

REPORT

SAMVAD CONVERSATION

COMMUNITY-LED ADAPTATION: WATER IS LIFE

01st OCTOBER 2021

4 – 6 PM

PRIA@40
SHAPING OUR TOMORROWS, TODAY



Decentralised community
governance



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- 💧 **Ensuring leadership within the community** – Water management can be possible only if it is community-driven and community governed so leadership inside the communities should be encouraged, especially the participation of women groups and other vulnerable communities in water resource management.
- 💧 **Link communities with governance** – There should be an integration of community associations and local governance institutions to build people’s knowledge on water sustainability to ensure that their voices and solutions are heard and implemented.
- 💧 **Use data and technology in the community** – The community should use data and technology to understand and analyse community governance to educate themselves on the ways to sustain the natural resources through the continuous learning process.
- 💧 **Dissociate water and land rights** – Ownership and control of water resources and land rights should be delinked to avoid the malfunction of water utilities and to develop shared strategies for both issues.



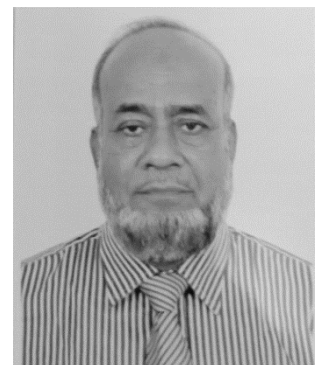
Shri Bharat Lal, Additional Secretary (Water), Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India, is an Indian Forest Services officer of the Gujarat cadre, 1988 Batch. He was the Additional Secretary to the President of India and had been the Gujarat government's resident commissioner in Delhi from 2010 to 2014.

Mr. Abhishek Srivastava, Senior Manager – Ecosystem & Relationships at Arghyam, led and implemented a portfolio of projects including advocacy projects across various sectors including gender, health, education, and media development directly or indirectly with organisations such as Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Dasra, Greenpeace, Internews, etc.



Prof. Saleemul Huq, Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) is an expert in adaptation to climate change in the most vulnerable developing countries and has been a lead author of the third, fourth and fifth assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and he also advises the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

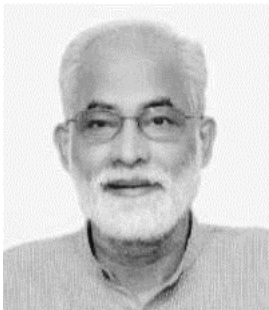
Dr. Sarder Shafiqul Alam, Coordinator of Urban Climate Change Programme at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), has gathered a wide range of experiences in designing and implementing research projects on natural resources management, climate change adaptation, review of NAPA documents prepared for LDCs, urban climate change, poverty alleviation and livelihood promotion, agricultural development, stakeholder analysis and consensus-building of local capacity, partnership building, policy and institutional analysis and organising international conferences and workshops.





Mr. James Kharkongor, Deputy Project Director, Meghalaya Basin Development Agency, Meghalaya, India is working on an NRM based project on the spring shed management including Spring Chambers, check dams, trenches, afforestation, spring mapping, etc., innovations on NRM related fields and rehabilitation of mining-affected areas. He has worked as a consultant on Participatory Watershed Development.

Ms. Susan Nanduddu is a development practitioner with a keen interest in climate change adaptation, climate finance, gender, and recently, sustainable cities. She has supported community-level adaptation initiatives in Uganda and used the experience to engage in advocacy work for climate-responsive policies. She facilitates knowledge sharing on adaptation in Uganda and at the international level. She is the Executive Director for African Centre for Trade and Development, an NGO that promotes sustainable development - based in Kampala, Uganda.



Shri Binoy Acharya, Founder Director of UNNATI – Organisation for Development Education, as a social development practitioner and researcher has been working in the areas of social inclusion, decentralised governance and social accountability and disaster risk reduction. He is the current President of Voluntary Action Network India, a national platform of voluntary organisations. Over the past thirty years, he has been associated with different social movements, networks and government forums.

Ms. Swapni Shah, Program Director, UNNATI, Jodhpur is an expert in participatory processes for research, training and project evaluation. She has worked in UNNATI Organisation for Development Education since December 2001 in various capacities. For the initial 10 years, she worked exclusively on the capacity building of PRI representatives and awareness of local governance aspects through different mediums. She continues to work to enhance the capacities of PRIs on participatory development planning and their role in the governance of community water bodies and Common Property Resources.





