

REPORT

*SAMVAD*  
CONVERSATION

TRAJECTORIES OF  
PARTICIPATION:  
FROM  
DEVELOPMENT  
TO GOVERNANCE

12 OCTOBER 2021

5 – 7 PM

**PRIA@40**  
SHAPING OUR TOMORROWS, TODAY

/// Participedia

**PRAXIS**



Citizen participation

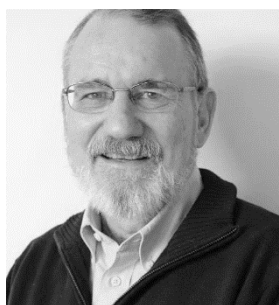


# CONTENTS

Key Take-Aways -----	02
Profile of the Panellists -----	03
Keynote Address by Prof. John Gaventa -----	05
The Conversation (SAMVAD) -----	09
Programme Design -----	16
PRIA@40 Events -----	17

# KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- ⊕ **Link participation to human rights** – In a time of democratic recession, we need to link participation to human rights as it is the only way to protect human rights and ensure meaningful participation.
- ⊕ **Strengthen spaces for change** – Even when civic spaces are shrinking under authoritarianism, people have always found a way to participate. So, we need to find and strengthen those spaces to bring about change.
- ⊕ **Inter-relation between learning, knowledge and participation** – People have participated based on available information so there should be a triad of learning, knowledge and participation to transform relations of power.
- ⊕ **Bring together multiple thoughts and voices** – Many civil society organisations promote only one school of participatory thought. So, there is a need to stitch a coalition of multiple voices and thoughts where all kinds of participation are appreciated



**Prof. John Gaventa**, Research Fellow and Director, Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) Programme, Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex is a researcher, educator and civil society practitioner. He has written and worked extensively on issues of citizenship and citizen engagement, power and participation, and governance and accountability around the world.

**Mr. Tom Thomas**, CEO, PRAXIS – Institute for Participatory Practices, has close to three decades of experience in the development sector. Tom is also the convener of Corporate Responsibility Watch, a coalition of organisations and individuals tracking responsible business in India. He is also a member of several national and international civil society coalitions furthering the idea and praxis of community participation as well as responsible business



**Prof. Bonny Ibhawoh**, Director, Centre for Human Rights and Restorative Justice at McMaster University, Canada and Project Director, Participedia teaches Human Rights History and African History in the Department of History and the Centre for Peace Studies. He also teaches in the McMaster Arts & Science Program and the Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition. His research interests are global human rights, peace/conflict studies, legal and imperial history

**Mr. Apoorva Ozha**, Chief Executive, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, India is a mechanical engineer with a diploma in rural management. Besides his work with AKRSPI, Mr. Ozha is actively involved in founding and supporting NGOs and NGO networks as well as influencing government policy. He is also interested in supporting initiatives that address the human resource needs of rural India



**Dr. Thamy Pogrebinschi** is a senior researcher at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center and a faculty member of the Berlin Graduate School of Social Sciences at the Humboldt University in Berlin. She has founded and coordinated the LATINNO (Innovations for Democracy in Latin America) Project, which has built a database comprising over 3,700 cases of democratic innovations in 18 countries of Latin America

# PROFILE OF THE PANEILLISTS



**Mr. Ashok Kumar Singh** is the Founder Director of a Lucknow-based organisation called Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK) which plays the role of regional level support organisation providing training and OD support to grassroot level CSOs of UP and Bihar. SSK has been providing such support to a large number of grassroot level CSOs and promotes participatory philosophy of development in training, research, planning, etc.

**Ms. Rebecca (Beckie) Malay**, Treasurer of the Board of Trustees of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement is the Director of Advocacy and Development Cooperation. Beckie's work in the last 30 years is rooted in the practice of sustainable development by communities organised and nurtured by PRRM through its integrated programmes on sustainable agriculture, coastal resource management, primary health, climate change, social enterprises, and advocacy at the local, national and international arenas.



**Dr. Rajesh Tandon**, Founder President, Participatory Research in Asia, India, is currently a UNESCO Co-Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibilities in Higher Education. He serves as chairperson of the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research (GACER) network, which facilitates the sharing of knowledge and information worldwide to further community-based research and has also served as an Advisor to the Commonwealth Foundation, UNDP, and numerous other international agencies.

**Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay** is the Director of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India. For more than 30 years he has been working on citizen participation in urban and rural contexts. He is an internationally acclaimed researcher, trainer, and facilitator of organisation development and participatory planning, monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment. Currently, he is the Co-Coordinator of Asia Democracy Research Networks (ADRN) and serves on the Governing Council of Asia Democracy Network (ADN).



