Knowledge. Voice. Democracy.

PRIA

Since 1982

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-25



FROM INNOVATION TO MAINSTREAM:

50 years of Participatory Research

FROM INNOVATION TO MAINSTREAM: 50 YEARS OF PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The first ever phrase 'Participatory Research' was used by my dear colleague ***Budd*** in an ***article*** in Convergence in 1975. He described his experiences as an adult educator and education researcher in Tanzania as an integrated methodology of research, education and action.
Around the same time, my field research in southern Rajasthan began to create dissonance in using research methodology I was trained in.



With a group of similarly 'ruffled and curious' researchers interested in bringing about social change, we began an ambitious initiative "International network of Participatory Research". I began to 'network' in Asia, based in Delhi, using cyclostyling tools to produce newsletters. With a small group of like-minded researchers and practitioners, PRIA was set up in February 1982.

In that period of 1980s, PRIA promoted reflections and systematisation of lived experiences as starting point for participation with motto 'Knowledge is Power'. International network developed strong linkages with social movements and community organisations of workers, peasants, tribals, women and other marginalised sections of society internationally. New interpretations of the core ideas began to evolve…Participatory Action Research (PAR), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and others.

By mid 1990s, Participatory Research had made inroads in international development programs world-wide. In this period, most academic researchers in India and around the world considered 'Participatory Research' as method of promoting community participation in socio-economic development projects. Its toolkits were taught to practitioners of development in government, NGOs and staff of international agencies, and students of some professional courses (like social work).

Over these first 25 years, Participatory Research was not taken seriously by academia and professional research funders. Early shifts began to occur at the turn of the millennium, as undertaking academic research in partnership with local 'beneficiary' communities emerged in some universities of North America and Europe. As practices of 'co-construction' of knowledge became somewhat widespread, and 'entered' universities of the southern countries, innovative research methods and small research funding began to attract younger researchers in the 2000-2015 period.

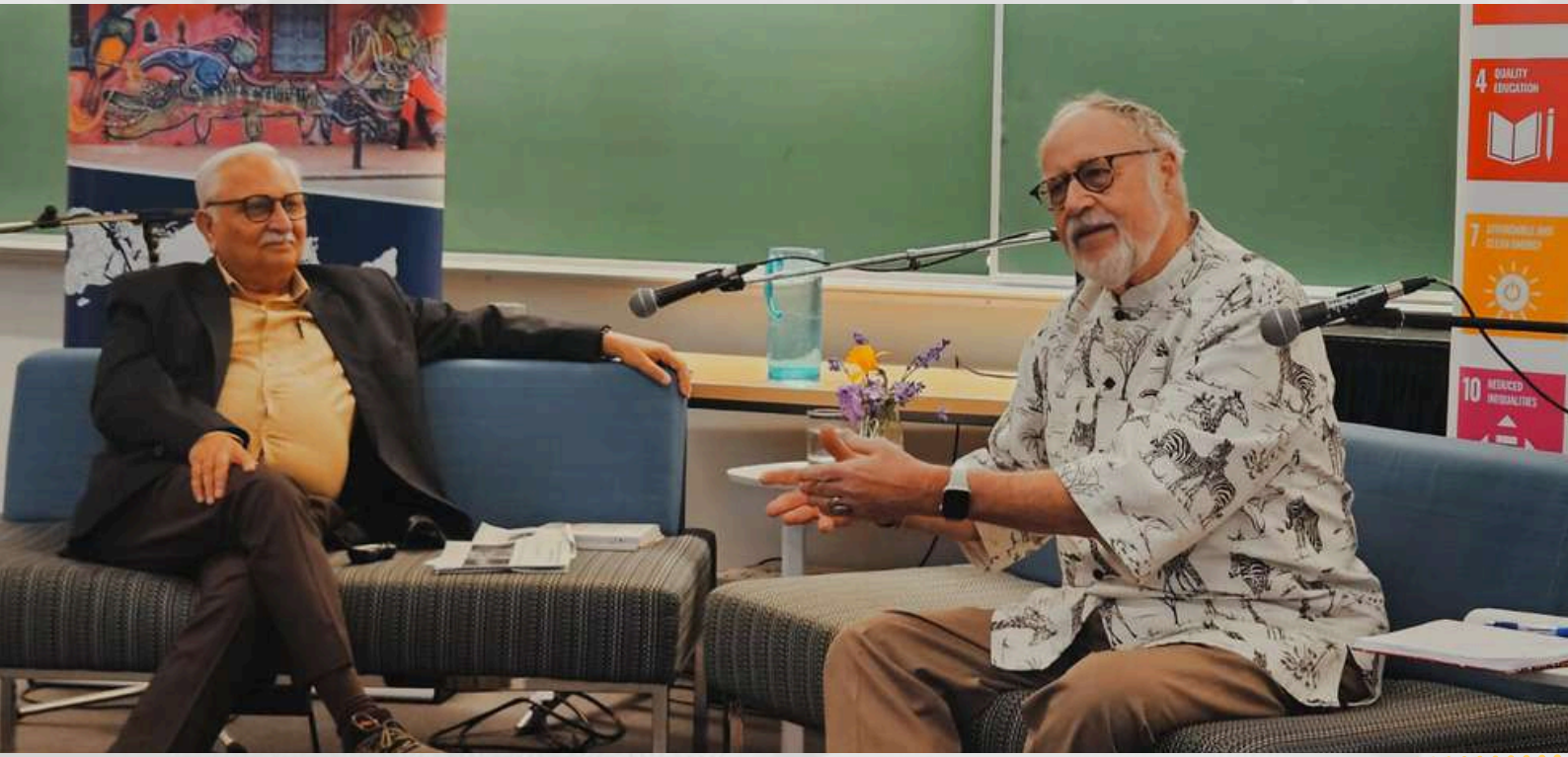


Those early ideas and the resistance that its champions faced began to shift in the last decade. Recognition and respect for community/indigenous knowledges among 'academic' researchers is gaining traction, especially in domains of public health, natural resource regeneration, climate resilience, gender justice, etc. New global policy agreements on Open Science and Social Responsibility of Higher Education have opened opportunities for 'bridging academic and community knowledge cultures'.

