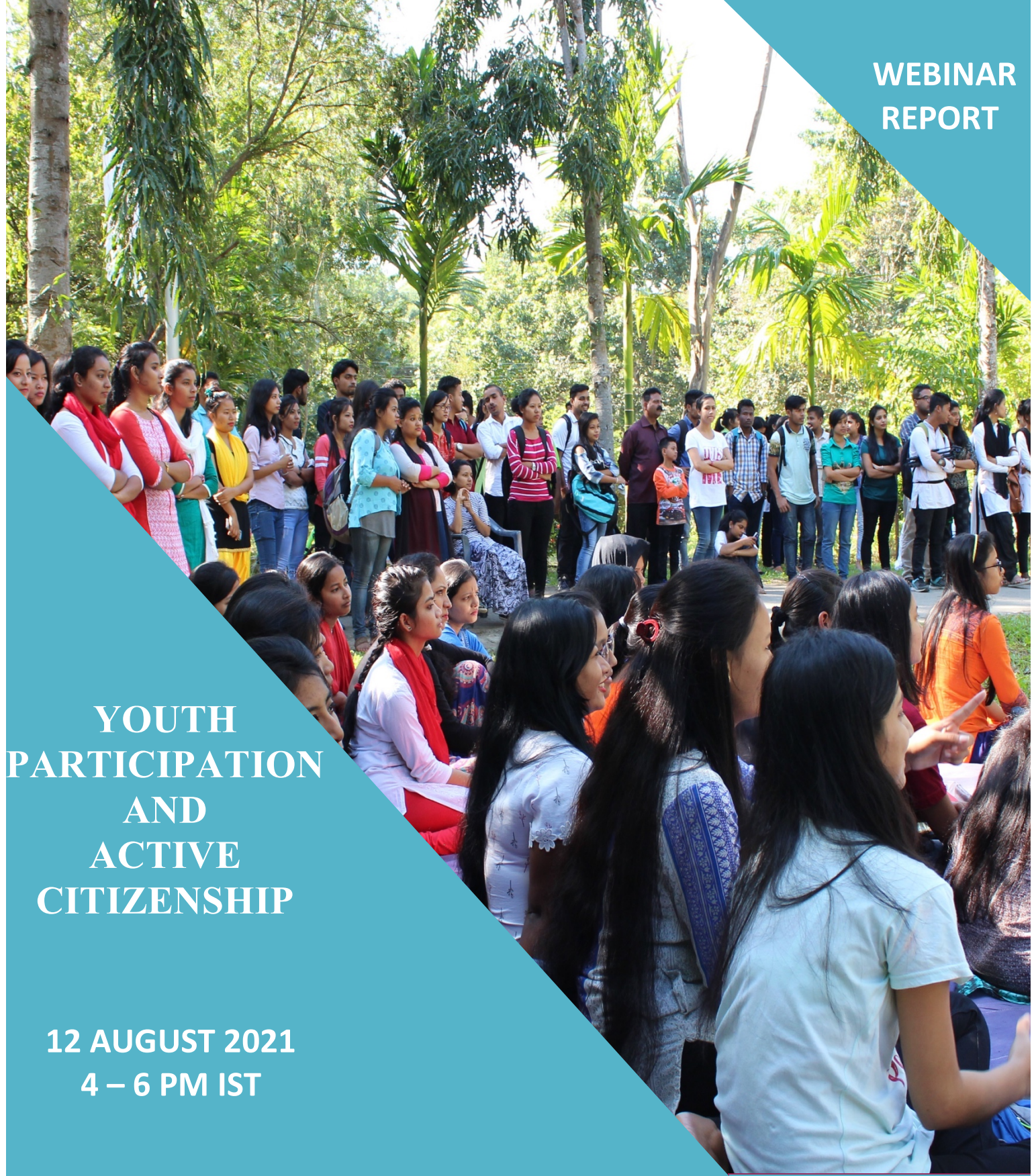


WEBINAR  
REPORT



# YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

12 AUGUST 2021  
4 – 6 PM IST

**PRIA@40**

SHAPING OUR TOMORROWS, TODAY



UNESCO GLOBAL  
YOUTH COMMUNITY



Citizen participation



# CONTENTS

1. Key Takeaways-----	3
2. Speakers' Profile-----	4
3. The Discussion-----	6
4. Programme Design-----	14
5. PRIA@40 Events-----	15