## I. The historical moment and the mission.

The impulse for popular participation – to have a voice in shaping our lives and futures – is age-old. But to understand how this unfolded in PRIA's work, we must remember the historical moment in which PRIA was founded forty years ago. In the late 1970s and early 1980's the emerging demand for popular participation in the development field was a strong one, fuelled by statements from the FAO, WHO and other UN agencies, building on an agenda of the right to development, and coming on the heels of national liberation movements in many countries.

We can already see how that moment is so different from the one in which we find ourselves today. Proponents of participation at the time built on the work of Paulo Freire and others, calling for the strengthening of popular knowledge as well as for popular participation. This dual agenda – of strengthening and recovering people's knowledge to strengthen people's voices and power in decisions affecting their lives – has been at the core of PRIA's mission now for over four decades.

## II. Shifting meanings and changing terrain

While this has been its mission, over the years, the meanings of participation and the focus on where and how to make it happen have constantly shifted in both development and democratic discourse. PRIA's work has often shifted with these changes as well, and indeed sometimes contributing ahead of the curve to make the change happen. We will look quickly at five different meanings.

- a. **Participation from below: as the demands of the excluded** – In its early days, popular participation was often seen as a process through which those who had been excluded from key decisions affecting their lives asserted their demands for inclusion. In this view, participation is about challenging power (e.g., increasing control). It sees participation as more than a consultation with random individuals or loosely defined communities. Rather it sees the participation of the excluded as realising power through *organised* groups and social movements, which have the awareness and capacity therefore to articulate and negotiate their demands. PRIA's early work with forest dwellers in the early 80's to help them gain their control over their resources or its efforts at the social mobilisation of rural women, utilising both Gandhian and Freirean principles of learning from everyday life, to build confidence in their knowledge and agency, perhaps reflected this meaning.
- b. **Participation as involvement of 'beneficiaries' and 'users' of development projects** – During the 1980s and 1990s, we saw participation rapidly become an ingredient of more formalised development projects, rather than part of grassroots mobilisation. We also saw the rapid growth of both national and international NGOs as development actors, who adopted participation as a principle to be used in project delivery, supported by a raft of new participatory methods and approaches. This was sectoral programmes, such as water, health, irrigation, etc., where participation often took the form of users' committees, which could help target and deliver services to those who needed them the most. While opening up space for peoples' knowledge and involvement in development planning and implementation, this beneficiary approach still often positioned people more passively as 'users and choosers' in externally defined and led initiatives rather than as 'makers and shapers' of their policies, programmes or futures. Again PRIA responded, throughout the 90's holding schools for participation, helping NGOs and other actors understand its more radical historical roots, the tools and approaches which could be used, and trying to hold on to concepts of participation as a tool for transforming

power, not only for implementing development projects. I remember well-being part of many of these schools with Namrata Jaitli and others.

- c. **Participation as 'stakeholder' involvement** – During the 1990s, with the mainstreaming of participation in large-scale development programmes terms like the 'excluded' or 'beneficiary' began to give way in mainstream development discourse to more neutral terms such as 'stakeholder'. In 1994 World Bank Participation Learning Group after considerable discussion arrived at the following definition: ....*Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.* (World Bank 1994). While this created space and support for participatory processes at very high levels, the term stakeholder was ambiguous - no longer meaning the excluded, but also meaning private sector, government, large NGOs or other powerful actors. As a member and leader of the Civil Society Working Group on the World Bank, PRIA fought to create these spaces, but also to modify this language to include 'primary stakeholders', to privilege the knowledge and participation of the poor or those at the grassroots levels in these processes. I have vivid memories of a large civil society gathering in the World Bank in Washington where Rajesh delivered an impassioned call for more robust meanings of participation to James Wolfensohn, World Bank President at the time, and other Bank officials. Working with NGOs around the world, PRIA was a leader in these global debates about scaling up participation, while also holding on to its more progressive meanings.
- d. **Participation as Exercising the Rights of Citizenship** – While much of this work on participation was in the development arena, we also must remember that participation is also a democratic right, linked to concepts of citizenship and deepening forms of democratic governance. In the 1990s in many countries, including India, democratic decentralisation opened new spaces for citizen engagement. In this context it was perhaps natural that the demand for participation in development processes should also lead to the demand for participation in governance processes, giving rise to new concepts and discourses of participatory governance and participatory citizenship. Again PRIA played a key role through its work on deepening participation, especially of women and Dalits in the Panchayati raj institutions, where a key constitutional amendment created new spaces for their voice and presence. PRIA was part of LogoLink, a global network to develop learning on participatory governance. At that time we also worked together for a decade on a programme focusing on Citizenship and Participation, where PRIA's work on the rights of migrant workers within India, or the struggles around natural resources in Jharkhand provided critical inputs to our global debates.
- e. **Participation, Transparency and Accountability** – By the early 2000's much of the attention for how citizens could engage in policies that affected their lives shifted to a focus on how to hold institutions to account for the implementations of such policies. In other words, the emphasis shifted downstream, moving away from participatory ways of agenda-setting, to focusing on accountability of leaders and institutions to meet development and democratic goals. Aided by demands for transparency of information, the accountability agenda once again fuelled new participatory innovations in what became known as social accountability. And here again, PRIA played a key role, with new programmes for social accountability in Cambodia and Bangladesh, as well as in its work on democratic engagement in urban governance, now a key issue in India's growing cities.

