



UNESCO Chair in Community Based  
Research and Social Responsibility  
in Higher Education



# Knowledge Democracy: Bridging Knowledge Cultures

Venue: Participatory Research in Asia – PRIA, New Delhi

Date: 6 February 2023 | 10.00 am to 2.00 pm IST

## Setting the Context

In the current system of socio-economic development around the world, knowledge has become increasingly important. The knowledge economy is seen to be rapidly integrated into the growth strategies of societies. Yet, the dominant knowledge system of our times is the basis for educating and training the next generation of professionals. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) produce and mobilise academic knowledge, largely based on European theories and frameworks that evolved over a few centuries. Universal access to higher education, mostly conducted in a European language, is further alienating youth from contexts in which their parents live and work.

Participatory Research in Asia – PRIA and UNESCO Co-Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education with support from the Asia Democracy Research Network – ADRN organised a national workshop on Knowledge Democracy: Bridging Knowledge Cultures on 6 February 2023 in New Delhi. A total of 57 participants attended the national workshop.

In his opening remarks, Dr Rajesh Tandon<sup>1</sup> said, “Participatory Research has been our foundational principle. It values local knowledge and enables people to systematise that knowledge in order to gain more knowledge”. One of the most invisible forms of exclusion in modern societies is a knowledge culture that devalues local, experiential, and indigenous knowledge systems. By excluding such local knowledge systems, voices, perspectives and worldviews of rural, nomadic, tribal, Dalit communities and those of women and the elderly, their democratic participation and inclusive development is obstructed.

Over the past decade, many experiments in community-university partnerships to co-create knowledge solutions have been gaining visibility. Such examples of engaged scholarship have been largely driven by academia. Yet, understanding of community knowledge systems, their rituals, literature, music, stories and artefacts has been rather limited even amongst such innovative practices. A recent international study of [Bridging Knowledge Cultures](#) has produced some significant insights into how diverse knowledge systems can be synergised.

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<sup>1</sup> Founder President, PRIA and UNESCO Co-Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education



Post-Covid context, increasingly facing climate distress, is starting to raise questions about limitations of various knowledge economy models practiced so far. Greater attention to experiential, indigenous, community knowledge to respond to these challenges is being encouraged at national and global levels. India's [National Education Policy \(NEP\) 2020](#) has explicitly recommended efforts to integrate community knowledge in teaching and research in higher education. [UNESCO's Recommendations on Open Science](#) (universally ratified by all member states) in November 2021 call for valuing the multiplicity of epistemologies and systems of community knowledge.

*A resonating example was the work shared by Dr Vinod Pavarala<sup>2</sup> during COVID-19. Through the medium of 'community radio', they have been bridging the gap between the community and university knowledge. The idea was to reach out to the communities and share information "with" them. Community radio stations in India, Nepal, Bangladesh in South Asia, among others aim at serving communities and reaching the unreached, especially the non-literate communities. Community Radio broadcasters' primary role remains community engagement – on different (and relevant) issues, in local languages keeping their indigenous context intact. Local communities use their communication competencies to share information and build resilient communities that adopt practices of sustainable lifestyles. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, community radio created a huge impact among the marginalised and underprivileged groups through its various locally contextualised programmes in local vernaculars. It was used to stay connected with communities in various interesting ways in Gurgaon and Mysore such as "awaze mehat, 21 baatein 21 din, 19 din aur sambhal ke" etc. to generate awareness among the community and by the community on various issues. It introduced a variety to that context by using folklore, skits, quizzes, etc. in local languages for making the COVID-19 vocabulary comprehensible to the participants (such as physical distancing, lockdown, hygiene, quarantine, pandemic, asymptomatic, N95, etc.). During*

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Chair on Community Media, University of Hyderabad

*the lockdown, the community radio helped its listeners by providing verified information in local languages in a timely manner, busting rumours about the virus, counselling, school programmes for children who did not have access to the digital world/literacy and so on.*

*Certain key characteristics of community radio such as - (i) its close proximity to the community has been a primary advantage, (ii) it is run in partnerships with and by the participation of community members, (iii) unlike 'one size fits all' model of dissemination of knowledge, the content of community radio programmes are contextualised locally, (iv) use of local languages (such as Bhojpuri, Haryanvi, Desia, etc.) make them more accessible and relatable, (v) it uses terrestrial broadcasting and distinguishes itself from online/ digital (social media) which communities do not have access to. Thus, challenges the dominant knowledge hierarchies by recognising local communities as bearers of valuable community knowledge who can then become active producer of content rather than remain passive consumer/receiver of knowledge.*

It is evident that there is an emerging movement towards 'knowledge democracy' which recognises and integrates diversity of knowledge systems.