Ms. Kamilla Kristensen Rai, Counsellor at the Delegation of the European Union to India, New Delhi is covering the EU-India Partnership on Smart and Sustainable Urbanisation, the India-EU Water Partnership and air pollution. She has worked at the Danish Energy Agency, Ministry of Climate and Energy on global cooperation on energy and climate including between Denmark and India, China, the Czech Republic and Ukraine.

Ms. Pratiti Priyadarshini, Senior Program Manager, Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) has been supporting long-term socio-ecological research and building evidence of the significance of Commons including forests, pastures, and water resources. She has been involved in developing and applying experiential learning methods and tools such as Community Based System Dynamics and Experimental Games that can enhance inclusion and collective action for governing Commons.



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.

Dr. Anshuman Karol, Lead, Local Governance, PRIA is a versatile and seasoned Social Development Professional with a strong academic background offering a multi-functional experience of over 20 years in Local Government Institutions, Decentralised Planning, Participatory Research & Evaluation, Community Development, Capacity Building and Training. He is a certified mentor on Community Based Research by Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium, an initiative of UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research & Social Responsibility in Higher Education lead by PRIA and the University of Victoria, Canada.



As Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) completes its 40 years, it re-commits 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 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 co-convened a conversation (Samvad) on [Community-led Adaptation: Water is Life](#) in partnership with [International Centre for Climate Change and Development \(ICCCAD\), Dhaka, Bangladesh](#), [UNNATI - Organisation of Development Education, Ahmedabad, India](#) and [European Union \(EU as part of Climate Diplomacy Week\)](#) on 1st October 2021. The conversation was held virtually and was attended by 52 participants. The session was moderated by **Shri. Binoy Acharya** (Founder, Unnati).

The discussion began with a short presentation by **Ram Aravind** (Research Associate, PRIA) on PRIA's work over 40 years. It was followed by a presentation by **Dr. Anshuman Karol** (Lead-Local Governance, PRIA) on PRIA's work on the theme of '**Decentralised Community Governance**' since its inception.

PRIA has worked on the areas of social forestry, primary health care, especially maternal health, female literacy and savings and community management of and planning for water. In the area of water management and conservation, PRIA's interventions in the past have focused upon integrating local traditional water practices with the government's programmes on water management.

Mobilising Gram Sabha in Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) areas for community-led governance of natural resources, including water and forests, have been documented and disseminated by PRIA. Building the local capacity of panchayats and civil society to co-govern water bodies by integrating these in local planning had also been undertaken in several states. Learning from practices being developed and followed in community-led adaptation to ensure that the 'source of life: water is regenerated for the future has become urgent. To know more about PRIA's work on the theme of decentralised community governance, click [here](#)

This Samvad focused on the following key questions:

- What methods and approaches have been effectively deployed in many current examples of community-governed water arrangements?
- What lessons, principles and strategies can be identified for more vigorous dissemination of community-led adaptation of water resources?

The Samvad began with **Dr. Binoy Acharya** inviting **Prof. Saleem UI Haq** to set the stage for discussions. In his opening remarks, **Prof. Saleem UI Haq** (Director, ICCCAD, Bangladesh) said, "*What energy is to mitigation, water is to adaptation*".

Mitigation is all about transitioning away from fossil fuels to renewable energy and that, according to the speaker, is the fundamental shift that should be adapted in practice, both by nations and people. Similarly, to work on rising water-related issues like water shortage, salinity, floods especially in the context of Low-and-Middle Income Countries (LMIC) and diminishing water resources, adaptation is the framework; however, it should be coupled with the expertise of communities and developed ground-up rather than a top-down policy imposition.

The principle of adaptation leveraging the knowledge of communities has proven to be beneficial in developing or innovating on intervention strategies that place community participation at the center in solving water-related issues. Setting the tone of the *Samvad* with this framework for presentations to follow, Dr. Saleem Ul Haq passed the stage to Mr. Binoy Acharya who opened the floor for presenters to throw light into their work with communities on the theme.

