the current situation does not come unexpected as, since the end of World War II, countries have made the endless pursuit of economic growth their primary goal. And research showed that an increase in GDP per capita increases well-being only when people's needs can be met by increasing material consumption (Easterlin et al. 2010; Layard 2005). Once material needs such as food, housing or health are met, additional income is largely spent to conduct resource-intensive lifestyles which would never be sustainable if adopted by the entire world population (Jackson 2016). GDP is a flawed indicator because it accounts only for the quantity of goods and services exchanged in the economy, without telling anything about the costs and benefits caused by production, consumption, trade and waste disposal (Fitoussi & Stiglitz 2012). Also, economic growth is positively coupled with GHG emissions and resource use (Burke et al. 2015; Steinberger et al. 2013), and most of the income generated since the 1980's has accrued to the richest at the expenses of the rest of the population (Alvaredo et al. 2018). Thus, the infinite pursuit of economic growth has so far proven neither socially, nor ecologically sustainable.

To move beyond a growth-addicted society, scholars in the post-growth field of studies have devised several policies, amongst which are implementing a Universal Basic Income (UBI) and a maximum income. UBI is a payment periodically provided in cash to all on an individual basis, without requiring to fulfil any conditions or to perform any work, set high enough to cover one's basic needs. A maximum income is a cap on the amount of income that each individual can earn on a monthly or annual basis; it includes wages, and rents from physical and financial assets. The lists of arguments in favour of UBI and of maximum income

show that they are proposed for similar reasons and therefore they may be considered as a combined policy.

According to their supporters, UBI and maximum income would promote social and ecological sustainability in similar ways. They would both fix market failures, promote social justice, reduce inequalities, emissions and resource use, cause money to be allocated more efficiently, improve the quality and fairness of democratic processes. In addition, a maximum income would provide the resources to finance a UBI. Whether or not the revenues generated from a maximum income could sustain UBI depends on several factors which vary among countries, such as the income necessary to pay for basic necessities, the ratio between poor and rich people, the income annually made by the richest, and the level at which the maximum income is set. If the policy is designed appropriately, scholars in the degrowth community advocate that it could ease the transition towards a more sustainable economic system, freed from the need to constantly grow (Alexander 2014; Videira et al. 2014).

Nonetheless, it is not obvious that a combined basic/maximum income policy is compatible with degrowth goals for at least two reasons. First, some supporters of UBI and maximum income emphasise that such policies would boost economic growth by reducing inequalities, reviving consumers' demand and increasing productivity (Bonciu 2018; Davala et al. 2015). Although chapter 6 indicated good reasons to believe that a combined basic/maximum income policy would not increase GDP, the opposite may also be true since there is no empirical evidence to prove it wrong; and a scenario with ever-increasing economic growth is unlikely to be sustainable. Second, while the degrowth movement advocates for participatory and democratic processes to design innovative and sustainable practices (D'Alisa et al. 2014), a basic/maximum income policy has so far been proposed with a top-down approach. It has not been autonomously developed by communities, rather largely discussed in the academic context and then translated into a policy proposal. The fact the a basic/maximum income proposal did not result from bottom-up initiatives is further exemplified by the two policies being rejected by public votes in the only consultations conducted – the two referenda held in Switzerland – and the opposition expressed by the majority of respondents interviewed for this research. Therefore, to truly ease the transition towards a post-growth society, a basic/maximum income policy should possess three specific features.

First, a basic/maximum income policy should be initially implemented in countries of the Global North. As emphasised by several respondents, it is unlikely that any country in the

Global South would adopt such policy in the first place, because it would lose competitiveness in the globalised market with consequences to be paid by its already vulnerable workers. Also, if governments in the Global South devalued their currencies to combat the initial reduction in investments and the rise of unemployment caused by a basic/maximum income policy, it would probably result in a loss of purchasing power of foreign commodities. Unless these countries are self-sufficient in terms of energy and basic goods production, their citizens could find it harder to cover their essential needs even with a guaranteed income. To avoid this scenario, the free-market structure underpinning the current neoliberal regime should be abandoned or strictly regulated. And this can occur only if countries with the largest economic and political power in the international arena – i.e. those considered the Global North – agree that market rules should be changed. If a basic/maximum income policy is first implemented in the Global North, it will be easier for countries in the Global South to follow and do the same.