Reflecting on this journey of '50 Years of Participatory Research', PRIA can take pride in the widespread mainstreaming of these ideas, practices and methods. Noticing this emerging trend towards mainstreaming of Participatory Research, 'Knowledge.Voice.Democracy' became PRIA's motto during past decades.

There are risks of weakening the principles behind the above motto as mainstreaming of Participatory Research gains momentum. Therefore, it is critical that normative and ethical premises underlying Participatory Research are refreshed, reinforced, rebooted in next 50 years!

Rajesh Tandon
September 30, 2025



Inclusive Urbanisation

In recent years, PRIA's interventions in inclusive and climate resilient urbanisation have been focusing on adapting participatory research methodology to discover granular evidence and promote co-creation of solutions with marginalised communities facing severe impacts of climate distress (heat, floods, drought, etc.). Several current interventions are described here.

- Finding Effective, Contextual Solutions for Urban Resilience 04
- Transportation and Female Mobility in Urban India 06
- Inclusion of Citizens' Voices in Kerala Urban Planning Commission 09

Capacity for Social Impacts

PRIA's capacity development interventions not only focused on individual civil society organisations but also for the sector of non-profits as a whole.

- Organisational Development (OD) for Non-Profit Organisations 10
- Youth-led Climate Action Fellowship Program 12
- Celebrating Women's Empowerment & Gender Equality 14
- Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium 15

PRIA International Academy 16

- Hybrid Trainings 17
- Higher Education Institution (HEI) Learning Visits 17

Community/ Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Resilience

- Knowledge Democracy 18
- DECODE Research 19

INCLUSIVE URBANISATION

Finding Effective, Contextual Solutions for Urban Resilience

Most urban informal settlements in Ajmer continue to experience acute deficits in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, exacerbated by the intensifying effects of climate change. These areas face irregular water supply, poor sanitation, and ineffective waste management systems. Women, who bear a disproportionate burden of household WASH responsibilities, remain largely excluded from governance and decision-making processes in these matters due to entrenched gender norms.

Institutional fragmentation, particularly overlapping mandates between the Ajmer Municipal Corporation (AMC) and the Ajmer Development Authority (ADA), further constrains effective service delivery. Erratic rainfall and climate-induced waterlogging continue to intensify public health risks and service vulnerabilities, while the absence of participatory planning processes contributes to a disconnect between lived realities and policy interventions.

To address these multidimensional challenges, the current project in Ajmer's informal settlements seeks to strengthen community-led water governance by co-producing knowledge and context-specific solutions in collaboration with AMC, the Public Health & Engineering Department (PHED), SHGs, and Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University in Ajmer.

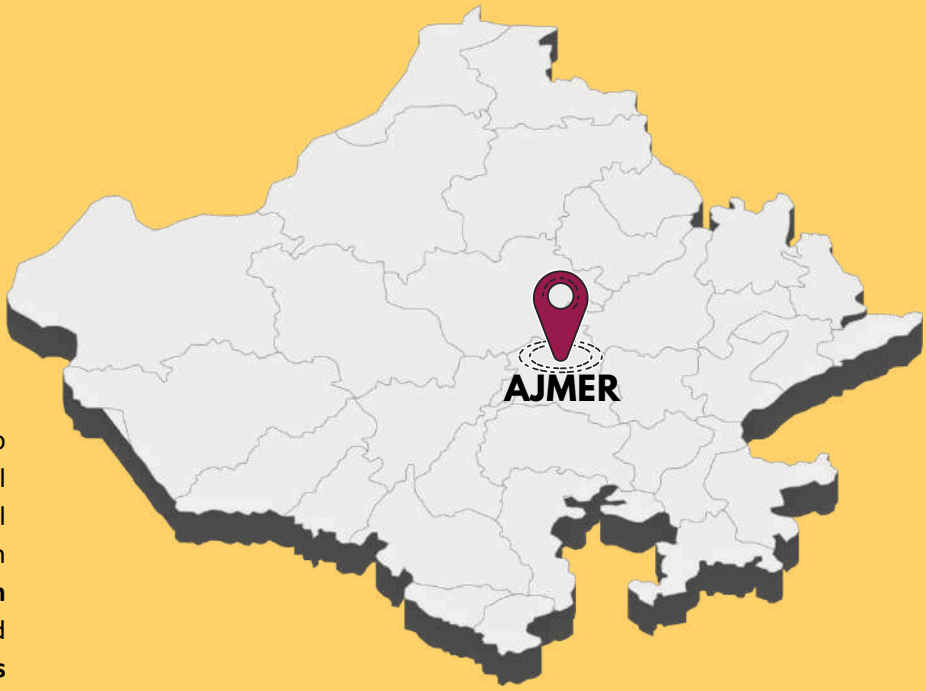


Through participatory tools such as transect walks, spatial mapping, and water quality testing, the project captured granular data on access, usage, infrastructure gaps, and governance challenges—foregrounding the voices and experiences of marginalised women.

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The initiative aligns with key national and state-level policy frameworks including **AMRUT 2.0, SBM-U, NULM, and the Rajasthan State Water Policy,** by:

- Operationalising GESI principles in local water governance.
- Institutionalising SHG participation in service delivery (via the Amrut Mitra model).
- Demonstrating scalable community-academic-government partnerships for inclusive, data-driven urban planning.



The findings offer a replicable approach to strengthening urban resilience and local climate adaptation, with potential application in other small and medium towns, in line with India's **State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs)** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

Most unique outcome of this intervention is a partnership between women SHGs, municipal officials and elected counsellors and students/faculty of environmental sciences department of local Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University in Ajmer.