### III. Lessons and principles

This is just a very high-level gallop across what is in practice a very rich and nuanced history – and a lot of PRIA's work has not been fully covered. But across these changing meanings and programmes over the last four decades, much has been learned. In particular, we have learned that while participation can be used as an approach for exercising voice and accountability, protecting and demanding rights, and deepening democratic institutions, it is not a panacea. It is also easily subject to misuse and co-optation. It can be used as a tool for placation, be reduced to a checkbox of tools, or endless forms of consultation that lead to little change, what one writer has called 'participatory disempowerment'. Understandably a certain weariness or scepticism about the term has set in many quarters.

And yet, PRIA's goal and focus has always been to achieve **meaningful** participation, and to realise this we have learned at least four key lessons:

**First**, participation is about inclusion – especially of marginalised voices. PRIA's commitment to strengthening women's voices, whether in the panchayats or over issues of sexual harassment in the workplace, as well its work over the last 10 years on listening to and supporting youth voices such as in its Youth and Democracy programme are part of this theme.

**Secondly**, participation is about power – for participation to be transformative in people's lives, it must also involve participation in decisions that shift power and control over resources.

**Third**, participation occurs in many spaces – through people's popular struggles as well as invited spaces of consultation and deliberation. It is about organised and collective efforts, not only about listening to individual voices, or the rapidly emerging trend to clicktivism through online polling and the like.

**Finally**, participation is about learning, building awareness, what Freire would call 'conscientisation' – in most situations of high inequality and exclusion we cannot take for granted that participation of active aware citizens is a starting point – rather participation, especially of the powerless, is a way to build that consciousness, to discover a sense of rights and agency, and to strengthen the skills and networks which help people learn to **become** more active, aware and empowered.

With these principles in mind, huge gains have been made in deepening the quality, scope and depth of participation in multiple spaces and issues around the world. In addition to PRIA, I am very pleased, for instance, to be sharing the panel with PRAXIS, which has pioneered the uses and applications of meaningful tools for participation and trained thousands of activists in their use. And with Participedia, which has documented and catalogued several thousands of innovations in participatory governance that have emerged in recent decades.

### IV. The current moment

But while we want to celebrate this work and accomplishment, we also need to recognise that the historical moment in which we now live is very different from when PRIA was founded. And when we do so, the picture for participation is very sobering.

- Unlike 40 years ago, when the world was at the beginning of several decades of democratic spread and deepening, we are now in a period of democratic recession, growing authoritarianism, and with-it closing space for civic engagement. Recent research by Civicus shows that now 87% of the world's population lives in countries where civic space rated as closed, repressed, or obstructed, and slightly less than 4% in so-called 'open societies' where we might expect participation to be the greatest.



- Despite decades of work for gender equity and inclusion, we also see around the world backlash against women's rights, both in the public sphere, as well as in the household. Such ongoing or increasing violence against women and sexual harassment serves to limit our hopes of inclusion.
- Despite decades of work on participation, the world is more and more unequal. The huge rise in economic inequality, within and across countries, means that economic power can often 'trump' political or societal power.
- After decades of work on strengthening people's knowledge, we now live in a world where misinformation seems as much as a basis of action as truth, spread all the more rapidly through online sources, and manipulated by powerful to their interests. This fundamentally challenges our core ideas about what authentic popular knowledge is and whose knowledge is used as a basis for action towards deepening development and democracy.
- And finally, with growing inequality, our societies are also deeply polarised, divided more and more by old divides of race, caste, religion, ethnicity, and class, as well as new ones, such as the 'masked' and the 'unmasked'. We face challenges not only of strengthening the participation of the excluded against the powerful but also of how to use participation to challenge the polarisation within and across the vast members of the excluded themselves.

