

**Business, Enterprise and Employment Support for Women in South Asia Network
(Guarantee) Limited
Knowledge Hub Webinar Series
Concept Note**

**Rethinking Economic Justice: Centering Unpaid Labor as the Key to Gender
Equality and Equity**

Event Title: Rethinking Economic Justice: Centering Unpaid Labor as the Key to Gender Equality and Equity

Event Date: 18th March 2025, 6.00 pm – 7.30 pm IST, 8.30 am – 10.00 am EST

Venue: Virtual (Zoom)

Organizers: Business, Enterprise, and Employment Support for Women in South Asia Network (Guarantee) Limited

Background & Rationale

The **Business, Enterprise, and Employment Support for Women in South Asia Network (Guarantee) Limited (BEES Network)** is a regional coalition dedicated to empowering marginalized women across the eight SAARC member states, impacting over 23 million households. Established in 2011 with support from the World Bank and formally registered in Sri Lanka in 2019, BEES brings together 14 member organizations to promote women's economic empowerment in South Asia through cross-border collaboration, knowledge exchange, and advocacy.

The call for "**Accelerate Action**" on Gender Equality for International Women's Day (IWD) 2025 highlights a sobering truth: despite decades of efforts, the current rate of progress remains far from satisfactory in achieving gender equality. Women globally continue to perform the bulk of unpaid care labor, including child-rearing, eldercare, domestic work, and the social and biological reproduction of labor. Although essential to the functioning of families, communities, and economies, this labor remains invisible in national accounts and is not formally acknowledged as the cornerstone of economic productivity and gender equality.

Current policies tend to emphasize redistribution and recognition—mainly through parental leave, elderly care, and childcare access—or raising awareness through mechanisms like time-use surveys. However, they fail to formally recognize unpaid labor as an economic contribution integral to development frameworks. According to the World Economic Forum, at the current pace, it will take 134 years—five generations beyond the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target—to reach full gender parity.

The South Asia region ranks among the lowest globally in gender parity, with a score of 38.8%. It lags significantly in economic participation and opportunity, primarily due to the devaluation of unpaid

labor. This systemic inequality remains unaddressed, suppressing labor-force participation rates for women and perpetuating significant gender disparities in leadership roles.

In contemporary economic systems, only work generating exchange value (i.e., market labor or goods sold for profit) is formally measured and valued. Unpaid care labor, despite being foundational to economic productivity, is excluded from GDP calculations because it does not generate revenue. However, recognizing unpaid labor as valuable work goes beyond fairness for women—it is about acknowledging the hidden foundation upon which all economies are built.

To truly accelerate action for gender equality, governments, international agencies, corporations, and civil society must move beyond symbolic gestures and radically rethink economic systems to incorporate care labor at their core. This webinar seeks to push the global conversation forward by advocating for formal recognition of unpaid labor as a foundational economic activity and exploring innovative solutions to integrate care work into economic systems and policy frameworks.

Objectives

1. **Highlight the Root Cause of Inequality:** Explore the critical link between the invisibility of unpaid labor and systemic gender inequality.
2. **Advocate for Formal Recognition:** Present actionable policy recommendations to value unpaid labor in economic terms and integrate it into national frameworks.
3. **Showcase Best Practices and Innovations:** Share global examples and potential models for formalizing the economic value of care labor.
4. **Mobilize Stakeholders:** Foster cross-sector dialogue and coalition-building to create momentum for lasting change.

Expected Outcomes

1. **Increased Awareness:** Greater understanding of the need to formally recognize unpaid labor in economic systems and policy frameworks.
2. **Policy Recommendations:** Practical proposals for integrating unpaid labor into national accounts, welfare systems, and labor protections.
3. **Actionable Steps:** Identification of clear pathways for stakeholders to advocate for care economy reforms for gender equality.
4. **Stronger Networks:** Strengthened coalitions to sustain advocacy efforts for systemic change.

Target audience and participants

- **Policymakers and government officials** (social welfare, labor, and economic development sectors).
- **Development agencies and international organizations** (e.g., UN Women, ILO, World Bank).
- **Gender equality advocates and civil society organizations.**
- **Academics and researchers** in economics, gender studies, and labor rights.
- **Media and influencers** committed to advancing social justice.