### **Knowledge Democracy: Mapping the Field**

Dr Budd Hall<sup>3</sup>, in his keynote speech, elaborated on the practice of monopolising knowledge by academic institutions. In the past many decades, the distribution of knowledge has been unequal leveraging upon supportive global policies. There has been a rise in the academic monopoly of knowledge. Dispossession of land, skills and knowledge existed traditionally. Prior to the invention of the university, knowledge like the land was held in the commons. Now, any powerful person can build a 'wall' and declare it as his/her territory. Universities are such walls for knowledge. People inside the walls of the university are considered as "knowers/ experts" and those outside the walls are "non-knowers/ ignorant". This has been the foundation of knowledge today in HEIs.

This was also endorsed by Dr Madhura Yadav<sup>4</sup>; she stated that academia enjoys the authoritative status by the virtue of the university's formal recognition in the education industry. Whereas the knowledge that resides in and within the community does not get the same recognition. There is no integration of community knowledge in the university spaces because the common perception is that the community is the 'non-knowers/ ignorant'. Therefore, we need to advocate for more platforms to facilitate open dialogue and exchange of knowledge between the two. The starting point for this would be to recognise that communities have knowledge.

*Case Study – A Waste Management Practices in Two Adjoining Villages (Thikaria and Sanjhriya), Conducted by Manipal University Jaipur*

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Emeritus, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria & UNESCO Co-Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

<sup>4</sup> Dean, Faculty of Design at Manipal University Jaipur

- *The objective was (i) to explore how community knowledge is created, shared and validated – both in the community and by the university; (ii) to identify and illustrate the power inequalities that exist between universities and communities; (iii) to understand how to bridge the existing inequalities between the university and the community.*
- *Methodology - data collection was based on a structured questionnaire containing both open and closed-ended questions. Interviews were also conducted with university administrators and faculty members.*
- *Analysis and recommendation – it was observed that the power in knowledge generation, use and validation is skewed in favour of universities. There is a need to strengthen academics’ capacity to encourage, promote, regulate, and sustain research partnerships with the community. Sustainable partnership characterised by regular meetings and discussions between universities and their surrounding communities is vital to bridge the knowledge inequalities that exist.*



Speaking of open and equal access to global knowledge and research, Dr Hall referred to a world map (see Figure 1) depicting the size of the continent as per the published academic knowledge production in comparison to the land mass. US and Europe are shown to be outgrown in terms of size while large land mass of Africa was shown as a small drop indicating that Africa is smallest in terms of producing acceptable academic knowledge.