Each of these challenges gives rise to a new agenda for participation:

- Of not only how to develop new democratic innovations, but how to protect those that we have and fight back against democratic recession and backlash;
- Of how to gain more democratic control over economic as well as social and political institutions and resources;
- Of how-to re-assert what we mean by popular knowledge, based on reflection and deep systemisation of experience, as opposed to opinions and misinformation fanned by powerful interests;
- And of how to use participation to work across polarised groups and against increased polarisation.

In dealing with these challenges, we are buoyed as ever by the fact that in all of these areas, there are already strong popular struggles, initiatives, alliances, and coalitions committed to a more just and participatory world. And in working with them, the core principles and lessons that launched PRIA's work on participation remain true:

- That it is about full inclusion and about transforming power at every level, from the household to the global,
- And that it is achieved through collective action and coalition, built on mutual respect and interest.
- And that it is built not through recipes from above, but a process of social learning and reflection, deeply grounded in people's experience and knowledge.

As the issues, moments, and meanings of participation continue to evolve in this new era, PRIA's work will also continue to change. But with these core principles in mind, we have a strong compass to navigate the turbulent waters ahead.

***"participation is a way to bring 'power' into the word 'empowerment'"***

- By Prof. John Gaventa

As Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) completes its 40 years, it recommits to continue institutional strengthening and capacity development support to civil society and non-profits with a special focus on new-generation civil society and non-profit groups. Between August and December 2021, PRIA will be convening [PRIA@40 Conversations](#) with communities, 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.

In this context, PRIA convened a conversation (samvad) on [Trajectories of Participation: From Development to Governance](#) on 12 October 2021 in collaboration with [Participedia](#) and [Praxis](#). The virtual conversation was bilingual – English and Hindi and was simultaneously being translated during the conversation. The conversation (samvad), attended by 72 participants, was moderated by **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder- President, PRIA).

The conversation (samvad) explored the following questions:

- How does the balance sheet of critical appraisal of participation of the excluded in claiming their rights over the past five decades look like?
- What strategies of promoting inclusive participation in development programming were effective in integrating participation in governance?
- What insights can be relevant for re-claiming participation, both in theory and practice, in post-pandemic democratic recovery?

The conversation (samvad) began with a short presentation by **Ms. Samiksha Jha** (Program Officer, Martha Farrell Foundation) on PRIA's journey of 40 years – a journey about sustaining an independent, forward-looking and energetic civil society organisation. PRIA's role has been that of an educator and facilitator. PRIA has supported individuals, organisations and grassroots initiatives to learn, change, grow and sustain themselves. Next, **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder- President, PRIA) spoke about PRIA's work on the theme of Citizen Participation. PRIA began with the social mobilisation of rural women anchored in the education programme because we realised that collectivisation and learning were required for empowerment. If sustainable development has to happen then the relations of power need to be confronted and changed. In order to improve planning and monitoring, we focussed on promoting accountability. To know more about PRIA's work on the theme of citizen participation, click [here](#).

After his presentation, **Dr. Tandon** invited the panellists to share their reflections on the questions mentioned above.

**Mr. Tom Thomas** (CEO, PRAXIS) began the discussion by highlighting the metamorphosis of political voluntary sector into a sanitised and depoliticised NGO. He said that the '*development sector*' has been dependent not so much on people's power but on donor power over the years'. Consequently, the voluntary sector will soon be available on Social Stock Exchange, to be bought as a commodity. We need to look at participatory development from three perspectives: from the perspective of rights, sustainability and knowledge creation. The creation of knowledge should be around the idea that the marginalised communities know their realities better than many others and therefore their active participation is crucial. These perspectives are important in imagining a holistic development. While we have made significant strides in knowledge creation, we have not been able to do much in promoting participation as a right. The failure in ensuring participation as a fundamental right of people

and for deepening democracy lies both in the external and internal fault lines. Even as we have progressed, on some of the development indicators, we continue to be a patriarchal society that neither values nor encourages participation. We are a country of logical decision-making and not dialogical decision-making.

In the 1990s, we approached participatory development as a panacea to depoliticise our work which had begun to be tied up to budget lines of donors and governments. Referring to Evgeny Morozov's book *To Save Everything, Click Here*, he stated that participation and participatory tools were used as a '*To Save Everything, Click Here*' approach. We are still in the stage of exploration which continues to be elusive, given our internal fault lines. We must acknowledge and look at that fault lines to make the corrections that are possible.