- ***Youth are committed:*** Youth are not apathetic; they are already committed to making change, both in their own lives (individual change) and societal change (in families, communities, institutions), including political change. It is both their responsibility and their right to participate. Commitment to participate is strengthened when young people are not seen as 'beneficiaries' or 'instruments of change' but rather as 'equal partners' (in social change).
- ***Creative methods facilitate participation:*** Enabling, encouraging and energizing youth participation relies on methods and tools of engagement that need to be fun and creative. Arts-based expressions (poetry, drama, drawing, etc.), dialogues and discussions between youth and peers, have been found to be very useful.
- ***Safe spaces promote learning of active citizenship:*** Participation in youth groups, youth associations, and fellowships facilitates learning of active citizenship. Learning requires safe spaces in which youth can participate without judgement. Build youth capacity to design inclusive spaces, take hold of the space, and take the decision on which issues they want to act upon and how to communicate them.
- ***Experiential learning of active citizenship is sustainable:*** Interventions based on learning from everyday experiences of youth, and taking decisions to act in everyday life, have the most sustainable impact. Sensitization becomes a crucial foundation necessary for active citizenship as it helps young people locate themselves within the social structures.
- ***Higher education institutions can play a crucial role in the learning of active citizenship by youth:*** The classroom can become a space for experiential learning of active citizenship. Higher education institutions should recognize and give credits for youth engagement in the real world.

The panellists at the webinar were a mix of development professionals, academics, educators and activists.



**NIKITA RAKHYANI** is a Youth Trainer at PRIA. She is a certified participatory trainer and impact evaluator, with experience of developing and conducting trainings and programs, with youth and adults. She has also conducted primary research with women in rural settings of India.

**SHALINI JHA** is the founder of menstrual awareness campaign, 'Alharh'. She runs this campaign with the support of a vibrant team of about 20 young volunteers from schools and colleges, in Bihar. Shalini wants to work towards ensuring equal access to good menstrual health and hygiene for all menstruators and believes in the power of youth movements to achieve this goal.



**YAPENG OU** is a researcher in rural-urban regeneration, innovation economies, and sustainable development. He is the co-editor of a thematic book on global irrigated rural landscapes. He is a member of the Interim Steering Committee of UNESCO Global Youth Community.

**JUFITRI JOHA** is currently the President of Malaysian Youth Council (MBM). Jufitri is also the Chairman Malaysia for Syria (M4S). Recently he was appointed as the Board Member Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Worker Association (CAYWA) and Corruption Consultative and Preventive Panel of Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC).





**POORNIMA KUMAR** is currently Co-Convener at the Youth Work Resource Centre (YWRC) in Samvada. In her current role she is involved in training youth workers, building knowledge around youth work, networking and youth rights advocacy at a national level.

**ROHIT KUMAR** is the co-founder of Young Leaders for Active Citizenship (YLAC). He is also the founding partner at TQH Consulting. Rohit is a 2013 IPRYLI (India-Pakistan Regional Young Leaders Initiative) fellow with the Asia Society and a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School and IIT Bombay.



**Dr. WILLIAM HERMANN ARREY** is an expert in Democratic Governance, Conflict, Peace and Security issues in Africa. Currently, he is a Senior Lecturer and Chair of the Department of Peace and Development Studies at the Protestant University of Central Africa in Cameroon. Dr. Arrey is also a Senior Research Fellow in Democracy, Governance, Peace and Security at the Nkafu Policy Institute.

**JUAN PABLO RAMIREZ MIRANDA** is the Head of Social and Human Sciences at the UNESCO New Delhi Cluster Office for Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Juan Pablo has worked as a psychologist in research and education in Mexico, Argentina and France. Within UNESCO, he was worked in the Education sector on education for sustainable development and global citizenship, as well as on Social and Human Sciences sector in the field.