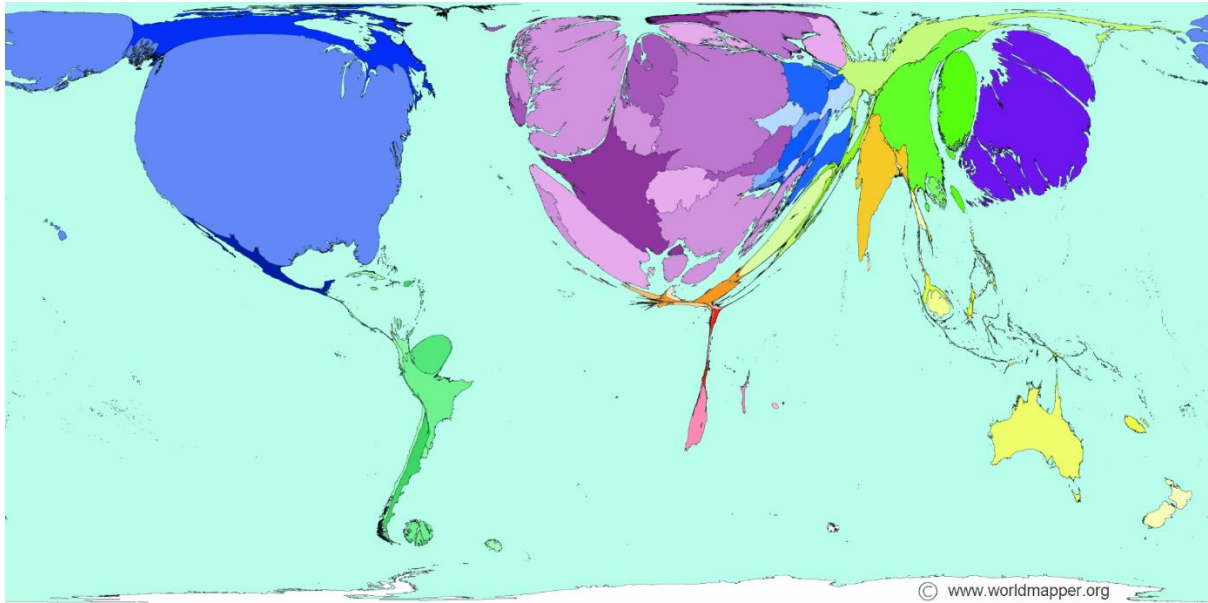


Figure 1: Unequal knowledge production

To further illustrate the phenomenon of knowledge monopoly, he referred to the list of most cited publications in social science on Google Scholar (see Figure 2). He highlighted that the list does not contain any female authors, indigenous authors, or from Global South except for Paulo Freire (a Brazilian adult educator and scholar). These publications were majorly Eurocentric. Among the other challenges to knowledge democracy, ‘paywalls’ have thus exacerbated and promoted colonial racist languages.

For the knowledge democracy paradigm, the research process itself must be democratised and opened, especially to those who are usually excluded from it – non-scientists, non-academics, indigenous peoples, and knowledge holders in the Global South, who thus become “actor-researchers”. Knowledge democracy rhymes seamlessly with participatory processes, with the fight against cognitive inequalities and injustices, with an aspiration to decolonise knowledge and resistance against epistemicides. UNESCO has a new vision for open science. This has been accepted by UNESCO General Assembly November 2021, as mentioned earlier by Dr Tandon. This includes open access to publications and data, fair and decolonial open science for and with the community. There is a call for greater openness to knowledge and systems of thought that come from Indigenous people, minorities, and cultures from the Global South.

The debate of open access is taking momentum and many publications have begun acknowledging and crediting the source of knowledge. Creating an open access infrastructure has its own challenges. However, there are platforms like [Zenodo](#) which is completely open access, it is designed to be used with low broadband/ internet connection. There is something called the ‘Association of Open Access Publishers’ – there are 16,000 journals that are committed to open access. We are in a transformative moment and this discussion is evidence that we all are in it together.

Book	Author	Date*	Discipline	Citations
The Structure of Scientific Revolutions	Thomas Kuhn	1962	Philosophy	81,311
Diffusion of Innovations	Everett Rogers	1962	Sociology	72,780
Pedagogy of the Oppressed	Paulo Freire	1968/1970	Education	72,359
Competitive Strategy	Michael E Porter	1980	Economics	65,406
Imagined Communities	Benedict Anderson	1983	Political Science	64,167
Mind in Society	LS Vygotsky	1978	Psychology	63,809
Discipline and Punish	Michel Foucault	1976/1977	Philosophy	60,700
A Theory of Justice	John Rawls	1971	Political Science	58,594
Social Foundations of Thought and Action	Albert Bandura	1986	Psychology	55,324
The Interpretation of Cultures	Clifford Geertz	1973	Anthropology	48,984
The History of Sexuality (3 Volumes)	Michel Foucault	1978-1986	Philosophy	47,955
Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation	Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger	1991	Education	47,627
The Fifth Discipline	Peter M Senge	1992	Management	43,876
Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance	Douglas North	1990	Economics	43,411
Culture's Consequences	Geert Hofstede	1980	Management	42,144
The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life	Erving Goffman	1959	Sociology	40,573
Das Kapital	Karl Marx	1867-1894	Economics	40,237
Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste	Pierre Bourdieu	1984	Sociology	39,729
The Social Construction of Reality	Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann	1966	Sociology	38,845
Metaphors We Live By	George Lakoff and Mark Johnson	1980	Linguistics	38,723
Stress, Appraisal and Coping	Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman	1984	Psychology	38,665
Communities of Practice	Etienne Wenger	1999	Psychology	37,775
The Economic Institutions of Capitalism	Oliver Williamson	1985	Economics	37,651
Motivation and Personality	Abraham Maslow	1954	Psychology	37,614
Attachment	John Bowlby	1969	Psychology	37,318