However, we have managed to make significant strides, particularly in knowledge creation, which is not any less important. Through the use of participatory development methodologies and models, we have made irrefutable contributions to how development is viewed, discussed and planned today. It's also true that most marginalised groups have been made visible through these efforts be it women, children, elderly, differently abled and so on; their desegregation and their different needs/ aspirations are here to stay in the knowledge pool of development discourse and policy making. We have also made reasonable strides in instilling the idea that there is a need for participation of communities for the sustainability of programmes, where the interest of the powerful is not too overpowering. Moreover, the pandemic has also shown us that we have multiple roles to play. It would be imprudent to stay put in our comfort zone. He concluded, '*We are at a junction where we need to do a critical evaluation in terms of our roles, boundaries and choices*'.

***“knowledge creation around the reality of the excluded is important for participation”***

Reiterating **Prof. Gaventa's** comment on looking at participation as inclusion; as human rights; as a transformation of power and as transparency and accountability, **Prof. Bonny Ibhawoh** (Director, Participedia) said, '*In Participedia, we aim to incorporate all these four dimensions of participation*'. It's a crowd-sourced platform of researchers, activists and practitioners who are interested in democratic participation. Participedia is about seven years old and currently, it's in the second phase of its operation. It gives a platform to the practitioners to capture the development of participatory processes in real-time.

He emphasised the important role that local organisations play in generating the data for those who research participation. In the absence of such data, it would be very difficult to map the trends in participatory democracy. Transparency and accountability is the biggest challenge in the context of participatory development. Lately, Participedia has been facing certain challenges by virtue of being a crowd-sourced platform. It has been accused of furthering the state's propaganda. So, it is imperative to find a regulatory mechanism to make the process balanced to make sure that the available information meets some basic standards, especially in today's context of fake news and toxic digital communication. Today, participation has become a digital process. Therefore, the question is how do people, with no access to these digital technologies, participate? What do we mean by participation? How can one ensure authentic participation? These concerns are important because, at the end of the day, these platforms where we seek to document global democratic innovation, must be representative of all parts of the world.

*“with participation becoming a digital process, how can those, without access to digital technology, participate?”*

Moving on to the next segment of the deep dive conversation, **Dr. Tandon** requested **Mr. Apoorva Ozha** (Chief Executive, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, India) to share his experience and reflection.

**Mr. Ozha** began by sharing that his work has largely been in rural India and that is where he learnt the participatory approaches. In this context, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) was one of the tools of promoting participatory planning. Initially, there was a lot of excitement and a lot of people participated. But when the states came into the picture and Government of India's National Watershed Programme was launched, it led to changes in the PRA approach. Eventually, a lot of training of the practitioners of PRA started happening but once the scale-up happened, these trainings stopped. One needs to question if it was a success that any of these participatory tools even became a part of the state. In a way, it became a failure because it was tokenism. The first failure was the inability to assess how we could do participatory processes on a scale, which was both scalar but contextualised.

The second challenge was that development activities, in India, were increasingly becoming project defined. As a result, the funding became project defined. A lot of time was wasted in planning the logistics and there was a lot of communication gap which then resulted in poor infrastructure. That has been failure of scaling up the participatory approaches in large-scale government development programmes. He also spoke of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) as one of the success stories of participatory development and described how it was a journey of learning to promote participation, inclusion and rights. He also spoke about his involvement in the Jal Jeevan Mission of the Government of India. He mentioned that when the guidelines of the programme were being prepared, it was prepared with a lot of consultations thereby it focused on participation. But there was a lot of resistance from the state government. While highlighting the use of digital technology, he said, *‘the dashboard has become the new mantra of governance’*. The use of technology for providing services to citizens has become an efficient way of delivering services and has greater influence these days. But in due process, citizens have been reduced to mere beneficiaries.

*“success of participation is that it became a part of development programmes, but it also became tokenism”*

**Dr. Thamy Pogrebinschi** (LATINNO – Innovations for Democracy in Latin America, Germany) talked about LATINNO – a 5.5-year-old database built on democratic innovations. She said that there are similarities and differences when one talks of the evolution of citizen participation, in several countries, over the last 30 years. In the Latin American context, due to the process of decentralisation and institutionalisation, more autonomy and power were given to several local-level institutions and communities. Citizen participation began to develop, gradually since the late 1980s, and specially early 1990s. It was evident initially at the local level and then slowly moved to the national level. Latin America is not homogenous – there is a difference among countries, especially among the sub-regions like South America and Central America. Most democracies have problems of grassroots representations and accountability of the governance and their responsiveness.