Indeed, some scholars have raised the issue of a UBI being implemented beyond national borders (Andersson 2012; Blaschke 2012; Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). Their rationale draws on the fact that globalisation has allowed natural resources to be shipped and consumed far away from where they are extracted, and therefore users (mostly countries of the Global North) owe to the providers (mostly countries of the Global South) their fair share of the wealth generated (Van Parijs & Vanderborght 2017). Also, skilled workers tend to migrate from the Global South to the Global North, further enriching the human capital of the latter at the expenses of the former (Docquier et al. 2007). A global UBI would directly reach and benefit people in the Global South while replacing international aid, too often captured by elites or spent for large-scale projects which do not necessarily improve living conditions of the local population (Ortiz 2016). Nonetheless, a UBI at the global level is probably even less politically feasible than at the state level.

Second, the adoption of a basic/maximum income policy in countries of the Global North should be democratically supported. If at least the majority of citizens of a country favours it, then the policy would most likely express its full redistributive and egalitarian potential. Since a radical policy such as a basic/maximum income needs time to achieve its objectives, it should be supported by people in the same way as the free provision of basic public services in several countries. For example, in continental Europe the fact that healthcare is freely provided by states is not questioned because it constitutes a welfare pillar; it is very unlikely that any political party would attempt to dismantle such system without generating massive protests from the population. The same should happen with a basic/maximum income

policy. The citizens of a state should agree on that such policy should be a pillar of a post-growth society. Otherwise, it will be perceived as unfair and inefficient, and it would probably be quickly abandoned.

Third, a fair ratio should be established between basic and maximum income. Drawing on the work of Pizzigati (2018), I support the proposal of a maximum income set ten times higher than the UBI. Such ratio is more radical than the average of those mentioned by respondents (i.e. 1:18), but I believe it is needed to rapidly prompt not only income, but also wealth redistribution through the 'cascade effect' on prices (Pizzigati 2018). At whatever level it is established, the long-term ratio between UBI and maximum income should be adjusted over time to ensure a level of inequality that is tolerated by both net beneficiaries and net payers. In addition, as suggested by Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017), within countries UBI should be homogenously defined taking as a reference figure the amount of money necessary to pay for basic needs in the richest areas of a state. In this way, UBI would work as a redistributive tool that benefits the 'peripheries' at the expenses of the 'centre'. Nonetheless, to move towards a sustainable post-growth society, a basic/maximum income policy should be coupled with other instruments.

One of these instruments should include measures to avoid immediate shocks, such as restrictions on capital flow and democratic control of money supply. As a basic/maximum income policy could incentivise rich people to transfer their wealth or their fiscal residence to countries with more favourable tax rates (Thompson 2012), restrictions on capital flows will therefore be needed. At the same time, in the short-term a basic/maximum income policy could also reduce the aggregate level of investments and the production of essential commodities. In this circumstance, states should make sure that basic goods remain available for their entire population. However, EU members and many countries who have signed loans with international financial organisations operate under constrained budgets which impose limitations on their capacity to increase public spending, even if this is necessary to address citizens' essential needs. Thus, states should be permitted to independently devise their monetary policy. In the degrowth scholarship, calls are made to restore state sovereignty over money supply, currently delegated to private banks, so that democratically elected bodies can rise funds free of interests and direct them to those sectors promoting collective goods rather than private interests (Mellor 2014).

Secondly, a basic/maximum income policy is unlikely to be effective unless implemented in a peaceful and collaborative international arena. As emphasised by two respondents, because of unstable geopolitical situations countries like India spend huge funds to finance the military and defence sector. Instead, these funds could be redirected to partially finance a UBI, if the revenues from maximum income were not sufficient, or to address the short-term shocks caused by a basic/maximum income policy mentioned in the previous paragraph. In this way, people would also be less attracted to enrol in the army only to get a stable and reliable income. In addition, a collaborative international arena is needed to ensure that UBI does not work as a 'pull factor' for potential migrants. Through this statement, I am not calling for restricting migrations, rather for countries of the Global North to devolve part of the wealth accumulated to those of the Global South, from which most of this wealth was extracted in the form of natural resources. These transfers should not be conditional, but allow countries of the Global South to independently devise policies to increase the quality of life of their citizens, now often forced to migrate because of poverty and conflicts.