**LALITA RAMDAS** currently serves on PRIA's Governing Board. has been active on issues related to literacy, non-formal education and women's empowerment in nationally and internationally. She is a founding member of the Board of Green Peace India. Her early careers in the fields of teaching and broadcasting have been followed by a career in development work through education with marginalized and minority communities, with a special focus on gender and women.

Over the past decade, youth engagement has gained greater attention in national and international policy-making. Given the pressures on youth employment and with the promise of potential demographic dividends, most attention has focused on education, training, and skilling of youth. Entrepreneurship, start-ups, and other economic opportunities have been promoted around the world.

Yet, youth have also been at the forefront of movements for equality, dignity, and justice (especially climate and gender) in many parts of the world. The pandemic has caused major disruptions in their lives. Shifting suddenly, and continuously, to online education, internship, work from home, etc. for the past 18 months has begun to cause widespread physical and mental stress. Nonetheless, the youth have joined and mobilized global efforts at providing COVID-19 related relief, information, medicines, access to health care, vaccination, etc. in their communities and to vulnerable households.

As socially responsible education began to gain attention, national programmes began to include opportunities for youth participation in society while studying at school and college. The Indian government launched the [Unnat Bharat Abhiyan](#) (UBA) initiative in 2016 to involve students to find solutions for the socio-economic development of poor rural communities. India's ambitious New Education Policy 2020 includes learning 'global citizenship' to empower students to become aware of and understand global issues and become active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable societies.

As official policy-making focused on youth participation to serve society, PRIA launched its [Youth-n-Democracy](#) initiative on its 35th birthday in February 2017. PRIA's focus is on promoting the learning of values and principles of democracy in everyday life and become active citizens – by supporting youth to learn about one's own identity and attitudes towards dissimilar others, about valuing other's knowledge and experiences, and learning to appreciate the diversity of perspectives, opinions, and actions. And, lastly, become willing to contribute to the democratic functioning of families, communities, and society throughout their adult lives.

Learning to become active citizens, therefore, is about acting in solidarity with fellow citizens and communities, offering mutual support with respect, and participating in amplifying voices and actions towards equality, dignity, justice, and sustainability. In the process, we discovered many other initiatives in India and beyond where youth are learning and practicing active citizenship in everyday life.

Recognizing significance of youth participation in actively engaging with and contributing to societal challenges, UNESCO promotes an initiative [Global Citizenship Education](#) (GCED) of youth taking active roles to contribute to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, and sustainable world. Likewise, United Nations Volunteers

(UNV) has invited youth to volunteer for ‘service to society’. **The UNESCO Global Youth Community** launched the “Y-Action” initiative in 2020 to raise awareness of and highlight the response of youth-led organizations globally to the COVID-19 crisis through a series of short videos. This global initiative is aimed to inspire, encourage and mobilize youth-led groups worldwide to contribute to the global fight against the COVID-19 by promoting experience sharing, peer learning, and collaborative actions.

In its fortieth year, PRIA is preparing to ‘re-tool’ for its future contributions, nationally and internationally, in the aftermath of the pandemic and its widespread effects. Between August and December 2021, PRIA will be convening conversations with partners, associates, supporters, experts, investors and colleagues, drawn from civil society, government, business, media and academia, to share ideas and experiences that can help ‘re-imagine’ PRIA, its interventions and the world in the coming period.

As part of these [PRIA@40 Conversations](#), PRIA organized a symposium [Youth Participation and Active Citizenship](#) in collaboration with [UNESCO New Delhi Cluster Office](#) and [UNESCO Global Youth Community \(GYC\)](#) on International Youth Day (August 12, 2021) to explore strategies for learning active citizenship through youth participation that can be further encouraged.

The webinar, attended by 99 participants, was co-moderated by Nikita Rakhyani (PRIA), Samiksha Jha (PRIA) and Milouda Bouichou (UNESCO GYC).