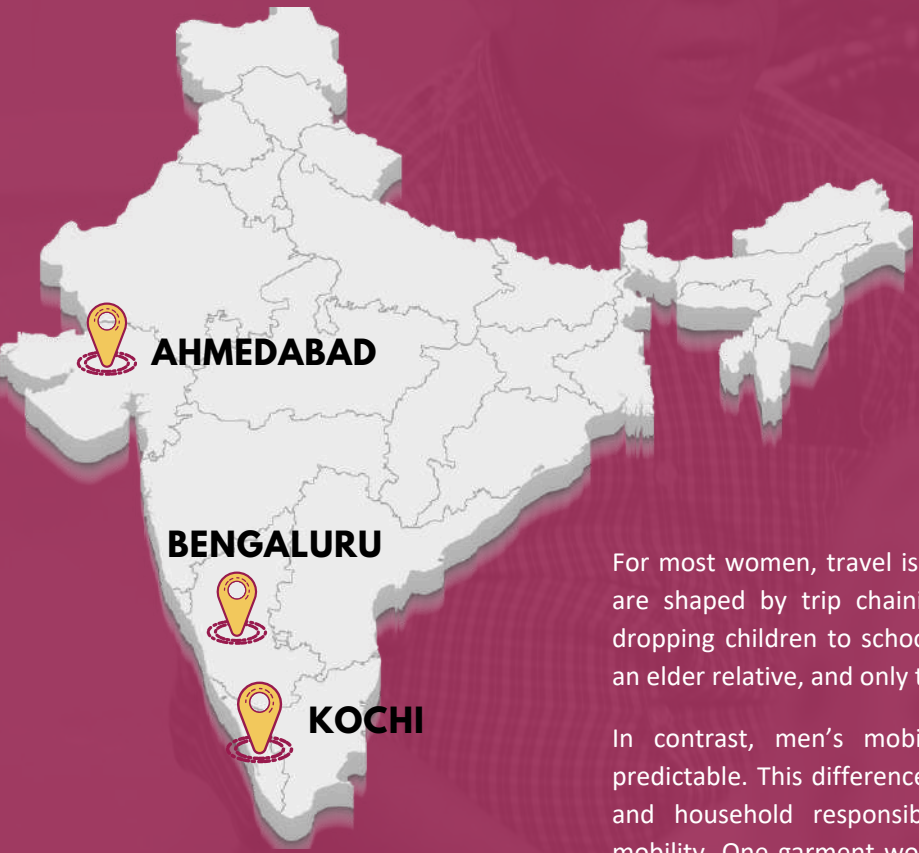
Click here to read the ***Phase 2 Report*** and ***SECURe Toolkit***.





Transportation and Female Mobility in Urban India





Female mobility in urban India is not only about moving from one place to another, it is about autonomy, dignity, and the right to participate in everyday life. The ***MobiliseHER*** project set out to explore how women and other marginalised groups navigate the streets, buses, autos, and metros of Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Kochi. These cities, though very different in infrastructure, revealed strikingly similar patterns: women's journeys are constrained not simply by transport systems but by the weight of social expectations and structural barriers.

For most women, travel is not a straightforward commute. Their days are shaped by trip chaining, where a single journey might involve dropping children to school, buying vegetables at the market, visiting an elder relative, and only then arriving at the workplace.

In contrast, men's mobility is usually linear—work-oriented and predictable. This difference is not incidental; it reflects how caregiving and household responsibilities are invisibly folded into women's mobility. One garment worker in Bengaluru described how she leaves home before dawn, taking her child to school before catching an overcrowded bus that adds an extra hour to her commute.

In Kochi, a domestic worker spoke of the unpredictability of her employer's schedules, leaving her stranded at times when neither buses nor autos were reliable. And in Ahmedabad, women repeatedly mentioned how simple errands were dictated not by efficiency but by the availability of safe and affordable connections. The choices women make are seldom clear, as affordability, safety, design, and access constantly interact to shape and define their options.

A girl might technically have a bus to take her to evening classes, but poor lighting at the bus stop means her parents will not allow her to travel alone. A metro system might feel safe and dignified, yet its fares remain beyond reach for informal workers. A free bus scheme might reduce household burdens but overcrowding strips women of comfort and dignity. Each journey becomes a negotiation of risk and responsibility, showing how mobility is differently conditional for women.

This conditionality was evident across the three cities in both shared struggles and local differences. In Ahmedabad, affordability was frequently undercut by last-mile autos that doubled the cost of already stretched budgets, while poor lighting and unsafe autos kept women uneasy. In Kochi, the metro stood out as a symbol of safety and confidence, particularly for young girls and working women, yet weak feeder services left many stranded at the edges of the system. In Bengaluru, the introduction of free buses expanded employment opportunities and reduced financial pressures, but overcrowding and harassment meant the experience of travel was often exhausting. A comparative view of these cities captures these contrasts clearly:

	Ahmedabad	Kochi	Bangalore
Main Modes	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	BRTS/buses; weak feeders
Affordability	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	Metro tickets costly for informal workers	Free buses help; other modes unaffordable
Safety	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	Metro safer; buses/autos harassment persists	Overcrowding & harassment constrain access
Access	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	Weak feeders limit reach	Peripheral workers walk long distances
Design & Comfort	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	Gender-sensitive metro stations	Broken footpaths; exhausting multi-stage trips
Policy	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	Progressive metro policies	Free bus policy increased ridership
Purpose of Travel	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	Health & caregiving trips invisible	Trip chaining most pronounced
Reliability	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	Metro reliable, buses less so	Poor information access burdens women
Benefits	BRTS/buses; weak feeders	Metro enhances dignity & confidence	Free buses widen employment opportunities

Behind these dimensions are stories that reveal the texture of everyday negotiations. A young girl in Ahmedabad described how she only attends group tuitions because travelling with friends feels safer than travelling alone. An elderly woman in Kochi explained how the lack of shaded walkways makes her hesitant to leave the house during hot afternoons, despite the metro offering a reliable link to the city. In Bengaluru, a transgender commuter highlighted how harassment on buses not only limited where they could travel but also when, forcing them to avoid evening commutes altogether.

These experiences demonstrate that barriers are deeply layered. Safety risks dominate the narratives, whether in the form of harassment, dimly lit streets, or overcrowded vehicles. Affordability weighs heavily on informal workers and students, especially women who lack financial autonomy. Poor design in everyday infrastructure —broken footpaths, absent toilets, unsafe waiting areas erodes comfort and dignity. Information gaps also leave many women reliant on male family members for route details, restricting independence. Social norms then amplify these challenges, with parents imposing curfews or husbands dictating whether a woman can take a job farther from home.





Yet there are glimpses of what works when gender is intentionally included in planning. Affordable or free schemes ease financial pressures, reliable metros enhance dignity, and community initiatives such as group travel or safety audits create localised safety nets. These enablers show progress is possible, though often fragile and limited to specific projects or groups.