Finally, a basic/maximum income policy should be accompanied by measures promoting a massive cultural shift to move away from the current unsustainable consumerist society. To avoid UBI being spent on superfluous commodities and maximum income being perceived as unjust, it is needed a profound change in what people believe it contributes to happiness and in how people measure each other. Nowadays, a higher income is commonly considered the key to happiness because it allows for more consumption. In the same way, people vastly measure each other on the base of their incomes, admiring the richest, rather than celebrating values such as honesty, generosity or spirit of service. Thus, a basic/maximum income policy would strongly clash with such assumptions. To break the vicious cycle of consumerism, degrowth scholars propose to strongly regulate advertising, banning it from public places like it was done in Grenoble (France) (McKinley 2017). This may be a first step, a visible strategy, but the change needed is much more subtle and difficult to achieve. 21st century growth-addicted society is built on the presumption that along with increased consumption comes increased happiness, even though this has been disproved (Easterlin et al. 2010). The cultural shift needed to move towards a more sustainable social and economic system implies formulating new narratives of the 'good life'.

The here proposed policy, with annexed instruments, attempts to address the weaknesses of UBI and maximum income detected in the literature and mentioned by respondents, and to inform future research and policymaking. Although seemingly far from

being soon implemented in any country and still belonging to a utopian society, a basic/maximum income policy should not be labelled as unfeasible and thus abandoned, since the current dramatic socio-ecological crisis could make its adoption more urgent or inevitable in the medium-term.

8. References

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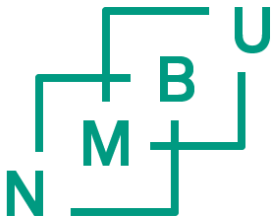
9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix I: Semi-structured interview guide for 'key informants'



Norwegian University
of Life Sciences

Are you interested in taking part to the research project *"Combining Minimum and Maximum Income to Promote Social and Environmental Sustainability"*

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Pietro Cigna and I am a master student in International Environmental Studies at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). Under the supervision of Prof. Erik Gómez-Baggethun, I am currently working on my final thesis which investigates challenges and opportunities on the way to combine the implementation of two policy proposals: a basic income, and a maximum income. A basic income is defined as an unconditional periodical cash payment provided to each and every citizen of a country, set high enough to cover one's basic needs (food, water, shelter). A maximum income is a cap on the amount of wealth each individual can earn. Some scholars believe that combining a basic and a maximum income, amid other measures, could ease the transition towards a more just and sustainable society, both from a social and an ecological perspective.

This is an inquiry about participation in this research project. In this letter we will give you information about what your participation will involve. Data collected will be used to write my master's thesis and a scientific article to be possibly published on a peer-reviewed journal.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The Norwegian University of Life Science (NMBU) is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

Because you fit at least one of the two categories of people I have planned to interview, namely those i) who would mostly be affected by a basic/maximum income policy, and ii) who have the power to promote or hinder the implementation of a basic/maximum income policy.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, I will ask you some questions regarding your opinions on the topic. Unless you disagree, the interview will be recorded for research purpose.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Your data will be available only to me and to my supervisor. I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.

Your name or personal information will be kept anonymous and will not be published in the final document, unless you agree for it to be included.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on June 30th, 2019. At this time, your data will be anonymised, meaning that it will be no longer possible to trace your opinions back to your personal information.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU), NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU), by email: (post@nmbu.no) or by telephone +47 67 23 00 00

via

Pietro Cigna – pietro.cigna@nmbu.no – student

Prof. Erik Gómez-Baggethun – erik.gomez@nmbu.no - supervisor

- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

The results of the research will be available approximately in June 2019. Through the contact you will provide in the following page, you will receive either the full thesis, a shortened version as a scientific article, or a brief summary of the results in a brochure.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader
(Researcher/supervisor)

Student

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *Combining Minimum and Maximum Income to Promote Social and Environmental Sustainability* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- ☐ to participate in an interview
- ☐ for information about me/myself to be published in a way that I can be recognised, i.e. indicating my name or profession and the place where I exert it

I would like to receive the results of the research published in the following format:

- ☐ Full thesis
- ☐ Scientific article
- ☐ Brochure

at the following e-mail address/postal address:

_____

_____

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. June 30th, 2019

(Signed by participant, date)

Let me first introduce you to the two policies I am interested to: a universal basic income, and a maximum income.