The main challenge that Latin America faces is that there is immense social inequality and political exclusion. The idea is that citizen participation would be a means to address political

exclusion. The death of democracies could not be solved only by having more citizen participation but by directing that participation to address the real exclusion and the several layers of inequality that most countries face. Over the past 30 years, citizen participation has been more of a state-driven initiative than a civil society initiative, in most countries of Latin America.

Mostly when it was a civil society-driven initiative, the state had a role to play. If not, co-governance roles like participating with civil society in the implementation of the initiative, then state-sponsored it somehow as an entity that made participation possible. But recently the trend has been changing because, on the one hand, citizen participation has been evolving over the last two and a half decades in Latin America through the state initiative in a very highly institutionalised way. So there is a mechanism of citizen participation and there are laws in place that made citizen participation mandatory, in many countries, at a local level. One of the outcomes of institutionalisation is that it makes democratic innovation less effective. Latin America is witnessing a moment of democratic decline. It had a wave of left-leaning governments which was very important for ensuring citizen participation, especially at the national level. She concluded, *'Now we are witnessing more and more of civil society-based initiative here in Latin America'*.

***“too much institutionalisation of participation can make democratic innovations ineffective”***

Reflecting on his experience, **Mr. Ashok Singh** (Executive Director, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, India) said that during the 1980s and 1990s Regional Support Organisations (RSOs) were promoted and the focus was on mainstreaming the marginalised and excluded communities. We worked on building the capacities of these institutions. There were many CSOs that continued to look at the citizens as ‘beneficiaries’ as a result there was a dearth of their participation in the process of sustainable development programmes. At this crucial juncture, came the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> CAA which decentralised the governance system. A legal space was created for ensuring the participation of those who were not included in the process till now. This gave the power in the hands of the local institutions and ensure the participation of the marginalised and the excluded in the governance process. To build the capacities of panchayat leaders, SSK along with PRIA and the like-minded organisation started a campaign called Panchayati Raj Jagrukta Abhiyan – PRJA (Panchayat Raj Awareness Campaign) in a phased manner, i.e., pre and post-election.

Pre-election was crucial for ensuring free and fair elections and that a suitable candidate was elected which would, in turn, ensure participation of the people. For this campaign, we mobilised a lot of CSOs, disseminated Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials were prepared, frontline facilitators were trained and so on. We also launched a campaign called Pre- Election Voter Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) in 17-18 states – it was a big public education programme to generate awareness among the people not only about the free and fair process of an election but also about the importance of selecting the right kind of candidate. The process must be inclusive and must ensure the participation of people. In the second phase, we focused on building the capacities of the candidates, especially women and the schedule castes (SCs) /Schedule Tribes (STs) so that their participation is taken care of and how effectively they can play their roles and responsibilities. There was a need for building the leadership of these elected representatives. We also initiated a well-planned capacity-building programme for the elected representatives. We did this in many parts of Uttar Pradesh, as result governance continues to be an important development

agenda. It is important to enable these local self-governance institutions right from planning to implementation so that people's participation can be promoted. There are many CSOs who continue to work on these initiatives.

*“an inclusive process ensures participation of the people”*

[This presentation was made in Hindi. Please find the transcript in Hindi below:

अपने सफर पर चिंतन करते हुए अशोक जी ने कहा की 1980-1990 में स्थानीय स्तर पर रीजनल सपोर्ट संस्थाएं को हमने बढ़ावा दिया। कोशिश यह थी कि हम उन लोगों के साथ काम करें जो हाशिए पर हैं और समुदायों को मुख्य धारा में लाया जाए। तो सबसे पहले हमने संस्थाओं की क्षमतावृद्धि का काम किया। बहुत सारी एसी सिविल सोसाइटी संस्थाएं थी जो नागरिकों को लाभार्थी मानकर उनके साथ काम करते थे। इस वजह से उनकी सहभागिता और उनकी भागीदारी का कहीं ना कहीं बहुत बड़ा अभाव दिखता था। उसी समय एक बहुत महत्वपूर्ण संसोधन हुआ-1993-1994 में 73वीं और 74 वीं सी0 ए0 ए0 का ऐलान किया गया। अन्य शब्दों में शासन का विकेन्द्रीकरण किया गया। ऐसा लगा कि एक बहुत अच्छा मौका है क्योंकि इसी तरह कि चीजों कि लोग मांग करते थे ताकि हाशिए पर जो लोग हैं उनकी भागीदारी शासन की प्रक्रिया में सुनिश्चित हो सके। सहभागिता की व्यवस्था कि गई थी, पर हम सब लोगों ने माना कि ये व्यवस्था मात्र इसका समाधान नहीं है। प्रिया के साथ मिलकर हम लोगों ने पूरे देश में एक अभियान की शुरुआत की जिसका नाम पंचायत राज जागरूकता अभियान (PRAJA) जो कि दो चरणबद्ध में किया गया-एक चुनाव के पूर्व और दूसरा चुनाव के बाद।