“what energy is to mitigation, water is to adaptation”

Talking about indigenous adaptation efforts for water conservation in desert regions, Ms. **Swapni Shah** (Program Director, Unnati) presented a case study from the Thar region of Western Rajasthan. She explained that Thar Desert is an ecologically fragile region that has been adversely affected by climate change. It is one of the most populated desert regions in the world. It has a strong tradition of rainwater harvesting and community management. Highlighting some of the major issues in the region related to water management, she said that the common property resources management has been neglected for a long time and no one has a stake in that. Recently there has been a spurt in unregulated usage of underground water which has rendered it unfit for the use of the community. Various construction activities have obstructed the water flow which had served as the lifeline for the communities and their livelihood. The communities have not been involved in the planning and monitoring of this work.

Moreover, the ponds and catchments are not listed in the revenue records, instead listed as barren lands or government lands – it’s a huge challenge because in this case the land can be diverted to other use and it happens very often. The increasing encroachment of water bodies by private players is hastening the death of water bodies.

She highlighted some of the key interventions undertaken by Unnati in this regard and also elaborated on some of the existing practices followed by the people/ community in the region.

One of the low-cost indigenously developed solutions in use in the Thar Desert includes *talab* or pond, for surface water harvest, with a catchment area of 25sq. km that support 12,000 livestock of 12 villages.

Another innovation has been that of Rezwani *talab* with an impervious rock structure below the ground that captures the rainwater seeping into the ground. Such innovations and indigenous solutions are testimony to the local knowledge that has helped avert what could have been a major water crisis in a desert region.

Unnati’s approach in addressing the barriers to water conservation has been that of integrating people participation by developing their agency, especially that of the women and the Dalits who have never had a stake in the decision-making of management of the common property resources. Unnati focusses on strengthening the community-based governance mechanism around water harvesting, maintenance management and equitable distribution.

The focus has also been on improving the planning and implementation of public development programmes. Unnati has also mobilised Dalits and women to form Jal Saheli groups. They led the participatory planning process at the ground level and also engage with the gram panchayat on the revival of community water resources. They were capacitated to undertake to monitor public water conservation and also protect the common resources by stopping water theft and removing encroachment.

“water table in some areas is falling at the rate of 3 meters per year”

Dr. Sarder Alam (Country Coordinator, ACCCRN-ICCCAD, Bangladesh) narrated the experience of Bangladesh, which is one of the countries that is most vulnerable to climate change. Due to the repeated occurrence of natural calamities like floods and loss of livelihood opportunities for communities living along coastal areas, migration of communities in search of water is rampant. In many districts and villages situated along the south-east Asia coastal regions, people suffer from a lack of safe water, due to contamination of water bodies, mostly due to intrusion of salinity. Women and children are largely affected by the disparities in access to water resources due to climate change, as the onus to travel large distances to collect water disproportionately falls on them.

The research team at ICCCAD undertook participatory action research to enable the communities to play their role in water management and to solve the crisis that has inflicted communities living in southeast Asian coastal regions.

Some of the key observations of the ICCCAD team as summarised by Dr. Alam highlight the need to balance local or indigenous knowledge with expert intervention. In under-resourced communities in Bangladesh, communities would use large mud jars in what could be identified as an indigenous water harvesting effort. However, it was observed that water stored in mud jars for long periods was unsafe for drinking and did not last beyond the rainy season. It is worthwhile to note that even though localised solutions to addressing the water crisis were adopted, communities had to be made aware of how the practice was harmful in the long run.

In order to address the shortcomings of existing water conservation practices, rainwater harvesting technology was improved in the villages. Use of local school buildings or roofs to harvest more water was encouraged. A concrete reservoir was built in the communities with help from different stakeholders that could hold more water than existing arrangements. Even as the reservoir was built, communities undertook the shared responsibility to maintain the reservoir thus building accountability into the framework of water harvesting. Through a partnership of the Government and important stakeholders, such initiatives have the potential of being scaled up and adapted in similar settings, according to the speaker.

“in order to understand what water technology is suitable for them, we undertook participatory research activities with the community.”

Ms. Pratiti Priyadarshi (Senior Program Manager, FES) identified a lack of coordination among bodies at the local level as the main reason for poor water management. In order to increase the stakes of community in water conservation and to make participation more inclusive, team FES had developed some interesting activities and projects, which have the potential to be used in low-income settings and with grassroots communities.

Experimental games are used to emphasize the shared nature of the resource and to trigger collective action. Crop water budgeting is another activity aimed at behavior change among farmers. It enables data-driven decision-making among farmers including crop planning according to the availability of water. Composite Landscape Assessment and Restoration Tool (CLART) is an easy colour-coded tech platform to guide people on adequate means to store ground and surface water. Community-based systems thinking is a set of exercises conducted with community members to understand inter-connection between different resources in the community.