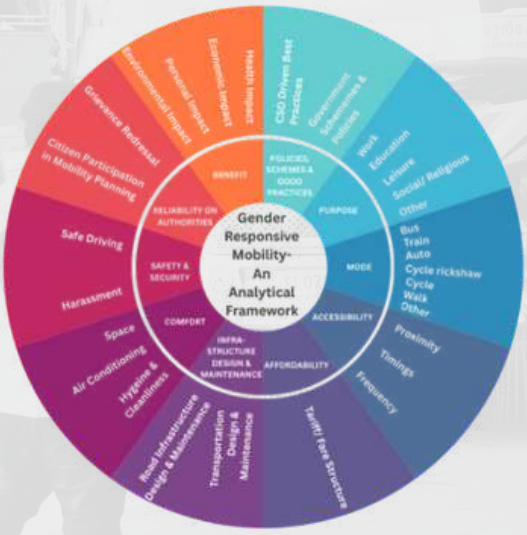


Image 1: MobiliseHER Framework

The MobiliseHER framework makes it possible to see how different categories, working women, young girls, elderly women, persons with disabilities, and transgender persons—interact with systemic transport factors like affordability, safety, access, design, policy, and reliability. When visualised as a spider web, the interconnections become clear: access lies at the centre, tied to every category, while safety and affordability form the strongest links for working women, girls, and marginalised groups.

Elderly women and those with disabilities are most directly impacted by design gaps, while transgender persons consistently highlight safety as a dominant concern. This web of interlinkages demonstrates that no barrier acts in isolation; they overlap, reinforcing the conditional nature of women's mobility.

Unavoidably, a reality arises throughout cities: women's mobility is a reflection of equity and encompasses much more than infrastructure. It shows how much society values women's time, security, and self-respect. Women who depend on inexpensive public transportation are particularly vulnerable to system failures in a world where cities are becoming more and more susceptible to climate hazards. Women are first cut off by flooded streets, damaged sidewalks, or interrupted bus lines, which restricts their access to jobs, education, and medical care. Thus, incorporating gender into mobility planning is a strategy for climate resilience: dependable and reasonably priced public systems not only lower emissions but also guarantee that women are not left behind in the event of shocks.

Inclusion of Citizens' Voices in Kerala Urban Planning Commission

With nearly half of Kerala's population urbanised and census towns surging from 99 in 2001 to 520 by 2022-23, the research sought to uncover why participatory mechanisms rooted in the 1996 People's Plan Campaign have weakened, and how they can be revitalised for inclusive and sustainable growth. Insights from consultations in five cities (Alappuzha, Palakkad, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, and Kochi) reveal persistent gaps in awareness, inclusivity, and responsiveness, highlighting the need for policy reforms to bridge state-citizen divide.



Key lessons underscore Kerala's decentralised model as a national benchmark yet reveal its vulnerabilities. First, participatory governance thrives when grassroots structures like Kudumbashree are empowered, but falters without sustained funding and inclusion in decision-making.
Kudumbashree members across cities emphasised their role as a 'bridge' for welfare delivery (e.g., PMAY housing and health schemes), indicating that bottom-up data collection enhances municipal efficiency. However, low remuneration and exclusion from policy formulation erode motivation, illustrating that empowerment without authority leads to tokenism. Second, youth engagement is critical for long-term sustainability, but civic education deficits perpetuate disinterest. Students in all cities expressed optimism for clean, safe spaces but lacked knowledge of ward sabhas and roles and responsibilities of Municipalities suggesting educational reforms- like municipal visits could foster responsible citizenship. Third, digital tools like K-SMART hold promise for transparency, yet bureaucratic delays undermine trust, reinforcing the lesson that technology must complement, not replace, human-centered approaches.

Core issues emerged consistently, with variations by city and citizen groups. Waste management dominated concern exacerbated by inadequate segregation and legacy dumpsites, as seen in Kochi's Brahmapuram fire and Kozhikode's health epidemics like Nipah. Infrastructure woes, including poor roads and water scarcity, were acute in Palakkad (groundwater depletion) and Alappuzha (saline intrusion), while traffic congestion plagued economic hubs like Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi. Low ward sabha participation due to poor notification, highlighted systemic barriers, with dominance by interest groups, marginalising women and migrants. Youth faced safety fears (e.g., female students in Alappuzha) and recreational deficits, while marginalised groups like transgender individuals struggled with access despite policies like the 2015 Transgender Policy.

Comparisons across citizens and cities reveal nuanced dynamics. Kudumbashree women, often from vulnerable backgrounds, viewed governance as a livelihood enabler, contrasting with RWAs predominantly middle-class who demanded statutory powers for autonomy, as in Kozhikode's calls for fund devolution. CSOs in Thiruvananthapuram advocated cultural platforms for cohesion, differing from youth's tech-savvy aspirations for online engagement. Inter-city contrasts showed coastal Alappuzha prioritising disaster resilience (e.g., floods), while inland Palakkad focused on water issues. Citizens aspire for stronger linkages and participation in municipalities. Local neighbourhood mechanisms may facilitate the same. Likewise, youth awareness of municipal governance can enhance their participation and contributions in city governance. Given rapidly urbanising Kerala, and its history of People's Planning in panchayats, more dynamic initiatives by municipalities and state government can demonstrate a model for the rest of the country.

CAPACITY FOR SOCIAL IMPACTS

Organisational Development (OD) for Non-Profit Organisations

Organisational Development (OD) for non-profit organisations was a stream of sectoral efforts begun by PRIA in late 1990s. Those initial experiences indicated the need for redesigning the purposes and meanings of OD in social purpose organisations. Unlike the for-profit corporate sector (from where the theory and practice of OD emerged in 1970s) the focus of OD for civil society sector is about relevance, impacts and visions.
Refer to our 1980s article on 'Organisational Development'

PRIA launched a renewed effort in this sectoral strengthening intervention two years ago, after Covid and regulatory changes significantly disrupted civil society in India.The purpose of the program was to build OD facilitation capacities of the non-profit professionals who could provide OD support to non-profit organisations to make them value driven, adaptive, effective and resilient.



