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## Centre for Development Studies Report

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January 2024

# How to Set Up, Manage, and Study a UBI+ Experiment The Case of the 'WorkFREE' Project in Hyderabad, India

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Causal Map Ltd

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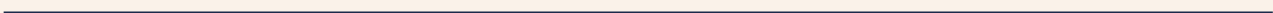
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# How to Set Up, Manage, and Study a UBI+ Experiment

The Case of the 'WorkFREE'  
Project in Hyderabad, India



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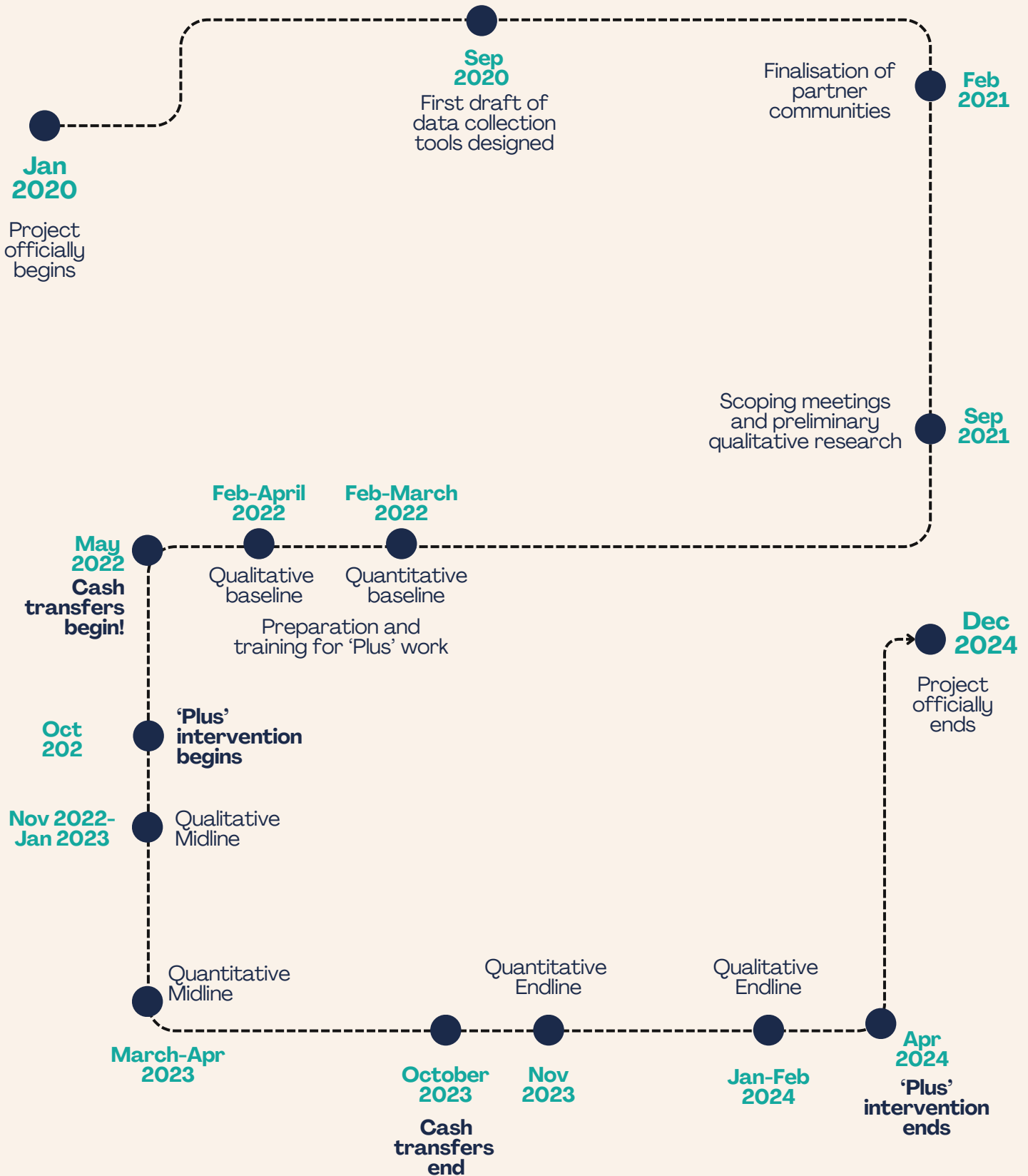
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# Timeline and Key Milestones