Figure 2: The most cited publications in social science

Resonating with Dr Hall's comment on knowledge democracy and owing to her roots in Jharkhand, Dr Sonajharia Minz<sup>5</sup> expressed that the conversation in academic space, especially the ones she encountered while she was pursuing her higher education at Jawaharlal Nehru University, were very passionate but unfortunately far from the lived realities of people in Jharkhand. She added that knowledge democracy does not just talk about multiple epistemologies. To elaborate, in social science when people work with data, they look for correlation but in data mining we look for patterns that come out of associations which may not be correlated, but they can be differently related. In this context, she mentioned that various indigenous studies could answer 'what', 'when', a part of 'how' but not 'why'? This is because interpersonal relationships are complex to understand, and indigenous communities have symbiotic relationships which cannot be understood easily. Thus, 'why' can only be answered and validated by the community itself.

This process of *othering* through knowledge dissemination must be replaced by co-creation of knowledge. Knowledge not only to question but to also to challenge hegemonies, empower community with certain dignity. She also raised questions on parameters considered by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for ranking the Indian universities. She emphasised the need to sub-categorise the parameters like gross enrolment ratio and drop out ratios. We need to see how many first-generation learners got enrolled, the pattern of their performance and their dropouts.

Referring to the comment on NAAC parameters, Dr Pavarala said that it is very important to redefine the existing highly standardised parameters of NAAC because as it stands today, the impact of higher education, community engagement work, knowledge democracy and so on, has no bearing on these standardised parameters of NAAC. Bringing in the concept of 'university rankings', Dr Yadav mentioned that universities focus on ranking and as a result 'community outreach' is misinterpreted as community university engagement. Further, the obligations imposed by NAAC such as publishing a set number of publications in a given time frame, do not really intend to improve our performance but it constantly keeps us on our toes to run after the targeted number. Echoing the aspect of meeting the set

<sup>5</sup> Vice Chancellor, Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Jharkhand

target for publications, Dr Victor Paul<sup>6</sup> said that we are witnessing the ‘cobra effect’ in the universities, where publications take precedence over the real impact of the work. Therefore, community engagement has become a mere formality. He also said that knowledge dissemination should not be limited to just writing, but we should also explore popular modes of doing the same. Mr Binoy Acharya<sup>7</sup> added that usually when we talk of validation, we refer to ‘peer validation’ or ‘methodological validation’, we need to incorporate ‘community validation’ when we assess the impact of community engagement work. Dr Minz added to the discussion, “in the context of community engagement the intellectual property rights should be with the community rather than the university. But at the same time, this concept goes against the concept of open access” – so how do we find a balance between the two.

The tribal knowledge systems have sustained the test of time showing symbiotic relationships and living the definition of sustainability. This brings about the need to include indigenous knowledge to academia through co-creation, validation, distribution, and diffusion of knowledge.

*Citing an instance from the community that Amrita University works with, Dr Bhavani Rao<sup>8</sup> also shared that the local (illiterate) women, in the region, have uncodified knowledge to understand currency and they use this knowledge to keep track of their monetary transactions. They understand the values of the currencies, they do fractions, they know proportions, mental mathematics, all without any formal training. The knowledge of indigenous people is built and validated over time. We live in an era of disruption – knowledge disruption, climate change, the world is moving faster than the pace at which these communities can adapt. It, therefore, becomes critical to bridge the knowledge system and find a balance between the various streams of knowledge. Knowledge is power – the power of intention, power of knowledge, and power of action.*

In his concluding remarks, the Chair of the Session – Prof. N.V. Varghese emphasised the need for creating demand for actionable, inclusive and transformative knowledge. The democratisation of knowledge happens at different levels. The theory is nothing but a generalisation of practices and practices do not take place in the universities and laboratories, it takes place in the community.