Have you ever heard of them?

A basic income is defined as an unconditional cash payment provided to everyone living in a country, set high enough to cover one's basic needs (food, water, shelter). Unconditional means that is provided without asking to work in exchange. Usually, the cash transfer is made by the state every month.

At the beginning of 2018, the Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India expressed hope that by 2020 at least two Indian states would implement a universal basic income (UBI).

A maximum income is a cap on the amount of wealth everyone can earn. In other words, it means that nobody can earn more than the amount defined by the state. All the money people earn over the maximum will be taken by the state through taxes. For example, if the state decides that the maximum is 1 lakh per month, then people who earn 5 lakhs per month will have to give 4 lakhs as taxes.

Some scholars believe that a universal basic income and a maximum income can be combined. In this way, the state will use the money taken through taxes from the richest part of the population to make monthly cash transfers to everybody. Nobody will be able to earn more than the maximum income, and nobody will be able to earn less than the basic income. In the end, the poor will be a little bit richer and the rich will be a little bit poorer.

This policy could create more equality, as it would reduce the gap between poor and rich. Also, it could reduce excessive resource consumption. In fact, people who earn more, also consume more resources.

I am interested in what you think about this proposal.

Do you have any questions regarding basic and maximum income before we proceed with the interview?

BASIC INCOME

1. How much Rs per individual do you think people need on average to have a decent house and buy food per month in Kerala?

□ 3,000 Rs per adult	□ 1,500 Rs per child
□ 4,000 Rs per adult	□ 2,000 Rs per child
□ 5,000 Rs per adult	□ 2,500 Rs per child
□ 6,000 Rs per adult	□ 3,000 Rs per child
□ 7,000 Rs per adult	□ 3,500 Rs per child
□ 8,000 Rs per adult	□ 4,000 Rs per child
□ Other. Please indicate: _____	□ Other. Please indicate: _____

2. Do you think that giving this amount of money every month to everybody would be a good way to alleviate poverty and empower people?
   - □ Yes, because…
   - □ No, because…

3. Who do you think should be provided with this basic income?
   - □ Everybody
   - □ Only the poorest
   - □ Only those with citizenship
   - □ Other. Please indicate: _____

4. If everybody was given [*answer from Q1*] Rs every month…
   - How do you think they will spend this money?
   - Do you think they would stop working?
   - Would they work less?

     If so, what would they do in the additional free time they have?
   - Would people change their current job?
     - □ Yes, because…
     - □ No, because…

5. Where do you think the central/regional government should get the money from for implementing a basic income?

    - □ Taxing the rich
    - □ Cutting on other existing social security programs
    - □ Cutting military expenses
    - □ Increasing money supply
    - □ Other. Please indicate: _____

MAXIMUM INCOME

As I said before, the other proposal is that the state decides a maximum that people can earn every month. Nobody will be able to earn more money than the maximum per month.

6. Do you think it is fair to limit how much money people can earn per month?

    - □ Yes, because…
    - □ No, because…

7. Do you think establishing a maximum income would reduce inequalities?

    - □ Yes, because…
    - □ No, because…

8. Do you think establishing a maximum income would be good also for the environment?

    - □ Yes, because…
    - □ No, because…

9. In your opinion, what is the maximum people should be allowed to earn <u>per month</u>?

    - □ 20,000 Rs
    - □ 50,000 Rs
    - □ 80,000 Rs
    - □ 1 lakh Rs
    - □ 1.5 lakh Rs
    - □ 2 lakhs Rs
    - □ 2.5 lakhs Rs
    - □ Other. Please indicate: _____
    - □ I don't know

COMBINED BASIC and MAXIMUM INCOME

10. Would you support a policy which allows the state to take money from those earning more than [*maximum income stated in Q10*] Rs per month and use that money to give [*basic income stated in Q1*] Rs per month to everybody?