The webinar began with a short presentation by Nikita Rakhyani on PRIA’s participatory research approach, its theory of change and how it has been applied in different thematic areas over 40 years. This was followed by a presentation by Samiksha Jha giving an overview of PRIA’s efforts in promoting and reimagining participation. She said, ‘PRIA’s approach utilizes the Gandhian principle of learning from experience of everyday life to support peoples’ agency’. PRIA’s effort at promoting participation has resulted in mainstreaming participation in the policies of international agencies like UNDP, World Bank, and in the programs of India’s national ministries, which included detailed guidelines for the participation of targeted groups as primary stakeholders in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes. To know more about PRIA’s work on promoting participation, click [here](#).

The presentations about PRIA’s work was followed by a presentation by Mirwais Wafa. Mirwais is the chairman and member of Interim Steering Committee of UNESCO Global Youth Community (GYC). He gave an overview of GYC and its various initiatives towards strengthening youth participation. He said, ‘GYC is the first youth-led and designed platform of UNESCO since 1998. This initiative emerged during the 11th UNESCO Youth Forum (November 2019) where 75 young people, from all regions of the world and leading ground-breaking change in their countries

and communities in UNESCO's domains, gathered to discuss the best strategies to improve youth engagement with support from UNESCO. They created the UNESCO Global Youth Community'. To know more, click [here](#).

The webinar focused on the following questions:

1. What practical methods and tools are being deployed in different efforts to promote active citizenship amongst youth?
2. What principles and strategies can support the wider promotion of active citizenship of youth in everyday life?

While presenting the work that the panellists are doing to promote youth participation and facilitate the learning of active citizenship by youth, they shared their insights on the first question.

**Nikita Rakhyani (Youth Trainer at PRIA)** was the first panelist. 'A lot of people associate democracy with politics, parliament or elections but as an aware and active citizen we make democracy function in different ways', she said. To practice democracy in everyday life one needs to listen, respect and value different opinions and views. It is also important to encourage conversations and facilitate agreements to be at work and live together despite differences. Lastly, one needs to constantly question one's own attitude towards opinions and views of others. This learning of the principles and practice of democracy in everyday life is at the core of PRIA's [Youth-n-Democracy](#) (YnD) fellowship programme, which engages with young people studying in colleges and universities in India. The programme focuses on developing their understanding of 'self and identity', and their position in society, and teaches the fellows participatory research skills to undertake a social action project through which they attempt to influence an individual and community to adopt the principles and values of democracy in everyday life. In the facilitation of learning by the YnD Fellows, Nikita's experience highlights the importance of *creating a safe space*, i.e., a space where people respect each other's opinion, where they can agree to disagree, where they actually experience diversity, and where they learn about different cultures identities. These safe spaces must have *freedom of expression* at its centre, i.e., giving youth the space to express themselves in forms and methods they like best, be it poetry, arts, dance, sports, social media, and so on. The ultimate idea is to enable them to *take ownership* by mentoring them and building their capacities to choose the issues and community that they want to engage with.

*“democracy is a very personal idea”*

Building on the idea of 'taking ownership and self-expression', **Rohit Kumar (Co-founder YLAC)** said, 'We must *make our engagements fun, creative, inspirational and focus on experiential learning*'. The choice of method and engagement, however, would also depend on the age group of the youth one is targeting. An



important strategy to engage youth is to ‘*build empathy without being preachy*’. Rohit concluded his presentation by stressing that such interventions take time to blossom, and YLAC’s work has shown that over time they do produce sustainable results.

*“seed the idea of empathy with youth, it blossoms over time.”*

Endorsing ‘the idea of experiential learning’, **Shalini Jha (Founder of Alharh)** stated that we need *innovative strategies to connect with the community* that we want to engage with. In this context, knowledge generation and capacity building through *connecting and collaborating with other organizations* becomes critical. Once the young people are capacitated enough to act on issues, we must provide them a space for self-expression that they require to be able to lead. *Promotion of self-expression and leadership* is imperative to make sure that the young have an equal chance, to gauge their reactions and enable collaborative decision-making process. Shalini concluded by saying that among other strategies, the use of social media has given tremendous results in enhancing youth participation.

