

## The Indian Society of Labour Economics

The Indian Society of Labour Economics (ISLE) is a professional association of researchers, scholars and other stakeholders interested in the area of labour, employment and development issues. The Society promotes scientific studies of labour markets, employment, employment relations and related issues and disseminates knowledge. It publishes a quarterly, peer-reviewed journal The Indian Journal of Labour Economics (IJLE), which is now in its 69<sup>th</sup> year of publication. Promoting and featuring scientific studies on labour and employment issues, the journal is co-published with Springer. More information on the journal is available on <http://www.springer.com/economics/journal/41027>



### THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF LABOUR ECONOMICS

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**A Panel Discussion during  
66<sup>th</sup> ISLE Conference**

## Unlocking the Potential of Informal Enterprises in India

Organised by



**UNU  
WIDER**



The Lakshmi Mittal and Family  
**SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE**  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



**20 January 2026 | Pune**



# About the Panel

## Unlocking the Potential of Informal Enterprises in India

### Background

This panel is proposed by partners in an on-going project called “Enterprises in India”, including Marty Chen (WIEGO, Harvard Mittal Institute), Renana Jhabvala (SEWA Bharat), G. Raveendran (ex-NSSO), Ravi Srivastava (IHD), Kunal Sen (UNU WIDER), Rajesh Raj (Sikkim University) and Nandini Dey (SEWA Bharat). The project recognizes that a majority of enterprises in India are informal, yet informal enterprises receive less enterprise support than formal enterprises and face greater obstacles to growth. The overall objective of the project is to better understand the significance, characteristics & performance of informal enterprises, particularly those operated by women, including what they produce or distribute, where and how they operate, what constraints they face, and what support they need. The project activities include statistical analysis of recent national data, policy analysis of field studies and literature reviews of related literature on the linkages between informal and formal enterprises. The panel will present findings till date, arrived at, through a combination of these activities.



# Programme

**TUESDAY, 20 JANUARY 2026**

- Chair : **Ravi Srivastava**  
Professor and Director, Centre for Employment studies, Institute for Human Development (IHD), New Delhi
- Presentations : **Kunal Sen**  
Director, United Nations University - World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki, Finland
- : **Rajesh Raj**  
Associate Professor  
Sikkim University  
Topic: *What holds back informal firms? Constraints and performance in India*
- : **Nandini Dey**  
Research Lead, SEWA Bharat  
Topic: *Women's Informal Enterprises: Enhancing Visibility & Promoting Growth*
- : **G. Raveendran**  
Former Deputy Director General of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) and Former Additional Director General, Central Statistical Organisation (CSO)  
Topic: *Data Gaps and Challenges of Enterprises in India*



: **Martha (Marty) Chen**  
Co-Founder, International Coordinator Emeritus and Board Member, WIEGO and Associate, Mittal South Asia Institute, Harvard University

Topic: *Barriers & Constraints to Productivity of Urban Informal Enterprises: Evidence from Field studies*

Discussants

: **Keshab Das**  
Visiting Professor, Institute for Human Development, New Delhi, and Adjunct Professor, Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi

: **Yuko Nikaido**  
Professor, Dept. of Economics  
Musashi University, Tokyo, Japan



# Biographies of the Resource Persons

## Prof. Ravi S. Srivastava



Professor Ravi Srivastava is currently Professor and Director, Centre of Employment Studies at the Institute for Human Development, Delhi. Earlier, he was Professor of Economics, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He received his education in the University of Allahabad (BA), the Delhi School of Economics (MA), Jawaharlal Nehru University (Pre PhD), University of Cambridge, UK (Ph. D.).

He was full-time Member of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), chaired by late Dr. Arjun Sengupta, in the rank of Secretary, Government of India (2006-09). The advisory Commission to the Government of India, which wound up in May 2009, submitted a dozen reports and made wide ranging recommendations to government on all aspects of policy related to informal sector enterprises and the informal workforce. Its recommendations led to the enactment of the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008, and the launch of the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, a public funded health insurance scheme for the poor, to which currently more than 35 million poor families are subscribers, and more recently, of MUDRA bank, a bank for the unorganised sector.

His main areas of research and publication include agriculture, rural development and rural poverty, the informal sector, regional development, decentralization, human development, land reforms, social protection, labour and employment, and migration. He has published several books, monographs, reports and more than a hundred research papers in these areas.

He has been involved with scores of major research studies and consultancies involving national and international agencies and has received several prestigious



academic awards and Fellowships from the University Grants Commission and other organisations. He has also been the conference President of the Indian Society of Labour Economics and the President of the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand Economics Association.

### **Professor Kunal Sen**



Professor Kunal Sen has over three decades of experience in academic and applied development economics research. He is the author of eight books and the editor of five volumes on the economics and political economy of development. Since 2019 he has served as Director of UNU-WIDER while on leave from the Global Development Institute, University of Manchester, where he is a professor of development economics.

### **Nandini Dey**



Nandini Dey is a research lead and activist with over a decade of experience working at the intersection of labour rights, social protection, and women's economic empowerment in India. She currently leads mixed-method research at SEWA Bharat, focusing on livelihoods, informal enterprises, financial inclusion, and collective economic models for women workers. Nandini has coordinated large multi-institutional research collaborations and designed surveys, evaluations, and policy-focused outputs for programmes and advocacy. Her work spans social audits, other accountability mechanisms, and grassroots capacity building, including training women workers in research and documentation. She holds an MSc in Labour, Social Movements and Development from SOAS, University of London

### **G. Raveendran**



Dr. G. Raveendran, is a professional statistician with experience of over half a century in diverse fields. After obtaining his post-graduate degree in statistics from Kerala University, he joined the Indian Statistical Service (ISS) in the year 1971. As an official statistician, he served in different government departments



including National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Central Statistical Organisation, Department Industrial Development and Department of Tourism. On retirement in 2005, he joined the National Commission for Enterprises in the Un-organised Sector (NCEUS) as consultant till 2009 and played a major role in operationalizing the definitions of informal sector and informal employment in the Indian context. He has also been a consultant to several institutions including UN Women, World Bank, World Tourism Organisation, Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organising (WIEGO), etc. Presently, he is Honorary Fellow in the Laurie Baker Centre for Habitat Studies (LBC) at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India.

He has authored a number of research papers and publications in the areas of labour and employment, informality, gender statistics, poverty and tourism.

### **Martha (Marty) Chen**



Martha (Marty) Chen is an Associate at the Mittal South Asia Institute at Harvard University, where she taught for 35 years, and Co-Founder, Emeritus International Coordinator and board member of the global network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). An experienced development practitioner and scholar, her areas of specialisation are employment, gender, and poverty, with a focus on the working poor in the informal economy.

Before joining Harvard in 1987, she had two decades of resident development experience working in Bangladesh (with the well-known NGO BRAC) and in India (as field representative of Oxfam America) with a focus, in both countries, on the economic empowerment of women from poor households. In 1987, Dr Chen co-founded WIEGO which she then led for 20 years. Under her leadership, WIEGO grew into a global network renowned for its work to improve the status of the working poor in the informal economy, through stronger organisations, improved statistics and research, and a more favourable policy environment.

Dr Chen received a PhD in South Asia Regional Studies from the University of



Pennsylvania. She was awarded a high civilian award, the Padma Shri, by the Government of India in April 2011, and a Friends of Bangladesh Liberation War award by the Government of Bangladesh in December 2012.

Currently, Dr. Chen is the Chair of the Boards of BRAC Global and the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU WIDER).