Several factors contributed to the program's positive impact despite various challenges. The integration of online, in-person, and practicum components addressed essential theories and practices of OD for trainee professionals. Participants received high-quality learning materials, including theoretical frameworks, practical examples, and case studies. Organisational diagnostic tools and checklists assisted participants in systematically designing, sequencing, and facilitating their assessments. A participatory approach to teaching ensured that participants remained engaged throughout the course. The practicum, divided into three parts, allowed participants to apply what they learned in both online and residential workshops

The first online component comprised six modules delivered over five weeks, featuring curated study materials and opportunities for online master classes, webinars, and discussion forums. However, many participants, who were full-time professionals, found it challenging to complete all required readings within the allotted time. Two key suggestions were made: to extend the delivery duration of the online component and include more online master classes and webinars; and to provide a condensed version of each module for convenient reference.

The practicum was structured in three phases over 8-10 days which included building a relationship with the organisation, facilitating a participatory diagnosis, and co-developing an OD intervention plan. However, establishing a trusting relationship and developing a time-bound diagnosis plan took longer than expected, as did the participatory diagnosis.



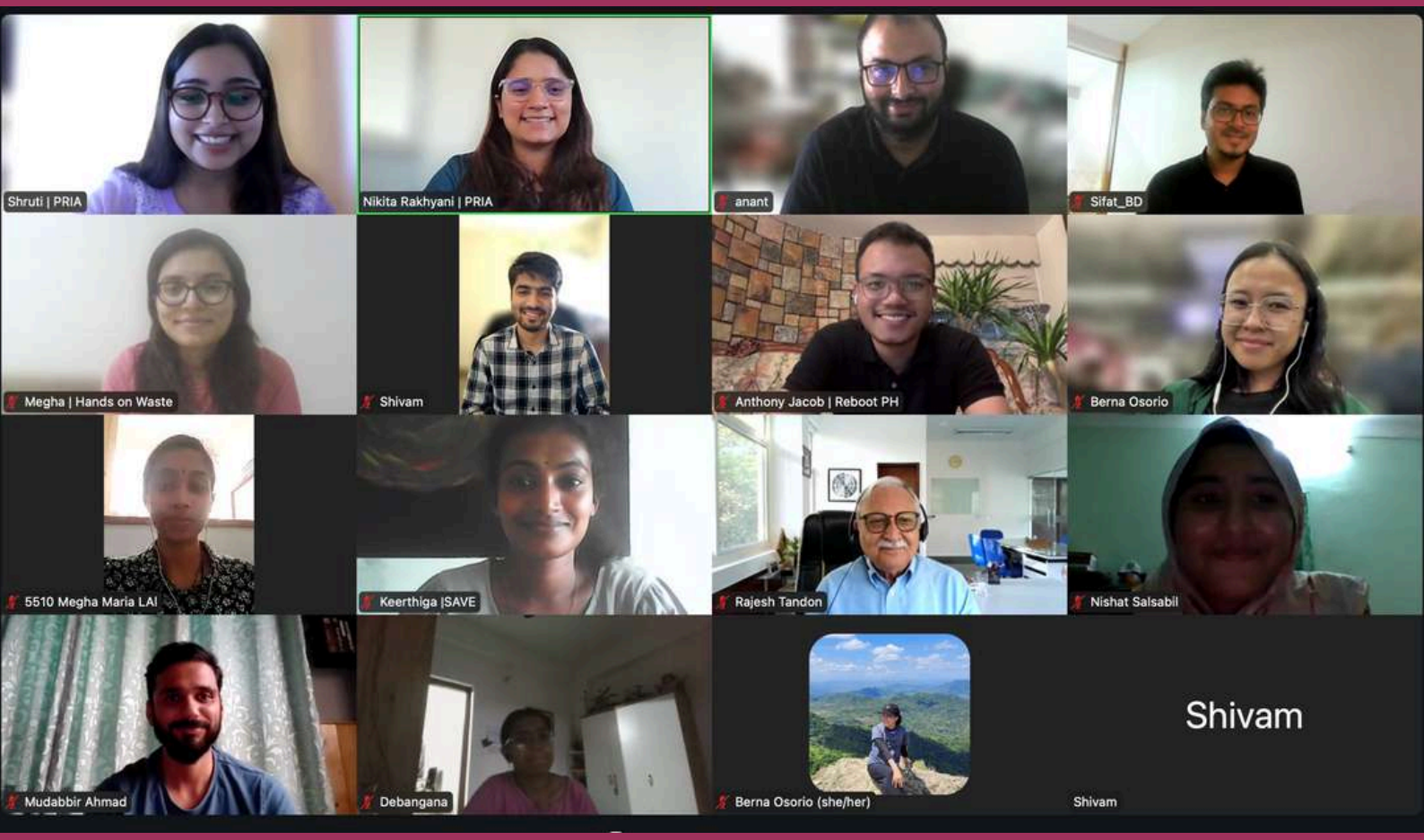
During the co-development of OD intervention strategies, some participants expressed a lack of confidence in facilitating these interventions independently, compounded by host organisations' expectations for concrete outcomes. Two suggestions were made: to concentrate the second residential workshop on facilitating OD interventions to equip participants with diverse skills; and to create dyads and/or triads among cohort participants to support each other's strengths, recognising the difficulty of mastering all OD interventions in a single course.

Post-cohort support, in the form of co-reflections and ongoing engagement between participants and facilitators, proved beneficial, allowing participants to clarify doubts and build confidence in sharing findings and co-planning interventions.

An informal coalition of these 23 trained OD facilitators over two cohorts has been sharing their ongoing experiences with each other. ***Click here for the report.***

Youth-led Climate Action Fellowship Program

As climate change accelerates, its impacts—ranging from displacement and resource scarcity to infrastructure loss—disproportionately affect marginalised communities who have contributed the least to the crisis. Waste workers, daily wage earners, gig workers, informal settlers, and the homeless remain largely absent from dominant, top-down climate narratives. To address this gap, PRIA launched the ***Youth-led Climate Action Fellowship***, a three-month initiative to engage young people in participatory research focused on documenting grassroots climate vulnerabilities and community-led adaptation strategies across the Global South.



The fellowship brought together 12 youth researchers from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. Through a blended model of online expert-led sessions and community-based fieldwork, participants were trained in climate science, participatory methodologies, gender-climate intersections, and Global South perspectives. Initially, many fellows adopted conventional research approaches, relying on secondary data and institutional sources. However, as the fellowship progressed, they were encouraged to conduct field recces and interact directly with affected communities.

