



WHERE THEOLOGY MEETS POLICY

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME AND HUMAN RIGHTS





Founded 1955 by a group of white women

Campaigned against the Pass Laws

Highlighted injustices – the Group Areas Act, detention without trial, deaths in detention...

Campaigned for an end to apartheid.

President Nelson Mandela famously called the Black Sash "*the conscience of white South Africa*," acknowledging their moral courage and vital role as one of the few white groups actively opposing apartheid and upholding liberty during the struggle,..

INTRODUCTION TO BASIC INCOME IN SA

- With the dawn of SA's democracy a key issue for consideration was dealing with the remnants of apartheid: a collapsed economy and social dysfunction with the triple challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment
- The conversation started in 1998 during a Job Summit to discuss ways to create jobs in the country. Parties to the Jobs Summit committed themselves to implementing a comprehensive social security system, aimed especially at those living in poverty and the unemployed. They also indicated that a basic income grant may be considered as part of such a system.

THE TAYLOR COMMITTEE

The Taylor Committee was established by the Minister of Social Development in 1999 to investigate and recommend a comprehensive social security system to address poverty which led to an Inquiry (1999 to 2001) on Comprehensive Social Security for SA investigated the feasibility of universal basic income to enable social well being through socio-economic support

The Taylor Committee Report (2002) made landmark recommendations for South Africa's social security reform. Key findings include:

- ❖ A Universal Basic Income (UBI) of R100/month for every South African resident as part of a comprehensive social protection package**
- ❖ Closing the social protection gap for those aged 18–59 who fall outside existing grant categories**
- ❖ The major policy recommendation of the Committee was the phasing-in of a basic income grant since it "has the potential, more than any other possible social protection intervention, to reduce poverty and promote human development and sustainable livelihoods."**

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME IN A NEW DEMOCRACY

The organization's advocacy for a UBI was primarily motivated by:

- ❖ Addressing widespread poverty and inequality that persisted after apartheid ended**
- ❖ Responding to South Africa's high unemployment rates**
- ❖ Recognizing the limitations of existing social grants which left many vulnerable groups without support**
- ❖ Supporting the constitutional right to social security**
- ❖ Advocating for Universal Basic Income as a tool to uphold human dignity and reduce systemic inequality rooted in apartheid**

BLACK SASH STRATEGY

- ❖ The Black Sash's strategy for advocating for a UBI included:
- ❖ Joining and playing an active role in **the Universal Basic Income Grant Coalition** of civil society organizations pushing for the implementation of a UBI- we were a founding member together with the SACC and COSATU
- ❖ Conducting research and publishing position papers demonstrating the feasibility and necessity of a UBI
- ❖ Engaging in public education campaigns to build grassroots support
- ❖ Lobbying government officials and policymakers
- ❖ Using their network of advice offices to document the hardships faced by those without access to social assistance
- ❖ Advocating for a universal approach rather than means-tested grants to reduce administrative barriers
- ❖ Proposing that the grant be set at approximately R100 per month (in early 2000s values) for all resident in South Africa



*Bishop Malusi
Mpumlwana*

NO IMPLEMENTATION 😞

- ❖ **Despite extensive advocacy efforts, the South African government did not implement a universal basic income at that time,**
- ❖ **Despite the 2002 recommendation by the Taylor Committee and support from civil society, the South African government resisted implementation**

Lessons:

- ❖ **Lack of political will within the ruling party;**
- ❖ **Parliament did not support a UBI, questions around inequality, poverty and financial sustainability**
- ❖ **The power of Minister of Finance**
- ❖ **Lack of coordination and tension between National Treasury and Department of Social Development – who leads social security;**
- ❖ **Lack of sustained grassroots mobilization**
- ❖ **No legal challenge to the right to particularly social assistance for those aged 18 to 59.**



UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME IS A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT!

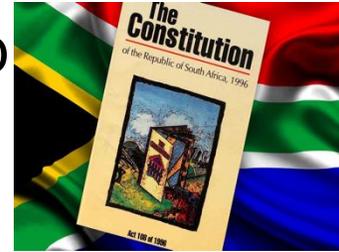
❖ Government has an obligation to comply with the Constitution to provide social security and social assistance

❖ Section 27 says:

everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water, as well as the right to have access to social security, which, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, which **includes appropriate social assistance**.

❖ Social security means programmes run by the state to assist people with inadequate or no income.

❖ social assistance means payments (based on need) made to beneficiaries for their food, clothing, and shelter needs.



INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS - ICESCR

- ❖ Our government has ratified the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which places an obligation on the government to comply with recommendations made by the Committee.
- ❖ As recommended by the UN Committee in 2018, the government must ensure that those between the ages of 18 and 59 years with little or no income and are capable of working, have access to social assistance;
- ❖ It also recommended that the government consider universal basic income.