*“collaboration in decision making engages youth”*

**Jufitri Joha (President of Malaysian Youth Council)** took the discussion forward by sharing the experience of building *youth associations*, as a significant strategy in Malaysia to build youth participation. In Malaysia, youth associations are inclusive and establishing and promoting *these association have given the youth a platform to network*. Every two years, young people are given a chance to be elected in to the national Parliament as ‘youth parliamentarian’ to raise their issues, their grievances and their ideas in front of ministers and other parliamentarians. He stressed that the results achieved by the youth associations and building of a youth network has been made possible by engaging professional youth workers – to *guide, enable and unleash the potential of Malaysia’s youth to actively engage* with society.

*“inclusive youth associations are spaces for engagement”*

Re-emphasizing the importance of informal dialogues to generate an understanding of ‘self and identity’, **Poornima Kumar (Co- convener at Samvada)** stressed that we must not perceive young people as ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘instruments’ of change rather see them as equal partners in social change. She said, ‘Our approach must be rooted within a youth rights and responsibilities framework where active citizenship through participation in democratic processes and decision making is a youth right as well as a responsibility’. *Sensitisation becomes a crucial foundation for active citizenship* as it also helps young people to locate themselves within the social structures. In order to enable them to explore their aspirations and career dreams, we must also *focus on their empowerment and livelihood planning*. The youth must explore what it means

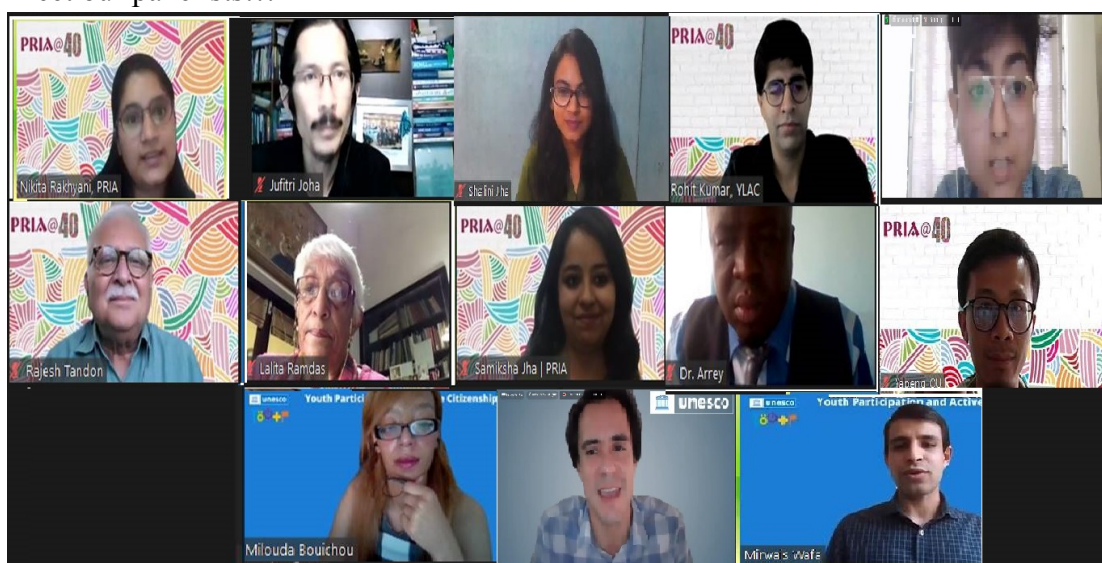
to be a youth leader and *learn leadership skills* to be able to negotiate with various stakeholders, such as within their families, in educational institutions, at the workplace as well as with the state, to contribute towards social change. She concluded by saying that in Samvada’s work the *three strategies – sensitisation, livelihood planning and learning leadership skills – are weaved together by the process of mentoring.*