This hands-on engagement proved transformative. Exposure to the lived realities of slum residents, waste workers, and riverside communities reshaped participants' understanding of climate impacts—shifting from abstract policy narratives to grounded, human experiences. Using tools such as community mapping, focus group discussions, and storytelling, fellows co-produced knowledge with community members, enabling a more democratic and inclusive research process.

Despite the program's short duration, the fellows' evolving capacity to build trust, foster dialogue, and engage with empathy demonstrated the transformative potential of participatory, youth-led research. The initiative affirmed that climate justice requires not only policy change but also active listening and collaboration with those most affected—whose voices are vital to crafting locally relevant and resilient climate solutions.

Click here for the report.









Celebrating Women's Empowerment & Gender Equality

Instituted in memory of ***Dr. Martha Farrell***, a pioneer in gender justice and participatory learning, the ***Martha Farrell Award for Excellence in Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality***—supported by PRIA—represents a unique initiative that seeks to institutionalise recognition of gender-transformative practices grounded in everyday feminism. Rooted in the values of participatory research and action, the award identifies and honours mid-career individuals and institutions who embody feminist principles through practice, community engagement, and systems change.



In 2024, the 8th Award received 251 nominations—147 in the individual category and 104 in the organisational —from 24 states and union territories across India. These nominations spanned a diverse spectrum of stakeholders including educators, civil society actors, government officials, entrepreneurs, and grassroots organisations

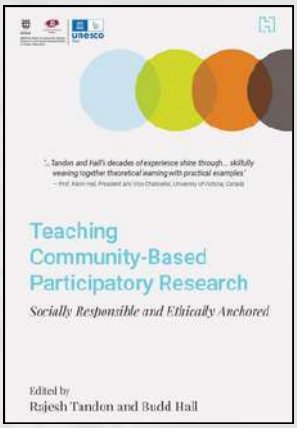
Begun in 2017, the purpose behind these awards is to identify hitherto unrecognised social activist who have been promoting women's empowerment in difficult and challenging contexts. The personal life-stories of these women is itself one of inspiring struggle for dignity and justice

Over these years 705 nominations have been received in individual and, 586 in organisational categories. These nominations are sensitively reviewed including through online, references and field visits. The finalists in both categories are invited to be part of this growing circle of gender champions.
Post award, support to these finalists and nominees is regularly provided to strengthen them to continue their impacts. They participate in workshops to share their knowledge and experiences; several have received new resources and support from others; and the visibility to their work contributes towards their stronger leadership in future.

The award ceremony, held on September 28, 2024, at the UNESCO New Delhi Cluster Office, served as both a celebration and a knowledge-sharing platform. ***Click here for the report.***

Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium

The ***K4C Global Consortium***, established under the **UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education,** was created to nurture the next generation of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) practitioners worldwide. Its ethos rests on the democratisation of knowledge, grounding higher education in social responsibility, and fostering equitable partnerships between universities and communities. Through its Mentor Training Program and the establishment of K4C hubs in diverse regions, K4C has sought to institutionalise CBPR as a legitimate and transformative field of knowledge and practice. ***Click here for the Annual Report of K4C for the year 2024-25.***



A central focus remained on the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium, particularly the regionalisation of its Mentor Training Programme (MTP). This year saw the launch of three new regional training hubs—in Colombia, Uganda, and Malaysia—marking a significant step toward localising capacity-building in Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR).

The Chair also published book entitled ***'Teaching Community Based Participatory Research: Socially Responsible & Ethically Anchored'***, which was released in early 2025. This book emerges from MTP, reflecting over fifty years of dedicated work in participatory research.

The UNESCO Chair supported two major initiatives under this decentralised training model:



October 05 – 13, 2024

The Mizan Hub, based at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, hosted a ***regional K4C MTP residency*** in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, fostering mentor development across the Southeast Asia region.



December 02 – 06, 2024

A ***second residency*** was co-facilitated by Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Dr. Budd Hall (University of Victoria), and Prof. Irma Alicia Flores Hinojos (University of Andes) at the University of Ibagué, Colombia. This initiative supported two cohorts of faculty in deepening their CBPR expertise and mentoring capacities

The UNESCO Chair undertook the mammoth task of compiling over fifty years of global experience into the book Teaching and Learning Community-Based Participatory Research: Socially Responsible and Ethically Anchored. This work draws richly from the learnings and experiences of the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium, which has cultivated a vibrant global community of practice around CBPR. Grounded in ethical values, social justice, and transformative practice, the book offers a comprehensive framework for teaching and learning CBPR. By integrating insights from K4C hubs, it stands as a foundational resource for educators, students, and practitioners committed to fostering a more democratic and inclusive knowledge landscape. Its release marks a significant intellectual and pedagogical contribution worldwide.

PRIA INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY
LEARN. LEAD. TRANSFORM

India's development sector is undergoing rapid transformation. In recent years, the social sector has seen a greater influx of mid- and senior-level professionals with prior experience in other sectors (especially the corporate sector) along with entry level professionals with diverse educational backgrounds (beyond social work/ arts/ humanities). This has led to an increase in demand from professionals working in the social sector for short-term, high impact online, offline and hybrid courses and educational initiatives to help them bridge gaps in their theoretical and practical understanding of the social development sector.

It is in this space that PRIA International Academy (PIA) plays a vital role. Established in 2005 as the learning and education arm of PRIA, PIA draws on four decades of practical experience from PRIA's action-learning projects and offers courses that combine academic rigour with real-world insights. PIA's philosophy centres on lifelong learning, recognising education as a tool for both personal and professional growth. It provides a wide range of stakeholders, including university students, development professionals, and public administrators, opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills.



6500 LEARNERS



35 COUNTRIES

HEAR FROM OUR PARTICIPANTS

"Participatory Approaches for Social Inclusion course was undoubtedly beneficial for my research work, providing a deep understanding of theoretical aspects and the applied side of participation."

"PRIA course was comprehensive, eclectic and integrative in nature thus having immense relevance for public private and civil society leadership engaged in promoting just, democratic and accountable planning and governance systems and structures in their countries".

"PRIA facilitators listen, engage and explain at the level where participants understand and learn through many practical exercises. The best workshop on gender that our employees have ever attended."