हम लोगों ने माना कि एक अच्छे उम्मीदवार को चुनने के लिए और निष्पक्ष चुनाव करने के लिए यह बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है। इससे सहभागिता कि पहली सीढ़ी बनेगी और इसलिए हम लोगों ने पहले चुनाव के पूर्व बहुत योजनाएं बनाई और बहुत सारे सिविल सोसाइटी संस्थाओं को जागरूक किया। इस संदर्भ में हमने 17-18 राज्यों में एक और अभियान आयोजन किया जिसका नाम प्री इलेक्शन वोटर अवेरनेस कैम्पेन (PEVAC)। इस अभियान के द्वारा हम लोगों में निष्पक्ष चुनाव का महत्व समझाना चाहते थे। यह प्रक्रिया समावेशी होनी चाहिए और लोगों की भागीदारी सुनिश्चित की जानी चाहिए। दुसरे चरण में हम उम्मीदवारों के क्षमताओं के निर्माण पर ध्यान केन्द्रित किया, विशेष रूप से महिलाएं और अनुसूचित जाती (एससी)/अनुसूचित जनजाति (एसटी) ताकि उनकी भागीदारी का ध्यान रखा जा सके और वह अपनी भूमिका और जिम्मेदारियों को प्रभावी ढंग से निभा सके। इन निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधियों के नेतृत्व के निर्माण की आवश्यकता थी। हमने निर्वाचित प्रतिनिधियों के लिए सुनियोजित क्षमता निर्माण कार्यक्रम भी शुरू किया। परिणामस्वरूप शासन एक महत्वपूर्ण विकास कार्यसूची आज भी बना हुआ है। योजना बनाने से लेकर क्रियान्वयन तक इन स्थानीय स्वशासन संस्थाओं को सक्षम बनाना महत्वपूर्ण है, ताकि लोगों कि भागीदारी को बढ़ावा दिया जा सके। कई सिविल सोसाइटी संस्थाएं हैं जो आज भी इन पहलुओं पर काम कर रहे हैं। ]

*“एक समावेशी प्रक्रिया लोगों की भागीदारी सुनिश्चित करती है”*

**Ms. Rebecca L. Malay** (Trustee, Philippines Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), Philippines) began by giving a historical account of PRRM. PRRM is 70 years old and is one of the oldest NGOs in the Philippines. In 1986, PRRM was very dormant it was important to revive it as an organisation that would focus on democratising the spaces, especially in the

rural areas where empowerment was much needed. The idea was to define empowerment strategy as shifting the traditional centres of social, political and economic power and giving it to the people. PRRM's approach is integrated in a way that it doesn't only have the ecosystems and physical approaches, but it also addresses the exclusion of the poorest of the poor in the Philippines.

PRRM organised the indigenous people and looked at the sectoral issues of these specific actors. We had organised the communities and penetrated actual political centres of power. Philippines is not only experiencing economic and gender inequality but also spatial inequality – rural and urban. These inequalities have surfaced even more so with the pandemic. Therefore, self-assessment and self-reflection are important to find a way forward. We need to dismantle the political and economic power that has gripped our social lives and push for a more progressive policy. We need to infiltrate the policy spaces successfully. She cited the example of PRRM and how every year since 2006, it has been a part of the government budgeting process, in a sense shadowed the government, in terms of putting budgets in specific areas which seemed important for sustainable development. The result was that PRRM was successful in shifting budgets.

Policy advocacy and strengthening the base organisations are the pillars of participation. The political reality of having an autocratic government in place, largely attributed to the digital influences and misinformation has dragged us back. We are often looked at as databases and generators of data. The concern is: how to engage digitalisation and participation at the digital level? We need to rethink the ways of preserving our desire to democratise our spaces and frame our interventions and approaches in the human rights framework. The human rights-based approach to sustainable development would be a better way of looking at safeguarding our rights and our community rights. She concluded, *'it was not by accident that we thought of empowerment in 1986 as the transfer of power and as long as sustainability and equity are not achieved, we will persevere'*.

***“coalitions with other organisations can push for changes in development programming”***

Meet our panellists...



[From top L to R: Mr. Ashok Kumar Singh, Mr. Tom Thomas, Dr. Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay, Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Prof. John Gaventa, Mr. Apoorva Ozha, Prof. Bonny Ibhawoh, Dr. Thamy Pogrebinschi, Ms. Rebecca L. Malay]

Moving on towards the closing session of the discussion, **Dr. Tandon** requested **Prof. Gaventa** to share some thoughts on the way forward.