*“believe in ‘youth development’ and not ‘youth for development”*

**Yapeng Ou (Member of Interim Steering Committee, UNESCO GYC)** said, ‘GYC’s key commitment has been to build and harbor youth led knowledge generation. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, youth action around the world have demonstrated active citizenship by generating rich knowledge and innovative solutions during the crisis’. GYC recognizes global citizens as key actors in social transformation. Therefore, *we must act with sincerity when we engage with youth.* We must use *contextualised and differentiated methods* – youth can be physically, differently located but they need a common space to get to know each other better, build mutual understanding, dialogue and feel a sense of community. A *politically responsible and critical platform for dialogue, advocacy and supportive policies* are important to mainstream youth participation. In this context, he also stressed on the importance of *establishing spontaneous response (both formal and informal) mechanism, building youth digital literacy platform, promoting multi stakeholder partnership and a cross sectoral – multidisciplinary approach.*

*“digital platforms can harness youth participation”*

Meet our panelists...



[From top left to right: Nikita Rakhyani, Jufitri Joha, Shalini Jha, Rohit Kumar, Poornima Kumar, Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Lalita Ramdas, Samiksha Jha, Dr. William Arrey, Yapeng Ou, Milouda Bouichou, Juan Pablo, Mirwais Wafa]



**Dr. William Arrey’s (Chair of the Department of Peace and Development Studies at the Protestant University of Central Africa in Cameroon)** reflections centred on the role of higher education institutions in promoting the learning of active citizenship. As a professor, he uses the strategy of *democratising the classroom*, giving opportunities to students to raise their concerns and to participate in the teaching/ learning process. It’s imperative to *put youth at the centre of the decision-making process* and the collaboration between the leaders, the government and the citizens. We must remember to *not impose programs on youth*, but play a supportive role when we work with them in order for them to be more effective. He reiterated the significance of a *‘rights-based’ approach* so that the youth can positively fight for their rights. *Citizens must not be seen as ‘customers or passive recipients’ but as ‘active citizens’*. Young people need to know that they are collaborating with leaders who are transparent, and accountable to them. Dr. Arrey concluded by saying, ‘Active youth participation is the lifeline of democratic government and development because *youth are the engines of change in every continent*. Therefore, their active participation is very important in every governance and development process’.

*“classrooms need to be democratic spaces”*

**Juan Pablo (Head of Social and Human Sciences at the UNESCO New Delhi Cluster Office)** shared a message from the Director-General of UNESCO – **Audrey Azoulay**:

*“the pandemic has been not only a major crisis for the world but particularly for the young people because of job losses. Youth employment fell by 8.7% in 2020 compare to 3.7% as before the pandemic. This of course has mental health crisis for young people and other consequences which will last for many years. On this International Youth Day, UNESCO’s main message is to invite young people to continue to engage and invite all civil society organizations to tap into the immense potential of the unique, productive and incredibly capable youth.”*

Juan said that we need to change our view that young people are the ‘future’ because *young people are really the ‘present’*. They should be capacitated enough to become decision makers and be given the space that would make them an active part of their society. The strategy is to *trust them to be at the steering wheel* – think of them as equal partners capable enough to generate actions and strive for social change. *Empowering young people on actions for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* is important. As part of the SDGs, everything begins with ‘education’ and SDG4 emphasizes the importance of ‘global citizenship’ and ‘education’. When we talk about youth led action, global citizenship and education, *providing young people with the skills and the necessary knowledge to engage as global actors* is of utmost importance.

*“local and global are connected”*

**Lalita Ramdas (Member of PRIA’s Governing Board)** emphasized on ‘education’ as the primary strategy towards strengthening participation. She also pointed out that while ‘democratizing the classroom’ is important, given the realities, this is easier

said than done. She said, “*We need a radical re- examination and redesigning of the content of education* especially in the context of understanding the concept of citizenship, democracy and our constitution”. Speaking of rapid spread of digital technology, she said that we need to *look at the fundamental inequities, hierarchies and the disparities in the economic, social, political spaces, which enter and get reflected in digital spaces*. For instance, with schooling and education having gone largely online due to the pandemic, we have witnessed that it has isolated and disempowered a large section of those young people who do not have access to digital technology. So, it becomes all the more critical to *challenge the entire structure of education*. The decision makers need to bridge these gaps so that these millions of young people can become a part of this process.