# Introduction

WorkFREE is a collaborative research project led by the University of Bath, UK in partnership with the Montfort Social Institute (MSI) and the India Network for Basic Income (INBI). It is funded by the European Research Council (ERC). The project brings together civil society institutions, academics, and activists from India and the UK to pilot and study a unique intervention that we call 'UBI+' in four slum communities ('bastis') in Hyderabad, India. The pilot combines universal basic income (UBI) and needs-focused, participatory community organising to support people to increase their power to meet their needs. All residents in the said bastis, (approximately 1250 people across 350 households) receive monthly unconditional cash transfers for 18 months. In addition, the community organising support wraps around the cash over a period of 24 months. The project studies the impact on peoples' lives – including their relationships, their work, and their wellbeing – and seeks to assess the prospects of UBI+ as a future social policy. WorkFREE is the first major UBI experiment to take place in urban India, and one of the first in the world to work with entire communities as opposed to selected individuals within those communities. Full project information can be found on the project's website [here](#). The rest of this 'Process Document' will outline the complex, challenging, nitty-gritty practicalities involved in project design, implementation, and management, with a view to supporting future would-be pilots embarking on similar journeys. We structure the report around three broad temporal phases.

## Phase 1: Project Design & Preparation

### Key Process Steps

#### 1.1. Selecting the location of the study

WorkFREE aims to extend pioneering previous UBI research in India to an urban setting, aware that poor, informal economy workers make up a vast proportion of the Indian population and yet remain largely underserved by social protection schemes. We chose Hyderabad both because it is one of the country's major urban centres and because it is home to a combination of India's leading UBI researchers and respected grassroots organisations perfectly placed to accompany an ethically, politically, and administratively complex project such as this. Trust, reliability, and on-the-ground capacity are vital for pilot success. It is recommended that future pilots leave a significant period of time for the set up and relationship building phase of a pilot before the cash rollout.



## 1.2. Selecting the target group of the study

The funding for WorkFREE was initially secured to explore the impact that UBI and community organising might have on urban labour relations, labour freedom, and what the International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines as '(in)decent work'<sup>[1]</sup>. This was in recognition of the problems plaguing mainstream approaches to advancing 'decent work' and the dire need for policy alternatives. Necessarily, however, the experiment provides the opportunity – which we have gladly seized – to study various other impacts, including on social relations, gender, sustainability, and human needs.

To select an appropriate community within which to explore these various thematics, we began to think through occupations conventionally considered 'indecent' by authorities such as the ILO, such as sex work, work done by the transgender community (mostly sex work and begging), sewage and sanitation work, and waste work. After consultation with national and international experts, we decided that the ethical and legal implications of conducting the study with sex workers may be too great for the project to navigate within the timeframe available. We were concerned that the particularities of transgender work might leave any findings open to accusations of non-representativity. Thus, we decided to concentrate on waste collection – a classic example of difficult, at times dangerous, and unambiguously 'dirty' work that is rarely ever recognised by state or society for the fundamental social function it fulfils. Our decision was further supported by the fact that waste collecting workers tend to be concentrated within tight-knit residential communities, which, as we will go on to explain below, is helpful for the simulation of community-wide universality.

## 1.3. Identifying the study population within the site

Having zeroed in on garbage collectors as the target occupational group for the study, our next step was to identify actual potential participant communities. MSI has decades of experience, a well-established reputation, and significant relationships of trust with slum dwellers across Hyderabad though its humanitarian work and advocacy around housing and labour rights. MSI also has existing relationships with waste picking communities. So, in collaboration with INBI, MSI began mapping possible participant bastis containing a preponderance of waste collectors.

Four criteria were essential to potential selection. First, the communities should be socially and geographically distinct from neighbouring communities, i.e. having clear boundaries. This was to enable the intervention to simulate, however falteringly, universality. Second, the communities, and the population therein, should be relatively stable over a period of 18 months, so as to facilitate longitudinal study.

Third, the communities should have a prior relationship with MSI or another humanitarian organisation to support participant safety and ensure ongoing support during and after the intervention period. We judged this vital from a participant safeguarding and research ethics perspective. For similar reasons, fourth, the communities should be relatively free from too much external political interference.

We conducted two months of scoping research, during which time we identified 10 possible sites across Hyderabad that came close to fulfilling all these criteria. These were finally whittled down to the four that became WorkFREE's intervention sites. Of those four, MSI had had an existing relationship with three for the past six years through its interventions around housing rights and relief work. The fourth basti was a new community wherein MSI had just begun work and in which it sought to expand its efforts. These began with several interactive sessions with community leaders as well as community members in order to develop relationships and earn trust.

Various criteria were used to triage the shortlist:

- Lack of preponderance of residents engaged in waste picking as their primary occupation.
- Anticipated opposition, interference or conflict in administering the UBI from a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) or powerful local political parties with opposing ideologies.
- Transient or highly migratory population.
- Too few community members engaged in waste collection.
- Community either too large or too small.