“there has been sufficient investment on improving surface water supply, but over a period of time, these benefits have failed to sustain”

Giving yet another international perspective on the theme was **Dr. Susan Nanduddu** (Executive Director, ACTADE, Uganda). She gave the example of Bwikhonje village, Uganda where efforts to conserve water came from the local leadership which was decentralised. The leadership also identified potential NGOs to aid them in the process, especially in receiving funding to set up cost-effective and sustainable modes of water conservation. A solar-supported water system was installed in the village, which was a 10000-litre tank that served five villages. Being solar-based, the project was sustainable and resulted in the availability of water round the clock.

With the availability of water, the local leader was mobilising Government leaders and NGOs to identify potential avenues within the area that could generate incomes. Until then, the major source of income for the villagers was subsistence agriculture. Ensuring water supply was a major step for the village in concentrating their resources and time to further accentuate their income.

To increase the stakes of the community in a localised effort to conserve water, the community donates money (under one dollar per household per month) that supports the maintenance of the project. The example of Bwinkhonje village highlights the fact that the availability of water is incentive enough to enable communities to concentrate on other avenues of income generation.

“it is critical to bring women at the center in decision-making spaces”

Mr. James Kharkhongor (Deputy Project Director, Meghalaya Basin Development Agency) began his presentation by invoking the spirit of community participation as enshrined in the Meghalaya State Water Policy, 2019. The policy aims to achieve sustainable development, management and use of Meghalaya water resources through community participation to improve health and livelihood for present and future generations. However, for a state like Meghalaya which receives heavy rainfall, there is an acute water shortage in some months, especially during the winter months.

The chief source of water for the population living in Meghalaya is water springs. However, in recent times, due to anthropogenic reasons, they have either been contaminated or have dried up. It was essential to sensitize the population towards preserving the springs to ensure that water sources are usable throughout the year. A lot of community trainings were organised in the Himalayan regions.

A couple of digital innovations were also designed which surprisingly found acceptance in the mountain communities, including Participatory Digital Attestation (PDA). Participatory Digital Attestation comprises the mapping of water resources with the opportunity to record issues with a live dashboard interface to the chief minister. The use of PDA technology is an effective means of addressing red-tapism; anyone can login to the mobile application or portal and assess the state of water bodies in Meghalaya from across the world.

To ensure the sustainability of the efforts, the team has also developed some plans where they aspire to begin with the establishment of a center of excellence in Meghalaya to educate people and community and provide technical input to sustain the natural resources in view of climate change. Conservation and rejuvenation of existing water bodies and sources including springs, Natural Resources Management committees in every village in Meghalaya, identification and training of community resource person in every village and recharge of water in springs that have dried up or has suffered from surface runoff are among the other steps mooted.

“Meghalaya receives the largest amount of rainfall on earth, (yet) face acute water shortage.”

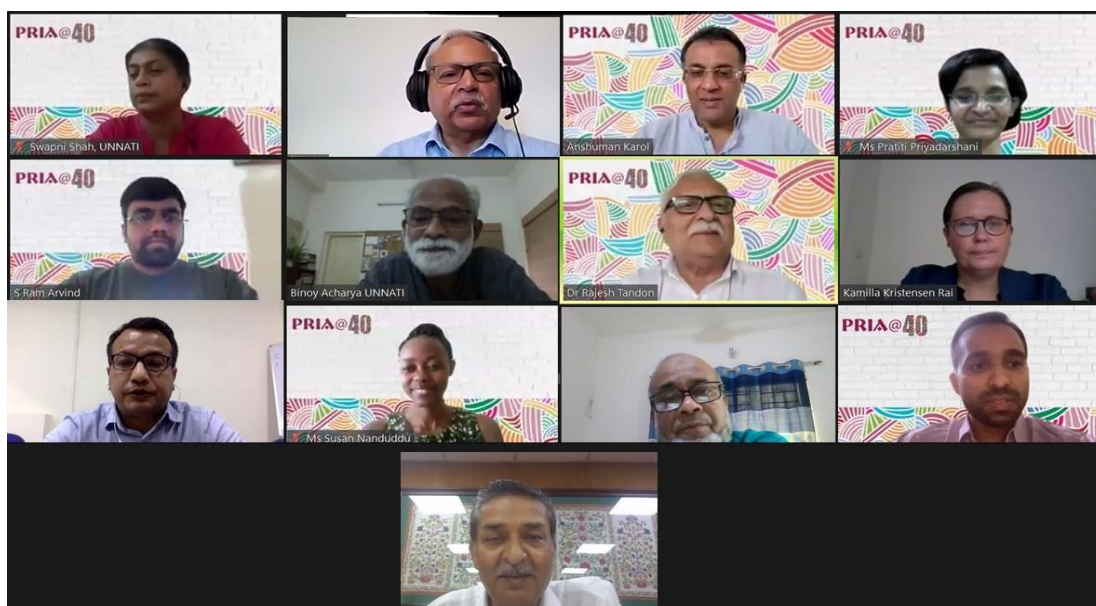
Mr. Abhishek Srivastava (Senior Manager, Ecosystem and Relationships, Arghyam, India) spoke about the work of Arghyam which is working on demystifying groundwater management keeping communities at the center. Solving the question of scale in water security with different sectoral players through the use of different participatory methods and tools is central to Arghyam’s efforts in conserving water.