"I have been calling experts to teach my students about Participatory Research but I myself have been thirsted to know about it in a comfortable space, free of judgement and this Learning Circle was a wonderful experience. This circle is so relevant where all of us researchers can get together and discuss things that don't come out in papers and thesis but practical realities that we face on field."

Since its inception, PIA has reached more than **6,500 learners across 35 countries** through its online courses delivered on its in-house Learning Management System (Moodle). Participants include university students, civil society leaders, development professionals, and government administrators. Courses are developed by experienced practitioners, academicians, and adult learning specialists, and are widely valued for their quality and contextual relevance.

In alignment with its commitment to deepening the practice and pedagogy of Participatory Research, PRIA International Academy (PIA) continues to organise a diverse array of capacity-building initiatives and collaborative learning platforms. These events are designed not merely as knowledge dissemination exercises, but as dialogic spaces that centre co-learning, relaxivity, and practice-oriented engagement, especially within academic and practitioner communities

Hybrid Training Workshops

PIA's hybrid training workshops integrate self-paced online learning with facilitated in-person sessions, enabling participants to engage more deeply with specific themes within participatory research and practice. Designed for early-career professionals, researchers, and students, these workshops promote the application of participatory principles within real-world contexts.



Participatory Research Methodology Workshop,
Indian School of Development Management (ISDM), Uttar Pradesh,
September 23 – 24, 2024



Participatory Research Methodology Workshop,
IIHMR University, Jaipur,
February 24 – 25, 2025

Higher Education Institution (HEI) Learning Visits

Since 2010, PIA has curated field-based immersion programmes for students and faculty from international Higher Education Institutions. These visits allow participants to critically reflect on the intersections of theory and practice through lived experiences of grassroots development and participatory research processes.



Learning Visit by University of Glassgow, Scotland,
April 15 – 24, 2024



Learning Visit by Michigan State University,
February 23 – March 07, 2025

New courses being launched include themes like: Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation, Social Accountability, Community-Based Participatory Research for Universities, Participatory Training Methodology.

COMMUNITY/INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Knowledge Democracy

The accelerating crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and cultural erosion have precipitated urgent global discourse about sustainable futures. At the heart of this discourse lies a fundamental paradox: while international forums increasingly acknowledge the value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), these epistemologies remain systematically marginalised in policy and practice (Hall & Tandon, 2017).

Indigenous Knowledge Systems represent more than alternative approaches; they constitute sophisticated, time-tested frameworks that for millennia have sustained human-environment relationships through dynamic, place-based adaptation (***DECODE***, 2024). Unlike the compartmentalised paradigms of Western science, IKS embody holistic integration of ecological stewardship, spiritual values, social organisation, and economic practices (Hall & Tandon, 2020).

Despite rhetorical commitments in instruments like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, IKS face persistent inequities in forums like COP28. The concept of "knowledge sovereignty"—the right of Indigenous peoples to control, access, and govern their own knowledge systems—remains weakly implemented.

Since 1970s, Participatory Research (PR) has challenged the dominant models of inquiry that kept communities at the margins of knowledge creation; it argued that communities must be recognised as co-creators of knowledge, not merely as objects of study. This radical shift seeks to make research into a democratic process, rooted in lived realities and actions for justice.

Over the decades, PR approaches have become significant strategies of inquiry, enabling communities to analyse their conditions, mobilise their strengths, and influence policies and practices that shape their lives. ***PRIA*** has been supporting these methodologies since 1982.

Over past two decades, academic research community has begun to undertake “co-construction” of knowledge in partnership with local communities. This approach has gained substantial traction in issues of public health, food security, water conservation and bio-diversity. However, much of co-construction of knowledge continues to keep control over the research agenda, methodology and resources in academic institutions. Community/indigenous led research has been not adequately recognised and supported.

Decolonised Co-construction of Knowledge

Last year, ***DECODE*** project was launched with the above questions in view. Led by Drs. Rajesh Tandon & Budd Hall, Co-Chairs of UNESCO Chair for Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education and funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the project aims to systematise understandings about the potential of locally contextualised, actionable knowledge. Recognising that knowledge is diverse, culturally situated, and linguistically plural, this project seeks to foreground systems of knowing that have historically been ignored or excluded. Anchored in the gender- and decolonial-informed framework of knowledge democracy developed by Tandon and Hall, the project emphasises the recognition and strengthening of community knowledge cultures.



Through peer learning, collective reflection, and systematisation, DECODE brings together global networks of community practitioners, academically trained professionals, and Indigenous researchers. This collaboration works to deepen the understanding of the principles, policy implications, and infrastructures needed to advance community- and Indigenous-led knowledge movements, contributing to healthier, more equitable, and sustainable futures.

Innovative Research Design & Methodology

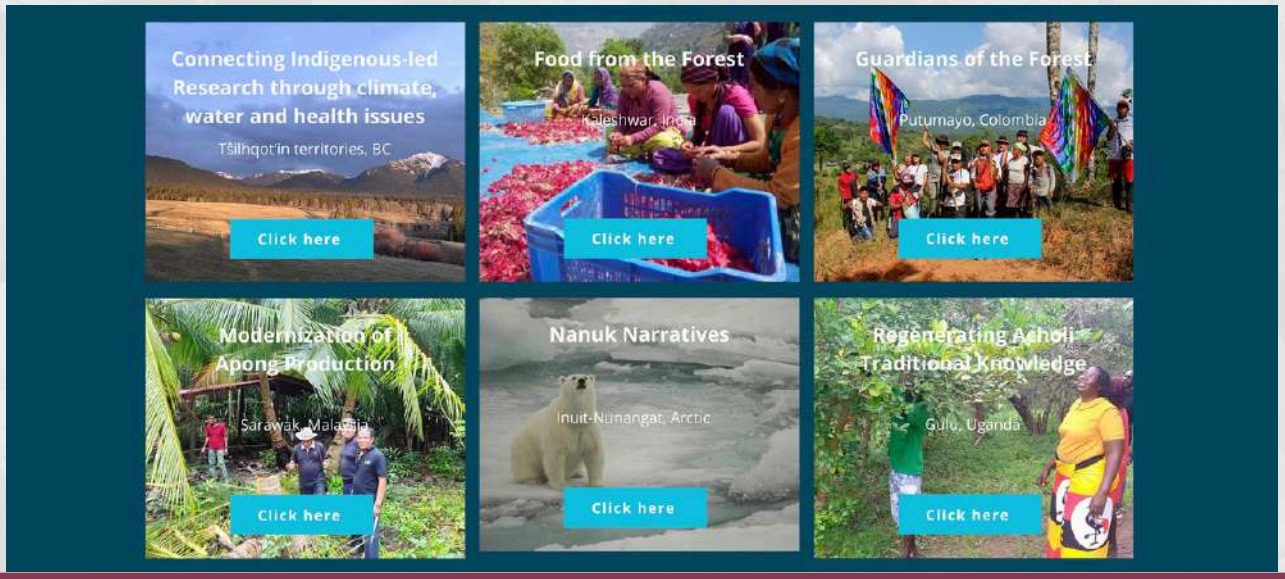
The year began with the DECODE teams meeting in Gulu, Uganda in early June, marking the first time project partners came together in person. This gathering provided a vital space to explore potential case studies, discuss methodologies and approaches, and lay the foundation for the project's direction. It was a formative moment that set the tone for the year ahead, strengthening collaboration and building the shared impetus that has guided DECODE's progress ever since.