*Dr Reeta Venugopal<sup>9</sup> presented the case study conducted by the students (within their Community-Based Participatory Research elective course) for six months on ‘Bridging Knowledge in Maternal Health Care in Rural Community’. This project was undertaken by the CBPR- Knowledge for Change (K4C) Sangwari Hub at the Pandit Ravi Shankar University, Raipur. Sangwari means “go hand in hand”, using this analogy she said that we believe that the community and the academia must go hand in hand. During this project, the students identified different partners and stakeholders such as Anganwadi workers, para-medical staff, academicians and community members. In consultation with all the stakeholders (such as Pregnant women, women who had recently given birth, husband, mother-in-law, community health workers and traditional birth attendants), they identified the issues related to maternal health – nutrition, delivery, facilities, the distance of health centres, care at homes etc. There was*

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<sup>6</sup> Professor, School of Social Sciences, Christ University, Bengaluru

<sup>7</sup> Founder Director, UNNATI

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO Chair in Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, Amritapuri

<sup>9</sup> Director, Centre for Women's Studies, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur



*an interesting exchange of knowledge between the community and academia using Focussed Group Discussion (FGDs), Arts-based methods. Using these methods, students explored the local practices that have been preserved by the communities through generations in the form of various norms such as diet patterns, hygiene practices, locally prepared food and so on. Through the experience of this project, they understood that the university and community play a complementary role in this process of co-creation of knowledge – they continue to learn new things from each other.*

Even today many of the research universities continue to be elitist in their approach, as a result, the knowledge it produces continues to be elitist because it is not linked to the communities. Therefore, the question is – how do we generate demand for such knowledge? It is important to change the locus of knowledge production and dissemination. In this context, understanding the market processes and knowledge production becomes crucial.

With globalisation, higher education has become a commodity to be placed in the market. In this context, if you see the funding agencies, in many developing countries research is promoted by the funding agencies, therefore they control how a particular issue is defined, they control the methodologies that are deployed in the process of the research, conclusions are drawn even before the research questions are framed – that is the challenge facing the current knowledge generation system. Thus, knowledge democracy emphasises on the demand side of the knowledge generation system must become a priority.

In many parts of the world, community engagement in research is considered non-credible, renowned universities consider community engagement as unreliable as it results in qualitative data and not the preferable empirical data. The other challenge is that we are increasingly focusing on schooling and not learning. Modes of learning are changing but what is not changing is ‘learning’. The biggest crisis in India is this phenomenon of ‘schooling without learning’. The public system is negating learning, and in this light, our NEP 2020 become timely as focuses on ‘learning’ as opposed to schools and universities.





Endorsing the comment on the crisis of ‘schooling without learning, Dr Pankaj Mittal<sup>10</sup> said that NEP 2020 is a step in the right direction as it emphasises on the importance of conceptual understanding, creativity, and critical thinking in the holistic development of students. She reiterated the importance of community engagement in making institutions of higher education socially responsible.

Summing up the discussion, Dr Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay<sup>11</sup>, who was also representing Asia Democratic Research Network (ADRN), said that the discussion seamlessly translates into the core values of the work that ADRN does. He emphasised that the network began to look at the existing/ ongoing research on democracy. All the global democracy indicators are prepared and disseminated by western scholars. ADRN and UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education came together to try to challenge these western world centrality in democracy research – to emphasise that Asia has its own narrative of democracy which is a bottom-up approach. Thereby making a case for the decolonisation of knowledge systems. In this light, it is important that activism and research are well-informed by each other. Most of the research work done on democracy by political scientists have looked at the institutional model or procedural democracy, not necessarily used a bottom-up approach which emphasises participatory and inclusive democracy. ADRN recognises the same, therefore, advocates that the researcher needs to understand and work with the community to deepen democratic values.

#### Annexure 1: Program Design

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
9.45am- 10.00am	Registration & tea
10.00am- 10.15am	Welcome and Setting the Context <b>Dr Rajesh Tandon</b> , Founder- President PRIA & UNESCO Co-Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education
<b>Session: Knowledge Democracy: Mapping the Field</b> <i>Chair: Prof N.V. Varghese, Former Vice Chancellor, N.I.E.P.A. University, Delhi</i>	
10.15am-10.35am	Keynote Address <b>Dr Budd Hall</b> , Professor Emeritus, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria & UNESCO Co-Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education
10.35am- 10.45am	Indigenous and Community Perspectives Dr Sonajharia Minz, Vice Chancellor, Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Jharkhand
10.45am- 11.15am	Open discussion
11.15am- 11.30am	Closing remarks by the Chair
<b>Health break</b>	
<b>Session: Promoting Bridging Practices</b> <i>Chair: Dr Pankaj Mittal, Secretary General, Association of Indian Universities</i>	
11.45am- 12.30pm	Reflections from UNESCO Chairs & Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium <b>Prof Vinod Pavarala</b> , UNESCO Chair on Community Media, University of Hyderabad <b>Prof Reeta Venugopal</b> , Director, Centre for Women’s Studies, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur

