

Speaker:

Prof. Subha Mani
Fordham University

Date and Time:

October 28th, 2026 (Wednesday); 05:00 to 06:00 PM

Venue:

**Room 401, 4th floor, Seminar Room, A91 Eco Hub Building,
Department of Economics, IIT Bombay**



Title: Economic Benchmarks, Material Disadvantage, and Redistributive Preferences

Abstract:

How do individuals evaluate who should receive redistribution? We study this question using an online survey experiment in the U.S. where respondents allocate government transfers to hypothetical households. We experimentally vary whether matched economic positions are described in absolute terms, as annual household income, or in relative terms, as a position in the national income distribution. Holding matched economic position constant, absolute-income descriptions increase desired monthly transfers by approximately 6% of the maximum allowable transfers. Holding income fixed, redistributive support also varies systematically across household circumstances: lack of health insurance generates the largest increase in transfers, followed by lack of homeownership and failure to complete high school. These choices are accompanied by differences in perceived poverty, fairness, luck, effort, and material need. The results show that targeted redistributive preferences depend not only on economic position, but also on how need is evaluated and on the specific dimension of material disadvantage.

About the speaker:

Subha Mani is a Professor of Economics and a Research Associate at the Center for International Policy Studies at Fordham University. Subha is an Associate Editor at the Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization as well as the Journal of Population Economics. Subha also holds a Research Affiliate position at the Population Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania and Research Fellow positions at the Institute for Labor Economics (IZA) and Global Labor Organization (GLO). She has her BA (honors) degree in economics from Delhi University, Masters degrees in economics from Mumbai University, and a Ph.D. degree in economics from the University of Southern California. Subha has over 15+ years of research and teaching experience in the fields of development economics, program evaluation, field experiments, applied econometrics, applied microeconomics, health, early childhood development, labor, and education. Subha has worked on numerous experimental and non-experimental evaluation studies. She has additionally undertaken extensive primary data collection, fieldwork, and management in several low-and middle-income countries including handling sensitive data for children and adolescents, people in conflict settings, and mental health data.

Her scholarly work has received external funding (>5 million USD) from the National Institute of Health, International Growth Center – India Central, 3ie (International Initiatives for Impact Evaluation), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, NICHD, and Grand Challenges Canada. She has worked closely with The World Bank, Catholic Relief Services, Magic Bus Foundation, National Institute of Health, the state govt. of Jharkhand, and the state govt. of Nagaland in designing survey experiments, lab experiments, and social policy experiments in education, health, spousal decision making, and public works programs. Her scholarly work has been published in 30+ peer reviewed outlets including several prestigious journals such as the *Journal of Development Economics*, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, *World Development* (4x), *Journal of Nutrition*, *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* (2x), *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, *Labour Economics*, and other peer reviewed outlets.