## 1.4. Participant Identification

After finalising our decision on potential participant communities and alongside gaining informed consent from all (see below), the project needed to conduct a census of community residents. To enable this, MSI worked with existing community leaders to divide the households in each community into groups of 30. Community members then chose leaders for each unit (1 male and 1 female). These leaders were briefed and prepared to help the MSI team set up for the project through boundary marking, enumerating and identifying households and families, and supporting the census. The participatory nature of this work built trust and accountability. Once the census list was prepared, it was vetted by community members.

As a next step, basic details of the household members along with their Aadhar card and bank account details were collected for all those who consented to be a part of the project. The rules for eligible participation included the below:

- Normal residence within the selected slums at the census point (with normal defined as 'the majority of the year'). This meant that guests, extended families in nearby communities and rural relatives were ineligible. In consultation with community members, anyone arriving post-census would not be eligible for receipt of UBI, so as to avoid a destabilising influx of new arrivals. We did however provide for inclusion in the event of marriage or births.
- Possession of a national identification (ID) document. Primarily this was the 'Aadhar' card but we also used ration cards or election cards.
- The opening of bank accounts using ID documents to enable automatic cash transfers. This was key as while most households had at least one bank account, it was integral for the 'individual' feature of a UBI that each adult had their own account. MSI extensively supported all who wished to open accounts to do so.

In addition to Aadhar card and bank account details of participants, a family photo was also taken from each household, to ascertain who lived within each household, and in the community. This was seen to be a useful method to cross-verify the numbers of individual members residing in each household, and authenticating and correcting the individuals who would be considered for receiving the cash transfer. For instance, if a household had shared details of 4 persons in their family, and 6 persons were there in the family photo, it was asked why these persons were not included in the family details. Similarly, if more member details were provided by any household, and fewer members appeared in the photo, this information was further cross-verified and members reduced as necessary. As this all constitutes personal data, MSI keeps it all locked securely in its offices and only uses it for project administration or audit.

## 1.5. Consent-seeking and trust-building

A social experiment is an enormously ethically complex endeavour and thus requires the highest possible standards of ethical oversight. WorkFREE went through ethical clearance with the funder, the lead University in the UK, and a partner University in India. The process of ethical clearance took over a year and involved rigorous risk mapping, the development of mitigation strategies, the establishment of unexpected findings and project termination protocols, as well as the constitution of an Independent Ethics Advisory Board chaired by an Independent Ethics Advisor. Subsequently, each individual researcher underwent the Ethics Approval process at the University of Bath. It is recommended that future pilots allow an extensive period for thorough ethical preparation. Full details of our ethics governance tools can be found and freely downloaded on the project website. These are Creative Commons licensed and we encourage fellow pilots to use and replicate them, preferably with acknowledgement.

In order to minimise the potential coercion attaching to the delivery of unconditional cash in a context of generalised poverty, we took great care to ensure that participants had the fullest possible chance to offer their free and informed consent. This meant ensuring that the need for money and does not preclude them from meaningfully saying no to participation in the research activities.

This meant dividing the consent sought, in procedure and optics, into two separate components: 1) participation in the project as a recipient of UBI; and 2) participation in research activities such as interviews, action research, and surveys. We further required each of our researchers to re-gain consent at the start of every research encounter, such as an interview or a survey. As such, the process of seeking informed consent for WorkFREE should be understood as building on and being embedded within existing relations of trust that were iteratively deepened at every stage.

Initial consent involved calling a community meeting with all basti leaders to orient them and through them prepare the ground. Participants were then brought to MSI for 'Information Days' in the previously established 30-household groups. The lack of any available public space in the slums and the risk of inciting undesired interference from neighbouring localities meant that this option was preferred to conducting the information days in community. Transport and food were provided. Further, participants visiting the MSI office build deeper institutional trust and accountability. On these information days, full details about the project were shared with participants and opportunities were provided for them to ask questions and clarify any doubts. Pre-prepared and translated information sheets were used to cover the description of the project, what participation entailed, potential risks and benefits, support and grievance redressal mechanisms. These sheets emphasised that participants were under no obligation to participate in either the UBI pilot or the research process. They were read aloud for all participants and handed out. Once people were satisfied that they were willing to participate, they signed or audio-recorded their consent. Given that there were two aspects to this consent, there were two separate forms/audio recordings. We found that the whole process helped establish the legitimacy of the project amongst community members who were initially reluctant to join. These meetings were also used as opportunities to tease through challenging implementational cases. For instance, in the case of a severely mentally disabled adult, the decision was taken to give the money to his mother, in consultation with the wider community.