Bringing gender disparity into the discussion, she applauded the continuous efforts of her dear friend – Dr. Martha Farrell, who had put gender and sexual harassment at the centre of the work that PRIA does. We cannot do enough to promote active citizenship unless we *address this particular problem which has to start with giving women the freedom to speak within her home and family and therefore be able to exercise their right of citizenship*. The need of the hour is to convince the decision makers at the policy level that we need to address this deeply rooted and entrenched patriarchy. We *need to not just work with young people but also with parents, communities, and religious leaders* who are very often the ones who perpetuate these disparities. Further, we need *to come together to address the issue of dissent and sedition* in today’s context (especially the past two years) where young people have been at the receiving end of draconian treatment by the government in power.

She concluded by *recalling the idea of the Rainbow Warriors* – whenever there is a crisis in humanity, it is the young people who have come together to lead the kind of change in lifestyle, policies, and the kind of development we want, to actually make it a different world. She concluded, ‘We were earlier taught to *“think local and act global”*, but the time has now come to *think global and take action locally*’.

*“we live under the shadow of patriarchy”*

**Dr. Rajesh Tandon (Founder-President of PRIA)** in his concluding remarks said that the essence of citizenship is to appreciate differences and disagreements; to tolerate, stomach, and play with different perspectives and opinions. He believes that people of his generation and institutions headed by people like him, including in government and academic institutions, are the obstacles in the way of authentic youth engagement and learning of active citizenship. He emphasised on the importance of the role higher education institutions play in recognizing engagement of the youth with the real world and in their learning of active citizenship. He concluded by saying, ‘*One has to create one’s own space, nobody is going to give it to you*’.

*“disagreement with dissimilar other can be enjoyable”*

The webinar ended with a vote of thanks by Nikita Rakhyani.

## ***4.00 pm to 4.10 pm***

Welcome and Introduction to PRIA@40

Moderators: Nikita Rakhyani and Samiksha Jha from PRIA

## ***4.10 pm to 4.15 pm***

Overview of UNESCO Global Youth Community

Mirwais Wafa

## ***4.15 pm to 4.45 pm***

Presentations

- Nikita Rakhyani, Youth Trainer, Participatory Research in Asia, India
- Rohit Kumar, Co-founder, Young Leaders for Active Citizenship, India
- Shalini Jha, Founder, Alharh, India
- Jufitri Joha, President, Malaysian Youth Council, Malaysia
- Poornima Kumar, Co-Convener, Youth Work Resource Centre, Samvada, India
- Yapeng Ou, Member, Interim Steering Committee, UNESCO Global Youth Community

## ***4.45 pm to 5.10 pm***

Open Discussion with the Participants

Facilitated by Nikita Rakhyani and Milouda Bouichou

## ***5.10 pm to 5.35 pm***

Deep Dive Conversation with the Discussants

- Dr. William Hermann Arrey, Senior Lecturer and Chair, Department of Peace and Development Studies, Protestant University of Central Africa, Yaounde, Cameroon
- Lalita Ramdas, Educator and Activist, Governing Board Member, Participatory Research in Asia, India
- Juan Pablo Ramírez Miranda, Head, Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO New Delhi

## ***5.35 pm to 5.45 pm***

Key Takeaways

Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder- President, Participatory Research in Asia, India

## ***5.45 pm to 6 pm***

Vote of thanks and closure

Nikita Rakhyani

# PRIA@40 EVENTS

<b>DATE</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>THEME</b>
12 August 2021	Youth Participation and Active Citizenship	Citizen Participation
20 August 2021	Planning for Urban Informalities	Sustainable Urban Future
31 August 2021	Accelerating Capacities in Civil Society and Non-Profits	Empowering Civil Society