After reaching out to maximum people through the de-mystification of concepts related to groundwater management, the question of scale arose. In 2018, Arghyam began working on the problem of scale- how to enable water security and scale? Technology was identified as a key enabler – overall they wanted to impact six indicators i.e., speed, scale, intensity, quality, unit cost and visibility by creating a design along with partner agencies from the government, the market and society.

The key learning of the Arghyam team was to identify the need for an operating model to be put in place to be able to answer the question of scale; what does the operating model look like and what should be done in terms of strategy?

“technology was identified as a key enabler for water security”

Meet our panelists...



[From L to R: Ms. Swapni Shah, Dr. Saleem Ul Haq, Dr. Anshuman Karol, Ms. Pratiti Priyadarshi, Mr. Ram Aravind, Mr. Binoy Acharya, Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Ms. Kamilla Kristensen Rai, Mr. James Khorkhongor, Dr. Susan Nanduddu, Dr. Sarder Alam, Mr. Abhishek Singh and Mr. Bharat Lal]

Ms. Kamilla Kristensen Rai (Counselor, Delegation of EU to India) introduced the EU climate diplomacy week which is focused on getting partners working on climate issues together on ‘ambition and action’. The speaker highlighted three key initiatives, EU climate law which is aimed at achieving climate neutrality by 2050, EU adaptation strategy and the EU *Janta* action

plan which is an important policy direction to integrate community participation in development programs sponsored by the EU.

While summarising the key presentations made in the earlier half of the webinar, Ms. Kamilla referred to three main points that emerged out of the discussions. Recalling **Prof. Haq's** work in Bangladesh, she highlighted the importance of acknowledging and leveraging knowledge systems and solutions that are available locally.

In order to illustrate the point, she referred to a key project undertaken by the EU in their work with Udaipur Municipal Corporation working on sustainable water management. It was conceptualised as a partnership effort between Government, a donor agency and a counterpart agency working in another country, Denmark, on a similar theme. Cross-learning was emphasized as a technique by Kamilla to build her point.

The solutions have to be translated to the local context. This is important for finding solutions to the future. She gave the example of an urban city Surat, which worked closely with Rotterdam to develop a water plaza. It is fulfilling the demands of water; by capturing when there is lots of it and bringing it to an urban setting. It also has other uses in the city, where it can double up as a 'meeting place'. Governance, both institutional and community-led is also an important issue that needs further strengthening of capacity.

“governance, whether it is at the panchayat or city level, is very important for water management”

In the second part of the Samvad, moderated by **Dr. Karol**, the key speakers summarised lessons, principles and strategies that have to be identified for more vigorous dissemination of community-led adaptation of water resources.

As **Ms. Shah** remarked, there is a need to aggregate the knowledge of communities around the rejuvenation of traditional water bodies as the experience of Rajasthan and Meghalaya have shown. The local CBPO and the Gram Panchayat must engage effectively to strengthen planning and monitoring for the development of sustainable water resources.

Technology is an important tool that needs to be integrated into the work with communities. Ms. Pratiti feels that documentation of such efforts is also critical since the learnings need to be disseminated to a wider audience so that similar models can be replicated elsewhere.

On the supply side, water rights need to be de-linked from land rights, as shared by Ms. Swapni Shah, so that water as a resource is not considered 'private'. Dr. Nanduddu believes that women should be brought to the forefront of the decision-making process since they bear the disproportionate effects of anthropogenic factors on water.