This process as a whole took three months. In particular, it took longer with the community that was newer to MSI. In this case, MSI led proceedings in the way it leads on establishing relationships with any new community that it aims to serve. This starts with building presence and holding meetings with

different leaders and trusted intermediaries. This then rolls into more frequent group meetings and events towards slowly building relationships with the wider community. In a number of communities, they begin by implementing their children's parliaments program, which is a tested and lucrative path of trust building.

## 1.6. Deciding the amount for the cash transfers

Deciding the 'amount' for a UBI pilot is a multifaceted process. WorkFREE is a policy experiment aiming to test the impacts of a potential future social policy. As such, we decided that the cash amount should be low enough to be replicable by social policy actors but high enough to make a difference.

These principles broadly guide cash piloting around the globe and were echoed in expert interviews that we conducted with the cash transfer community in India and abroad. WorkFREE's Research Director, Dr. Sarath Davala, conducted estimates based on national and global poverty lines, on activist and policy proposals in India, and on estimates of basti household income. This also took into account levels, sources and reliability of household incomes, their avenues and nature of expenditure, their cost of living, the local interaction of the forces of state, market and community, existing benefits and welfare systems and the economic and social stress points in participants' day-to-day lives. Based on this, an amount of INR 1000/month/adult and INR 500/month/child was decided, with the child's amount given to the mother until age 18. This amount was calculated as a 25% top up to the World Bank poverty line consumption amount. For a family of two adults and 2 children this would roughly be a 20-25% increase to their monthly household income.

## 1.7. Risks, challenges, and limitations

The preparatory phase consisting of site identification, participant selection, relationship building, and informed consent gathering was long, arduous and challenging. It posed several risks and challenges at each level that the WorkFREE project has tried to address through regular and timely team meetings. <sup>[2]</sup> Some of the key challenges are summarised below:

- Informing the community members about the project through regular dialogues was critical as unconditional cash, by its very nature, came across as a strange concept causing doubt and suspicion. The unconditionality led people to ask the most obvious question as to 'Why would anyone distribute money for free?'. Community concerns in this regard had to be allayed and that took time. In order to overcome some of the suspicions related to free/unconditional cash transfer it was explained that this was also part of a research project interested in studying the impacts of this idea

Additionally, as discussed later, the research team stayed clear of the communities for the first few months after the rollout of the cash to further buttress that this money came with 'no strings attached' and participants could use it as they liked.

- The second challenge emerged when the census began. Understandably, participants were hesitant to share too many personal details, since many were scared that sharing these details would lead to their being defrauded. These fears were allayed by reassuring community members at length. Again, time and trust-building were essential.
- The third big challenge was around financial inclusion. Individual transfers (as opposed to one transfer for the entire household) are a key feature of UBI, and central to UBI's emancipatory potential. However, this process is far from easy. In our case, first, many people did not have bank accounts and/or interest in opening bank accounts, given the assumed hassles associated with having one. Second was people having bank accounts but having loans pending on those accounts. This meant that if the transfer were made to that account, the money would immediately be debited to pay off a loan instalment. Other people had bank accounts (from previous government schemes or civil society programmes) but these had become 'dormant'. Third, many participants had had undignifying and demeaning experiences while previously engaging with the banking system, and were unwilling to go through that process again. Finally, most bank accounts in India require people to keep a minimum balance of INR 10,000 – unfeasible for most of the poor. While the Prime Minister's 'Jan Dhan Yojna' scheme is meant to give each person access to a 'Zero-Balance' bank account, this policy has lost steam. Most bank managers (especially in privately owned banks) were unwilling to provide our participants with 'Zero-Balance' accounts. Accommodating all these challenges, for every single adult in the communities, meant collating all their bank details and then opening bank accounts for those who did not have functional or accessible bank accounts. WorkFREE took the decision to partner with the Indian Postal Payments Bank, following a system that INBI had first piloted during the Covid pandemic to provide emergency support to migrant workers. On the back of the success of that partnership, WorkFREE decided to take the same route for opening bank accounts in bulk and then transferring the money to each person. After high-level meetings and MoUs with the Postmaster General, this involved either people going to the nearest post office or for the postman to come to people's houses to fill in the application form and help them in opening and accessing bank accounts. Still this process entailed delays – obtaining documentation, ensuring that the postman would come, or that people would go to the office if not.

# Phase 2: Developing and Deploying Research Tools and Beginning to Deliver UBI

## Key Process Steps

### 2.1. Design and finalisation of the research tools

WorkFREE is a deeply collaborative endeavour aspiring to embody the values that it hopes to advance in the world. The project involves large numbers of researchers from different backgrounds, at different career stages, and with different research foci. Accordingly, we constructed our many research tools together. This involved multiple rounds of meetings to establish priorities, preferences and shared strategies. Full details of our research tools are published in the WorkFREE Research Design Report, available on the project [website](#). We summarise them briefly below.