    - □ Yes, because…
    - □ No, because…
    - □ Only under certain conditions, namely that…

11. What do you think are the barriers to implement a basic/maximum income policy?

    - □ Poor people would oppose it
    - □ Rich/powerful people would oppose it
    - □ Lack of political will
    - □ There are technical difficulties to implement it, for example:
        - □ Tax evasion
        - □ Controls on cash transfers
    - □ Other. Please indicate: _____

12. What do you think is encouraging a basic/maximum income policy?

    - □ Need to address social inequality
    - □ Need to address poverty
    - □ Need to address environmental degradation
    - □ Lack of decent jobs for everyone
    - □ Current global debates on the topic
    - □ Current national debates on the topic
    - □ Other. Please indicate: _____

<u>We have now come through all the questions we prepared. Before concluding the interview,</u>

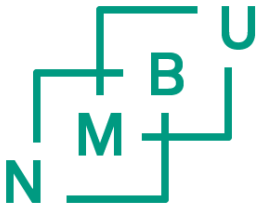
- □ Would you like to make any comment/observation/recommendation which you feel you could not express in the previous questions?
- □ Do you know other people who would be able to give useful insights for the purpose of this research? Do you mind if I tell her/him that you gave me the contact?

The interview is now concluded. We would like to thank you for the time you spent answering our questions. We really appreciated it.

Details of the interviewee

NAME	
GENDER	
AGE	
LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED ☐ Not finished primary school ☐ Primary school ☐ Secondary school	☐ High school ☐ Bachelor's degree ☐ Master's degree ☐ PhD
STATE OF ORIGIN IN INDIA	
STATE OF CURRENT RESIDENCY IN INDIA	
CASTE BELONGING (optional)	
PROFESSION:	
EMPLOYER:	
INCOME RANGE PER MONTH ☐ 0 – 10,000 Rs ☐ 10,000 – 20,000 Rs ☐ 20,000 – 40,000 Rs	☐ 40,000 – 60,000 Rs ☐ 60,000 – 80,000 Rs ☐ 80,000 – 1 lakh Rs ☐ Over 1 lakh Rs
PLEASE, DO NOT FILL IN THE FORM BELOW THIS LINE	
POWER TO INFLUENCE DECISION (P) **MOST AFFECTED BY THE POLICIES (M)** **INDEPENDENT OPINION (I)**	
CODE	

9.2 Appendix II: Structured interview guide for 'regular informants'



Norwegian University
of Life Sciences

Are you interested in taking part to the research project *"Combining Minimum and Maximum Income to Promote Social and Environmental Sustainability"?*

Who is responsible for the research project?

The Norwegian University of Life Science (NMBU) is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

Because you fit at least one of the two categories of people I have planned to interview, namely those i) who would mostly be affected by a basic/maximum income policy, and ii) who have the power to promote or hinder the implementation of a basic/maximum income policy.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, I will ask you some questions regarding your opinions on the topic. Unless you disagree, the interview will be recorded for research purpose.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

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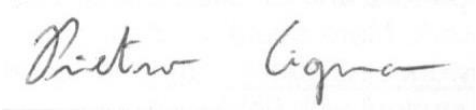
The results of the research will be available approximately in June 2019. Through the contact you will provide in the following page, you will receive either the full thesis, a shortened version as a scientific article, or a brief summary of the results in a brochure.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader
(Researcher/supervisor)

Student



Consent form

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(Signed by participant, date)

BASIC INCOME

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□ 4,000 Rs per adult	□ 2,000 Rs per child
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□ 6,000 Rs per adult	□ 3,000 Rs per child
□ 7,000 Rs per adult	□ 3,500 Rs per child
□ 8,000 Rs per adult	□ 4,000 Rs per child
□ Other. Please indicate: _____	□ Other. Please indicate: _____

2. Do you think it is good to give money for free to people every month?
    - □ Yes, because…
    - □ No, because…
3. Who do you think should get money for free every month?
    - □ Everybody living in Kerala
    - □ Only the poorest
    - □ Only those with citizenship
    - □ Other. Please indicate: _____
4. If you were given […] Rs every month…
    - Do you think you would stop working?
    - Would you work less?
5. If everybody was given […] Rs every month…
    - How do you think they will spend this money?
    - Do you think they would stop working?
    - Would they work less?

The interview is now concluded. We would like to thank you for the time you spent answering our questions. We really appreciated it.

Details of the interviewee

NAME	
GENDER	
AGE	
LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED ☐ Not finished primary school ☐ Primary school ☐ Secondary school	☐ High school ☐ Bachelor's degree ☐ Master's degree ☐ PhD
STATE OF ORIGIN IN INDIA	
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CODE	

Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Noregs miljø- og biovitskapelege universitet
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

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Norway