**Prof. Gaventa** said, '*Participatory struggle has been a global one*'. He endorsed **Ms. Malay's** comment that in the time of democratic repression and recession, it's more important than ever to not just think about participation as a right, but also to link the struggle for participation to the struggle for human rights. Participation is the way that we achieve and protect human rights and in a period of deepening harassment, violence, disappearances, closing down of the media, and so on it is imperative that we reframe our work within the framework of human rights. The other significant concern is that of transparency and accountability. If we cannot protect the rights of those who speak truth to power, then participation will not be meaningful and real. It's important to realise that even under authoritarianism, participation doesn't go away. It may close some of the formalised spaces, yet people have historically always found a way to participate. It may be indirectly – through music, culture, protest and so on. But participation will be there. The challenge is to think where the impulse for voice should be happening. It's to listen and closely watch the community struggles and see where they are creating their own spaces for change. Finding those spaces and strengthening them will be the most important thing to do, rather than simply trying to fill institutional spaces.

Concluding the samvad, **Dr. Tandon** invited **Dr. Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay** (Director, PRIA) to share the key take-aways from the discussion.

In his closing remarks, **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** said that we are indeed facing a deep democratic recession, shrinking civic space, manipulation of participation through submissive information, a deep polarisation on the basis of caste, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, etc., both in the real life and also in the digital life. The practice of participation started as popular political mobilisation and demand for being part of the decision-making process, access to natural resources and other kinds of resources. Those mobilising were based on the understanding of popular knowledge and gradually it moved to a projectised understanding of participation. Reiterating, **Mr. Thomas's** comment, **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** said that many of our institutionalised civil society organisations and the promoter of participation got depoliticised. One organisation alone cannot address the democratic recession, closing civic space, and other issues. But certainly, a network coalescing all the ideas together and making a stronger connection between the movements and projects and institutionalised organisation can make a difference. So perhaps, the time has come to think about building and stitching together a larger coalition with multiple thoughts where all kinds of practices can be appreciated and taken forward. One needs to consider how much institutionalisation is good for promoting participation? How institutionalisation of participatory spaces can work in an effective manner? And therefore, we need to seek the balance and create an interface between the universalised form of participation and particularised form of participation.

*“triad of learning, knowledge and participation can transform power relations in a much more meaningful way”*

The conversation (samvad) ended with a vote of thanks by **Dr. Bandyopadhyay**.



*5.00 pm to 5.15 pm*

Welcome and Introduction to PRIA@40 Programmes and Conversation

Moderator: Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India

*5.15 pm to 5.30 pm*

Keynote Address -

- Prof. John Gaventa, Action for Empowerment and Accountability(A4EA) Programme, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, UK

*5:30 pm to 5.50 pm*

Setting the Stage -

- Mr. Tom Thomas, CEO, PRAXIS – Institute for Participatory Practices
- Prof. Bonny Ibhawoh, Director, Centre for Human Rights and Restorative Justice at McMaster University, Canada and Project Director, Participedia

*5.50 pm to 6.00 pm*

Open Discussion

*6.00 pm to 6.50 pm*

Deep Dive Conversation -

- Mr. Apoorva Ozha, Chief Executive, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, India
- Dr Thamy Pogrebinschi, Research Fellow, WZB Berlin Social Science Centre and Coordinator, LATINNO (Innovations for Democracy in Latin America), Germany
- Mr. Ashok Singh, Executive Director, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, India
- Ms Rebecca (Beckie) L. Malay, Trustee, Philippines Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), Philippines

*6.50 pm to 7.00 pm*

Key Takeaways, Vote of Thanks and Closure -

Dr Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Director, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India

# PRIA@40 EVENTS

DATE	TITLE	THEME
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
2 September 2021	Nurturing Civil Society Partnerships in Uncertain Times	Empowering Civil Society
15 September 2021	Redesigning Civil Society Ecosystem: From Local to Global	Empowering Civil Society
28 September 2021	Unlearning Patriarchy: Expanding Impacts of Gender Training	Making the Gender Leap
30 September 2021	Investing in Civil Society Innovations	Empowering Civil Society
01 October 2021	Community-led Adaptations: Water is Life	Decentralised Community Governance
06 October 2021	Inspiring Leadership of Mayors and Councillors for Inclusive Urbanisation	Sustainable Urban Future
12 October 2021	Trajectories of Participation: From Development to Governance	Citizen Participation