#### 2.1.1. Qualitative

##### Interviews

Individual interviews formed a bedrock of the WorkFREE methodology. Most interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, with the specific content varying based on the research themes and stories emerging from the other methods. Interviews were conducted with a variety of participants, including young people, adults, influential members of the community, and so on. Interviews last for around 60-90 minutes. Key attention was paid to lifestory interviews, closely tracking 15 families across the course of the project.

##### Focus Group Discussions

As with the interviews, focus groups were of critical importance and were conducted with a variety of participants, primarily identified by positionality and research themes. FGDs were useful for multivocal discussion of collective perceptions and experiences, revealing shared or dissonant understandings in a dialogic fashion. FGDs were used for the dual purpose of sense-making and harvesting local understandings to shape the quantitative tools, as well as for triangulating findings.

##### Ethnography

One of the unique elements of our research design was the incorporation of ethnography. Ethnographic fieldwork took place in all communities at different stages, taking the form of multi-month visits during which researchers lived nearby to the participant communities and spent their days observing routine as well as project administration tasks.

##### Creative and Participatory Tools

With some groups (eg. children) and research themes (eg. needs satisfaction) not ideally suited to narrative-based research methods, we used more creative and participatory tools. This included playing games like kabaddi and cricket while chatting with children, using role plays as well as using more visual mapping charts for needs satisfaction.

All qualitative researchers underwent rigorous training as part of their PhD preparation at the University of Bath. In turn, they each hired and trained experienced qualitative Research Assistants in Hyderabad

## 2.1.2. Quantitative

### **Baseline and Periodic Surveys**

A baseline survey was undertaken before the beginning of the UBI and the plus. This is followed by periodic surveys at midline (9-10 month mark) and endline (after the end of the last cash payment). This survey to captured data on demographics, engagement with public services, health and educational status, as well as concepts like freedom, exploitation, civic engagement, labour patterns, human needs, subjective well-being, dignity, consumption patterns, asset ownership and time-use. Preliminary qualitative work informed the design of the survey tool through checking the viability of certain questions and conceptual translations. Midline and Endline surveys served as a pre-and post-test to gather information on the use of cash and compare the effects of on different aspects of participants' lives. The final tool was translated into Telegu and back-translated. It was administered digitally through tablets.

The surveys were designed and implemented in partnership with research organisations like IWWAGE and DAI, and built on other national surveys and those used in the previous UBI pilot in India. The process of each round of quantitative data collection lasted approximately eight weeks. Each day a group of 11 surveyors would conduct 22 interviews, with each taking roughly two hours.

### **Training the team of field enumerators for data collection**

A team of 12 experienced field enumerators were enrolled for collecting the survey data. This team remained largely consistent across the three rounds of the survey, with the same team leader. The team was of mixed composition with six men and six women headed by two supervisors. Team members underwent a five-day training hosted by MSI Hyderabad under the supervision of the Research Director and Quantitative Leads of the project. After five full days of training, the team members piloted the survey instrument in an MSI community that was not a part of the WorkFREE project. The training process itself was rigorous and done in a step-by-step manner where the team was taken through all the sections of the survey instrument. Each section of the questionnaire was discussed in detail followed by a discussion to check the accuracy (linguistical and cultural) of the Telugu translations, and appropriate changes were made.



The surveys included some experimental modules and 'games' around expenditure preference game, time-use analysis and labour-choices.

The second half of the training days were used by the team of enumerators to practice the tools with each other in the presence of facilitators. This ensured that they had understood the tool well and any questions or queries could be answered on-the-spot. Both the training and the pilot served as opportunities for identifying the challenges in administering the survey instrument and relooking at the survey tool to make changes wherever necessary. The pilot study was particularly important for the project team to understand the shortcomings in the survey instrument that otherwise would not have been evident during an indoor discussion.