Mr. Abhishek Singh advocates for a continuous learning process which is important to sustain community-led water governance attempts. Organising Training of Trainers (ToT) and mechanisms to address any issue that may arise during implementation is important to keep the work going, according to Mr. Abhishek.

Mr. Acharya was once again invited by **Dr. Karol** to summarise the discussions and to carry forward the discussion with **Shri. Bharat Lal**.

Shri. Bharat Lal (Additional Secretary (JJM), Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India) began his address by adapting water to the context of the participatory framework, highlighting that the paucity of water should not become a limiting factor in the quest for socio-economic development. The need to ensure water security stands magnified during testing times as the world battles climate change, increasing population pressure and natural calamities like droughts.

He also pointed to the need to ensure efficient water management. He gave the example of faecal management in India. Transportation of human waste consumes large quantities of water and emerges as one of the most inefficient ways in which water has been put to use. Approximately 100 liters of water is used to transport 250 gms of faecal matter and hence, the speaker called upon the scientific community in India to develop new technologies that can address the glaring way in which water is wasted in India. There are several ways in which household water can be put to alternate uses and the speaker was keen to take such knowledge to the masses.

Mr. Lal gave the example of Gujarat, wherewith adequate support from the Government, NGOs and other stakeholders, the problem of frequent droughts was addressed. When water is put to efficient use, it will have a transformational impact exemplified by the practice of micro-irrigation in the state.

Micro-irrigation in addition to doubling farmer's income also has the advantage of returning water to the ground, thereby replenishing underground aquifers. To take water to more households and to develop a platform for complaints redressal, the Jal Jeevan Mission was set up by the Government of India, which uses a technology user interface to avert a potential water crisis. River-water management is another step in the right direction, as the example of Namami Gange has shown.

“water is everybody’s business. Water security needs an integrated, holistic approach”

Dr. Rajesh Tandon (President- Founder, PRIA) summarised the discussion by advocating for water resources to be community governed for efficient use and management. The adaptation of water management can be possible only if it is community-driven and community governed just like the system of rainwater harvesting which is managed by social control and social influence not through formal policing.

There should be an integration of community associations and local governance institutions which can improve its legitimacy and competency. The leadership of women in the governing body is important along with the technical and financial resources. The community should use data and technology to understand and analyse community governance by linking granular data understanding to mapping them through new technology. Ownership and control of water resources and land rights should be delinked so that water management warrants the attention that it deserves and not as a peripheral entity to be clubbed with other resources.

“traditional water-harvesting had a community-level rule-based system in common, which was managed by social control”.

The conversation (samvad) ended with a vote of thanks by **S Ram Aravind** (Research Associate, PRIA).

4.00 pm to 4.10 pm

Welcome and Overview – Dr. Anshuman Karol, PRIA

Moderator: Sh Binoy Acharya, Director, UNNATI, Ahmedabad

4.10 pm to 4.25 pm

Opening Comments Setting the Stage

- Prof. Saleemul Huq, Director, ICCCAD

4.25 pm to 5.25 pm

Panel discussion – Community led water management – Examples and case studies

- Ms. Swapni Shah, Program Director, UNNATI, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India
- Ms. Pratiti Priyadarshani, Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), India
- Mr. Abhishek Srivastava, Senior Manager, Ecosystem and Relationships, Arghyam, India
- Mr. James Kharkongor, Deputy Project Director, Meghalaya Basin Development Agency, Meghalaya, India
- Dr. Sarder Shafiqul Alam, Coordinator, Urban Climate Change Programme and Country Coordinator, ACCCRN-ICCCAD, Bangladesh
- Ms. Susan Nanduddu, Executive Director, African Centre for Trade and Development – ACTADE, Kampala, Uganda
- Ms. Kamilla Kristensen Rai, Counselor, Delegation of EU to India

5.25 pm to 5.35 pm

QnA

5.35 pm to 5.50 pm

Special Address: “Water – A shared commitment for sustainable management and long-term security”

Sh Bharat Lal (IAS), Additional Secretary (JJM), Dept. of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, GoI

5:50 pm to 6.00 pm

Key Takeaways and Ways Forward

Dr Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, 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 the impacts of Gender Training	Making the Gender Leap
01 October 2021	Community-led Adaptations: Water is Life	Decentralised Community Governance