WHY UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME?

- Social grant programmes provide financial relief to certain vulnerable groups but there is no social income support for people between the ages of 18 and 59 years , who have no to little income
- UBI provides the means to look for work, making them less vulnerable to accepting work that is exploitative.
- UBI ensures that people are able to be part of economic activity such as job seeking, informal trading and becoming entrepreneurial
- Reduces household poverty
- UBI allows for improved access to education as well as improved health by allowing the most vulnerable being able to afford nutritional food

WHY UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME?

- ❖ In a country that is plagued the shadow pandemic of **gender-based violence** – women will have agency with some financial independence to choose what work they do and give them a choice to leave abusive relationships
- ❖ UBI will provide give people with a greater **sense of agency** and control over their life
- ❖ UBI will encourage **savings** rather than debt by getting loans
- ❖ Reduction in **crime, alcohol and drug abuse** which is symptomatic of poverty

THE CATALYST OF COVID-19

- ❖ The COVID-19 pandemic led to a global economic and humanitarian crisis.
- ❖ It forced government to acknowledge the gap with the social assistance framework which does not provide for the unemployed between 18 and 59 years
- ❖ A key intervention was the introduction of the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant of R350 for 6 months for the unemployed until October 2020.
- ❖ Since 2020 the SRD Grant has been extended on an ad hoc basis with one increase of R20 where the grant is now R370
- ❖ We strongly believe that the coordinated efforts of civil society has led to these extensions

WHY URGENCY IN SOUTH AFRICA

- ❖ People cannot afford to live without an income
- ❖ There is no work opportunities to generate an income

How are people meant to survive????

There needs to be an intervention by the State

THE SOUTH AFRICAN REALITY

- ❖ Over 32% of South Africans are unemployed (expanded definition exceeds 42%) – one of the highest rates in the world
- ❖ 55.5% of South Africans live below the poverty line (Statistics South Africa)
- ❖ 18 million people receive permanent social grants – but those aged 18-59 are excluded

Universal Basic Income would close this critical gap and provide dignity for all.

CAN GOVERNMENT PAY FOR UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME SUPPORT?

- ❖ Shift the mindset of government to unlock the political will of government so that National Treasury can prioritize financial resources to progressively realise the right to social security with the introduction of Universal basic Income
- ❖ **THE QUESTION IS NOT; CAN WE AFFORD IT?**
- ❖ **THE QUESTION IS, CAN WE AFFORD NOT TO?**
- ❖ UBI is essential to be budgeted for so that people can survive this economic crisis given the limited prospects for the employment in the foreseeable future, especially because COVID-19 has disrupted employment and the economy
- ❖ **The UBI is an affordable option for South Africa (there are feasible financing options for it.**

BUDGET SPEECH 2026

Social grants for 2026/27

Social grants are allocated R292.8 billion, enabling the following increases:

- The old age grant, disability grant and care dependency grant rise by R80 in April 2026, to R2 400.
- The war veterans grant also increases by R80 to R2 420
- The foster care grant goes up to R1 290 in April, a R40 increase and to R1 300 in October, a R10 increase
- The child support grant and grant-in-aid grant increase by R20 to R580.

❖ THE SOCIAL RELIEF OF DISTRESS CONTINUES IN ITS CURRENT FORM OVER THE YEAR AHEAD.

❖ UBIC VISION FOR UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME IN SOUTH AFRICA

❖ Our vision is for universal basic income for those aged from 18 to 59 years immediately, as we work towards comprehensive social protection for everyone. The UBIC does not want to replace existing social grants but instead we want existing grants to improve and the introduction of a basic income!





UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME COALITION

Who we are?



PARTNERSHIP: CIVIL SOCIETY, CHURCHES AND FBO'S **policy expertise and organisational capacity of civil society with the moral voice, community trust, and grassroots reach of churches and FBO's**

- ❖ **Both civil society broadly and Christian organisations have a shared foundation of a commitment to human dignity, poverty reduction, and social justice.**
- ❖ **Calling for UBI is a way for churches and faith based organisations to express their theology**
- ❖ **It is critical to shift the needle by pairing the technical and policy arguments with the moral voice of faith based communities**
- ❖ **Churches and Faith based organisations have credibility in communities-they often have deep roots in poor and rural communities. Working together means UBI advocacy can reach the people who would benefit most, and those voices can be brought into the conversation.**
- ❖ **When respected religious institutions advocate alongside civil society, it normalises the conversation and shifts UBI into the mainstream policy debate and can be politically persuasive**
- ❖ **With the support of Churches, we can broaden the holistic argument to ask for financial security allows people to flourish, pursue meaningful relationships, care for families, and contribute to community – which aligns with a vision of human wellbeing**

THANK YOU