For instance, the team of enumerators expressed that they were having difficulties with some of the questions related to subjective wellbeing at the time of translation and finalising. This was so due to the abstract nature of the questions and also the fact that the team felt they were ignorant about what categories the community members use to refer to the concepts and notions such as love, meaning of life, transcendence, etc. While they were prepared to ask the questions during the training, at the pilot stage the enumerators found it difficult and time-consuming to explain these questions to the respondents. After the pilot, the quantitative team assessed the responses and found that this data was unlikely to be valid. Hence, to avoid challenges in data collection and to make the survey instrument as transparent as possible, the team decided to omit them from the baseline surveys and instead to use qualitative tools for these pieces

## 2.2. Cash Rollout

### **Testing the cash transfer mechanism**

Another important step, prior to the beginning of the UBI transfers, was account verification and confirmation for all accounts under the project. This had to be verified at the end of the donor bank (in this case the South Indian Bank where MSI has its account). In order to do this, MSI generated a beneficiary list with all the names and account details and these were manually cross-verified with the final list provided by the bank. A second level of confirmation was provided by way of a one-rupee test transfer to ensure that all the details provided by the participants were correct. The one-rupee transfer was provided in three batches.

After the test transfers were made, participants were asked to confirm receipt of INR 1 by sharing a photocopy of their passbook page that contained the record of this transfer.

However, a host of challenges surfaced at this point. One, in the first round of testing, the money bounced back for approximately 30 accounts. On checking, it was found that for a few the account details such as the IFSC codes were incorrect - often even by just one digit! Second were those people whose bank accounts had become dormant or inactive or who had given us an account where they had pending unpaid loans. Third was the challenge of incorrect bank detail records, owing either to data entry errors or extraneous circumstances like a change in details due to the merger of banks.

Finally, there were many technical challenges due to the banks (including and especially the Indian Postal Payments Bank) not having a technical infrastructure robust enough to handle such bulk transfers. Understandably, people were hesitant/slow in confirming this one-rupee receipt, as it required going to the bank in the middle of a working day to confirm the transfer of just one rupee. Hilariously, some community members were outraged that after almost a year-long buildup, they had received only one rupee! The project team had to provide many reassurances and work to address these challenges at multiple levels.

Finally, and disappointingly, Post Office personnel were often unhelpful or dismissive to the community members when they raised their concerns and it was only when the MSI team visited the Post Office to speak to staff about the lack of cooperation that better assistance was provided. Such are the ways of class- and caste-based discrimination that need to be overcome.

### **Cash transfers begin**

Finally, after a number of months of labouring through practicalities, the first UBI transfer was made – appropriately – on May Day, 2022. Transfers were paid at the beginning of the month for easy streamlining of the process. On receiving the amount, the MSI team started getting calls from some very pleased community members. This is a moment of satisfaction to be enjoyed by anyone engaged in such work!

## **2.3. Risks, challenges, and limitations**

The core practicalities and logistics of delivering cash, even unconditional cash, are not to be underestimated. Indeed, one of the central purposes of this report is to make that clear and to prepare would-be piloters for the task. Similarly any policymaker readying themselves to take pilot findings to scale. As much can be said for large-scale multi-method research – it all takes time, resources, patience and a willingness to respond to circumstances.

One final challenge bears mentioning from this phase of our project beyond what has already been alluded to above. When the surveyors reached our second basti around the third week into the survey, they learned that the local government had just decided to relocate over 50% of the residents, giving them 24 hours to prepare for eviction and shipping them to the edge of town, where they were finally to receive formal, titled accommodation – which was sadly unfinished and very disconnected. This was traumatic and hugely impactful for participants and it had significant implications for our research design. Ethically, how to support these participants? What to do about the corruption of the data represented by this huge life shock?

How to navigate the fact that our relocated participants were now about to share a new community with other relocates from other, non-project bastis from around the city? MSI and the project team immediately engaged themselves in support work and constituted sought formal Ethical Advice. In the end, a decision was made to continue UBI transfers for those initially promised them despite having moved locations. The survey was adapted to take account of their move and the change in their life circumstances, and their new community was taken as a kind of case study apart from the wider study.

## Phase 3: Planning and Initiating the ‘Plus’

### Key Process Steps

#### 3.1. Designing and conceiving the ‘Plus’

The WorkFREE experiment differs from many UBI experiments because it also adds a human-centred ‘plus’ to the delivery of cash: the provision of relational, needs-focused community development work facilitated by community organisers. This work is oriented towards building participants’ capacities to recognise and meet their needs. This addition builds on a growing body of work highlighting how relational ‘plusses’ routinely enhance the positive impacts deriving from cash and lay the groundwork for emergent forms of collective change. It also responds to the recognition (ethical and political) that when a cash-based experiment comes to an end, the transition beyond can be a challenge – one which is made easier to navigate if community power has been built.

We conceive of the cash as ‘making time’, i.e. giving recipients some time in their lives for activities other than relentless work and a preoccupation with scarcity, while we conceive of the ‘plus’ of community work as ‘making space’, i.e. bringing communities together to collectively understand, reimagine, and transform their lives.