Invitees

- **Chair – Ms. Alissar Chaker**, Resident Representative, UNDP, Kingdom of Cambodia
- **Welcome address – Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne**, Director, BEES Network, President, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement
- **Key Note address – Dr. Caren Grown**, Senior Fellow, Center for Sustainable Development, Brookings Institution, former Global Director for Gender, World Bank Group
- **Panelists**
 - **Ms. Kanta Singh**, Deputy Representative, UN Women India
 - **Dr. Bina Pradhan**, Senior Advisor, BPW Nepal, Director BEES Network
 - **Ms. Megha Desai**, Senior Coordinator, SEWA

Bio of Chair

Alissar Chaker has more than 18 years of experience contributing to inclusive recovery and sustainable development in least developed and middle-income countries in diverse contexts of humanitarian crises, post-conflicts, and special development settings. She held various management positions at UNDP in Germany, East Timor, Egypt, Syria, Honduras, and Tunisia and is currently serving in Cambodia as UNDP Resident Representative. Alissar has a proven track record in empowering marginalized women and implementing innovative solutions for accelerating positive change in power structures, as well as economic, social, and political systems that perpetuate discrimination and inequalities, prioritizing the development of capabilities and agency. She is the proud recipient of the Medal of Merit of the Royal Order of Sahametrei (Knight) in 2004, an order of chivalry conferred by the Royal Government of Cambodia in recognition of outstanding contributions to sustainable development and international cooperation. Ms. Chaker holds two master's degrees in engineering and environmental management from the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland and the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom.

Alissar is fluent in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish and has knowledge of German and Portuguese. Holding an advanced degrees in Environmental Engineering and Management, Alissar is a multilingual leader committed to fostering sustainable development and inclusive governance worldwide.

Bio of Key Note Speaker

Caren Grown is a Senior Fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution where she leads a program on gender equality and sustainable development, focusing especially on the intersection of public finance, climate change, and care. From 2014-2021, she served as Global Director for Gender at the World Bank Group and then as Senior Technical Advisor in the Macroeconomics, Trade, and Investment Global Practice, where she developed a workstream on taxation and gender equality. Prior to the World Bank, she was economist-in-residence and co-director of the Program on Gender Analysis in Economics at American University. During her career, Caren held senior positions at USAID, the Levy Economics Institute at Bard College, and the International Center for Research on Women. She has developed and co-led several large research projects, including the UNU-WIDER program on aid effectiveness and gender equality, the three-country Gender Asset Gap Project (based at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, India),

and the seven-country Taxation and Gender Equality Project (American University & University of KwaZulu Natal) and has published widely on fiscal policy, trade, development, gender data, and health.

Bios of Panelists

Kanta Singh has over 25 years of experience in the management of pro-women development programmes. She has worked with national and international organizations to promote women in the formal economy, sports, and politics. Her last assignment was with the UNDP, where she spent 9 years. Currently, she is the Deputy Representative with UN Women India.

She is also a former national-level volleyball player and a Chevening Gurukul Fellow from the University of Oxford.

Bina Pradhan is a feminist economist with a Ph.D. from Cornell University and a multidisciplinary background in economics, rural sociology, gender studies, anthropology, and international development. A Fulbright New Century Scholar (2009/10), she is an independent researcher affiliated with the Beatrice Bain Research Group at the University of California, Berkeley.

She currently collaborates with the Federation of Business and Professional Women, Nepal (FBPWN), advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship development, trade, and post-COVID economic recovery initiatives. Previously, she served as a Socio-Cultural and Operations Research Adviser for UNFPA's South and West Asia Country Technical Services Team.

A pioneering researcher, Bina led the landmark Status of Women in Nepal study, which played a critical role in developing methodologies for valuing paid and unpaid care work. She also established Nepal's first action-oriented women's research center, the Center for Women and Development (CWD). Her current research focuses on gender and macroeconomics including care economy, analyzing data from Nepal Labor Force Surveys (1998–2017) to assess women's economic contributions and the evolving nature of gendered labor dynamics.

Megha Desai holds degrees in Commerce and Law from Gujarat University and completed the Senior Management Development Program at IIM Ahmedabad. She leads SEWA's National Farmer's Forum Network, supporting 3.2 million informal women workers, including small and marginal farmers across 19 states, through agro-business initiatives and policy advocacy. She also heads SEWA's Agriculture Campaign, helping women farmers navigate climate and market challenges.

With over 15 years at SEWA, Megha has led economic rehabilitation and peace-building programs for war and disaster-affected women in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Nepal. Her work began with rebuilding the lives of riot-affected widows and orphaned children.

She specializes in economic rehabilitation, grassroots organization, skills development, and sustainable business models, supporting over 15,000 women in securing livelihoods through financial and market linkages. Previously, she worked in leadership development in education and as a Senior Research Analyst in financial research.