<sup>10</sup> Secretary General, Association of Indian Universities

<sup>11</sup> Director, Participatory Research in Asia - PRIA

	<b>Dr Bhavani Rao</b> , UNESCO Chair in Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, Amritapuri <b>Dr Madhura Yadav</b> , Dean, Faculty of Design at Manipal University Jaipur
12.30pm- 12.45pm	Open discussion
12.45pm- 1.00pm	Closing remarks by the Chair
1.00pm- 1.10pm	Key Takeaways – <b>Dr Kaustuv K. Bandyopadhyay</b> , Director, PRIA
<b>Lunch</b>	

Annexure 2: List of Participants

<b>Serial No.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
1	Dr Rajesh Tandon	Participatory Research in Asia
2	Dr Budd Hall	University of Victoria
3	Dr Kaustuv K. Bandyopadhyay	Participatory Research in Asia
4	Dr Anshuman Karol	Participatory Research in Asia
5	Nandita Bhatt	Martha Farrell Foundation
6	Sumitra Srinivasan	Participatory Research in Asia
7	Dr Bhanumati Pilli	Parvatibai Chowgule College, Goa University
8	Joyce Poan	UNESCO New Delhi
9	Dr Amrita Sastry	Jesus and Mary College, Delhi
10	Dr Bhavani Rao	Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham
11	Nilanjana Moitra	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
12	Dr Sonajharia Minz	Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Jharkhand
13	Dr Madhura Yadav	Manipal University Jaipur
14	Dr Reeta Venugopal	Pandit Ravishankar Shukla University
15	Dr Victor Paul	Christ University
16	Prof. Anand Krishnan	All India Institute of Medical Sciences
17	Prof. Jyoti Chandiramani	Symbiosis School of Economics
18	Prof. N. V. Varghese	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
19	Wafa Singh	Former PRIA staff
20	Dr Mousumi Mukherjee	O. P. Jindal Global University
21	Prof. Vinod Pavarala	University of Hyderabad
22	Dr V. Rukmini Rao	Former PRIA Board Member
23	Binoy Acharya	UNNATI
24	Jagadananda	Centre for Youth and Social Development
25	Dr Yogesh Kumar	Samarthan
26	Prof. Aruna Bhardwaj	Sushant University
27	Dr Pankaj Mittal	Association of Indian Universities
28	Joe Madiath	Former PRIA Board Member
29	Sheela Patel	Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centers & PRIA Board Member
30	G Placid	Sahayi

31	Dr Sharmila Soren	Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Jharkhand
32	Dr Sanjeev Sinha	Sido Kanhu Murmu University, Jharkhand
33	Dr Kishore Babu	CHRIST University
34	Prof. A. K. Singh	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
35	Hemanta Padhan	Larambha College Larambha, Bargarh, ODISHA
36	N. Krishnamoorthy	Society for Education, Village Action and Improvement
37	G. Palanithurai	Gandhi Gram University
38	Deo Datta Singh	People's Action for National Integration
39	Mazher Hussain	Confederation of Voluntary Associations Network
40	Mana Mandlekar	Tinka Samajik Sanstha
41	Sandra Joseph	Jesus and Mary College, Delhi
42	Gopal Bhai	Akhil Bharatiya Samaj Sewa Sansthan
43	Prof. Junita Paul	Jesus and Mary College, Delhi
44	Rahima Khatun	Nari-O-Sishu Kalyan Kendra, Howrah
45	Prof. Preetha Sajin	Sushant University
46	Neha S Chaudhry	Participatory Research in Asia
47	Nikita Rakhyani	Participatory Research in Asia
48	Kumari Shradha	Participatory Research in Asia
49	Harshita Umrao	Participatory Research in Asia
50	Meghna Sandhir	Participatory Research in Asia
51	Shruti Priya	Participatory Research in Asia
52	Samiksha Jha	Martha Farrell Foundation
53	Linu Rachel Chacko	Participatory Research in Asia
54	Hannah Fischer	Participatory Research in Asia
55	Gauri Khanna	O. P. Jindal Global University
56	Ms. Geeta Rani Sharma	Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Government Girls Degree College
57	Ravi Prakash Gupta	Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Government Girls Degree College