The WorkFREE approach to community work is rooted in a relational, needs-based (RNB) approach that contrasts with more traditional, mainstream approaches to social and development work that tend to be characterised by:

- hierarchical, patronage based relations between community workers and participants,
- linear, rationalist thinking that adopts a reductionist causal mechanistic theory of change;
- pre-conceived conceptualisations of the problems communities face and pre-determined solutions to be implemented;
- the objectification of targeted individuals and communities (i.e. treating participants as objects);
- centralised, technocratic and, thus, inflexible structures of governance

In contrast, our RNB approach is characterised by:

- the recognition of the complexity of all living systems, especially human communities;
- the recognition of change as an unpredictable emergent process;
- cultivating the relational conditions necessary for social changes to emerge;
- processes that enable the empowerment and flourishing of participants;

- a focus on identifying the needs of participants and their communities; exploring how those needs currently are/not met; and developing and implementing strategies to meet those needs collectively;

This approach draws on and integrates multiple needs-based frameworks, including Manfred Max Neef's 'Human-Scale Development' (HSD) and Marshall Rosenberg's 'Nonviolent Communication' (NVC). Its core principles are that:

- **It is needs-centred:** recognising that all people share fundamental needs and that human actions can be understood as conscious or unconscious attempts to meet those needs. The work of community organisers is to create space for identifying those needs and supporting the development of new approaches to meeting them.
- **It is people-led:** appropriate responses to people's difficulties begin with those people. Community organisers are there to hold space for people's ideas to form and plans to develop.
- **It is open-ended and emergent:** Instead of pushing participants in any specific direction, the process of the Plus is designed to create the relational conditions necessary for appropriate change strategies to emerge and develop.

### 3.2. Team preparation and action planning

Rooting the project's experienced community organisers in the RNB approach to Participatory Action Research (PAR) required initial internal team training that sought to:

- build team relationships ('building our boat of safety');
- facilitate understanding of a relational and needs-oriented (RNB) approach to community work;
- facilitate recognition of current patterns, practices, blind spots and biases
- channel this understanding into the design and planning of action;

This involved a week-long, in-depth training and planning workshop that took place in March 2022 centred around the following core principles:

- Linear thinking vs complexity thinking
- Emergence
- (Un)Safety
- Fear/Scarcity - Safety/Abundance
- Deep listening and sensing
- Trauma as an obstacle/gateway to transformation
- Holding and healing conflict (through Nonviolent Communication)
- Needs (vs Satisfiers)

It is vital to emphasise that when we use the word 'training' we do not refer to the usual practice of the demonstration or dissemination of technical information. Rather, we refer to the curation of a planned but unique and emergent collective experience that is itself designed and delivered as a relational, needs-based practice. Since the idea was to prepare the team to move from implementing solutions to facilitating collective action, these 'trainings' aimed to replicate (rather than roleplay) the approach to group facilitation that the team was expected to trial in the field. This involved not just building a bank of activities and tools but also questioning many of the traditional (often hierarchical) practices so deeply rooted within social work. For instance, it was a process of deep unlearning for many team members with decades of experience in social work and activism to think of a meeting as a space where one just facilitates conversations about challenges and needs, and hold back from providing potential solutions, even if they have the 'answer'!

Subsequently, members of the design team and the MSI team would sit together every month to carefully each month's activities in keeping with the aforementioned principles.

### 3.3. Community meetings and leadership development

The initial internal training led to the articulation of the following Plus implementation plan. First, the implementation team would recruit two or three community leaders from each of the four participant communities and would invite those leaders to participate in initial RNB workshops. Second, the team would then begin to implement the Plus according to an iterated regular three-step process:

1. The team would design a community development workshop session;
2. The team would then run this session with the community leaders;
3. The team would finally run the session with each of the four communities.

Recruiting a cadre of community leaders conferred various benefits on the project. First, it allowed the Plus implementation team to test out and receive feedback on their workshop session plan and activities before delivering it in the field. Second, it enabled community leaders to develop and deploy exciting new skills and vocabulary in their lives and communities. As the Plus progressed, community leaders took larger roles in community workshop facilitation. Third, community leaders were able to build connections and cultivate relations among each other and, by extension, between their communities. Fourth, the community leaders served as a bridge between the implementation team and communities, offering and generating enthusiasm and support for the Plus program within communities.

The original plan envisaged monthly Plus meetings over eighteen months. Various internal and external factors meant that meetings became bi-monthly for the first twelve months, and then monthly over the final six months.

### 3.4. Impacts and emerging actions

With a theory of change grounded in recognising social complexity, we eschew simplistic claims of causation. Instead, we focus more on the the satisfaction of deeper psychological needs, building of relationships and participants' testimonies of agency developing through the intervention.

Many participants shared how participation in Plus meetings helped them feel safer, more connected, and more trusting of fellow participants and neighbours. Participants describe the deep satisfaction of encountering a new, unique space where problems can be aired and shared, a space not just to cry but to laugh and a space away from the monotony of daily life. Many describe feeling lighter during and after Plus sessions. They also described stronger relations with the community workers, as well as a greater sense of agency in dealing with some pressing problems. In the words of some participants, whilst the cash transfers were immensely helpful, it was the Plus meetings that created a space of possibility, a space where actual change could happen.

While we will outline deeper and more rigorous process of change in forthcoming publications, we have many observed and anecdotal stories of decreased conflict, increased agency among women's groups and increased cooperation between households. Most concretely, there has been the establishment of the Hyderabad Garbage Collectors' Collective in November 2023. An inaugural meeting drew over 500 people from all four participant communities and beyond to our partner NGO Montfort Social Institute. At this event, participants agreed on common demands that were sent to various government offices at the municipal and city level, and agreed to establish a collective to serve to defend their labour rights and improve their pay and working conditions. This is an exciting and potentially hugely impactful development. We have also noted how a significant number of individuals being elected to the organisation's executive committee have been regular participants in Plus community meetings.

### 3.5. Planning for sustainable 'exit' and the project's conclusion

The Plus team met again for another week of workshops in April 2023 to plan for a smooth and ethically robust process of 'exit' of the WorkFREE project. The core principles here were first, to avoid a massive cliff for participants once the cash stopped in October 2023 and the Plus work in April 2024 and second, to maximising communities' chances of sustaining and building on the changes begun during the project. A key tool for both of these was to support MSI to build its capacity to continue to implement RNB approaches in all their work.

These workshops led us to identify and plan for the following four pillars of activity:

1. Continuing the three-step process over the final six months, with a focus on training in conflict resolution and collective consensual decision-making, to support effective collective action.
2. Collating all documentation, refining our RNB praxis model, and recording our journey and model in publications like this one.
3. Developing MSI team's research and facilitation capacities through workshops for the teams
4. Producing publications documenting our process and model, producing a handbook for relational community organising, producing a documentary film on the journey of UBI Plus, and lobbying political parties to incorporate the discourse and policies of basic income within local and national manifestos in upcoming elections in India.

### 3.6 Risks, challenges, and limitations

Prefigurative attempts to foster new ways of relating will always face challenges, since most of us have been socialised in traditional, alienated, ways of being and doing. This, and the novelty of our approach, threw up many implementational challenges.

- For an organisation steeped in ideas and practices of community organising that its staff itself described as being of the 'saviour' model, it was a psychological, social and bureaucratic challenge to internalise and adopt this 'partner' approach. This is a long and challenging journey. We have noticed how our ingrained salvational, problem-solving reactions are aroused most quickly and acutely when we feel the stress of needing to achieve particular outcomes within short periods of time. What we have found, time and again, as crucial to transitioning from traditional problem-solving to relational practices of community organising is precisely enacting the same RNB approach internally on ourselves. This requires a deep level of internal connectedness, trust, and faith in each other, in the principles, and in the process.
- Another key concern implementing this model in the field was around participants' time. Relational forms of being together, especially when such spaces and practices didn't already exist, took long period of time spent collectively to build. In resource and time-poor contexts it was a constant struggle to balance between integrity to the process and respect for participants' other responsibilities
- Additionally, participants themselves have been socialised in the same 'saviouristic' model of relating to NGOs, and took time to get accustomed to a model of conversations that didn't directly lead to action.



## Conclusion

Just in the last 10 years, there has been a multifold rise in cash transfer programs around the world, run by researchers, civil society organisations and governments. Fortunately, this boom has been accompanied by attempts to aggregate knowledge from the experiences and learnings of practitioners around the world. This paper aims to contribute to this growing pool of knowledge by collating our experiences, design principles and methods of responding to emergent challenges in implementing the WorkFREE project. Each element of this complex, multi-stakeholder and multi-country project, i.e. a UBI pilot, a new form of community mobilisation and a research study, are mammoth tasks unto themselves. Not least to do so during a global pandemic! Trying to do them together, through turbulent times, has required agility in dealing with emergent challenges and commitment to the core ethical, political and scientific principles that have guided our work. We wished to stay true to principles of unconditionality, relationality and doing no harm, in solidarity with communities we saw very much as partners more than 'beneficiaries'.

Formal research outputs on the effects of the intervention will follow in due course. This paper does not claim to speak of effects or outcomes, but merely the processes of getting this project off the ground. We hope that this builds on knowledge not just on piloting practices, but on setting up projects across borders and with vulnerable populations around the world.



# Work**FREE**



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