Following this, the DECODE project made significant strides over the past year. It successfully mapped 10 case studies across the globe.



The community researchers themselves were the anchors of the case study preparation process. Each case study was prepared in local language as well (in addition to English).

Six webinars (in Colombia, Uganda, India, Malaysia and Canada) have been held already to share findings and develop reflections with other participants. Webinar synthesis reports and Storymaps of each case study have been disseminated.



These webinars and Story Maps have been imperative in communicating our work- demonstrating the value of adopting diverse forms of media to bring knowledge to life. The webinars created meaningful spaces for communities themselves to speak their knowledge with the world. They were conducted in local languages as well to enable communities to speak directly. By embracing such varied methods of dissemination, DECODE embodies its ethos of openness, accessibility, and inclusivity in knowledge-sharing.

In addition, a collective preliminary analysis of lessons learned from the methodologies and key messages was prepared, culminating in a working paper that presents these findings. ***https://tinyurl.com/DECODE-Paper***

Building on this progress, the framework for digital open-access Knowledge Democracy and Participatory Research platform has been developed with the support of the University of Victoria's library and PRIA. This repository is expected to be fully functional by the beginning of next year.

Influencing Research Systems

Lessons from DECODE were strategically shared in two major global events last year.

Dr. Rajesh Tandon was invited to speak at the opening plenary of **Global Research Council 12th Annual Meeting held in Interlaken May 29-30, 2024.** Global Research Council (GRC), set up in 2012, now has nearly 100 National Science Councils as members, in addition to EU, IDRC, International Science Council and some networks like Belmont Forum. The theme of the conference was 'sustainability research', as two themes of 'research for sustainable development' and 'sustainability of research' were merged.

Dr Tandon was to provide 'Perspectives from Global South', where DECODE principles ***(presentation)*** were highlighted - co-construction, decolonisation and community knowledge partnerships. First Plenary speaker, Prof Peter Messerli, made a very thoughtful presentation, emphasising 'no science without sustainability, and no sustainability without science'. DECODE message just added 'inclusive and democratised' science to that call.



The second occasion of similar conversation was in Ethiopia.

“Knowledge is a garden, if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested. Many different plants make the garden beautiful and useful to humanity”; emphasising the rich history of African knowledge systems, epistemologies and contributions, President Sahle-Work Zewde (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia) also said “Africa’s indigenous knowledge has the power to inspire global solidarity and contribute to the creation of a just and equitable global system”, she invited delegates to explore pathways towards the same.



Thus began UNESCO conference on “Transforming Knowledge for Africa’s Future” in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), September 30 - October 2, 2024. Organised jointly with African Union and International Forum of UNESCO Chairs, the deliberations by nearly 300 delegates (two-thirds from Africa) began to articulate a new consensus about knowledge and sustainable development.

The conversations focused on three streams -

- Recognition of ‘knowledge ecologies’ argued for decolonisation of research frameworks and methodologies. Decolonisation is not merely an intellectual shift, but also entails emotional, personal and normative renewal.
- Deliberations on the implementation of Open Science approaches argued that the third and fourth pillars of the UNESCO Recommendations (which focus on public engagement and dialogue with multiple epistemologies) continue to be ignored, thereby weakening the requirement of engaging with community & indigenous knowledge.
- Conversations on research partnerships emphasised the need for reform of institutional cultures and structures in research institutions and research funders.

As the perspective of knowledge democracy begins to engage with climate research institutions and networks, it is hoped that DECODE's findings of the criticality of working respectfully with community & indigenous knowledges will begin to make further impacts.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING & DIALOGUES

Throughout the year, PRIA had the opportunity to host several distinguished guests, alumni, and institutional partners. These visits facilitated meaningful dialogue and reaffirmed long-standing collaborations:

May 22, 2024
Dr. Tapati Dutta
Assistant Professor, Fort Lewis College (USA) | Former PRIA colleague (2000–2004)

August 5, 2024
Ms. Deepika Rao
Executive Director, CIVIDEP India (Bengaluru)

October 22, 2024
Ms. Sashi Kiran
Hon'ble Minister for Women, Children, and Social Protection, Fiji


Dr. Tapati Dutta


Ms. Deepika Rao


Dr. Suman Sahai






Ms. Sashi Kiran


Ms. Lalita Ramdas


IYC Delegates, Malaysia

February 1, 2025
Delegation from International Youth Centre (IYC), Malaysia

February 11, 2025
Ms. Lalita Ramdas
Long-time Associate| Former PRIA Governing Board Member

February 18, 2025
Dr. Suman Sahai
Founding Director, Gene Campaign





During 2023–24, PRIA colleagues have actively shared their knowledge and expertise through a variety of platforms — from engaging online sessions to in-person workshops and interactive learning events. These contributions have enriched dialogues, built capacities, and strengthened networks across diverse audiences. A few highlights of these activities are noted below.



- Indo-Pacific Summit on Social Science Funding & Collaboration, Thailand
- 15th Asia Democracy Research Network Regional Workshop, Japan
- Roundtable of Major Sustainability – Promoting CSOs in India, New Delhi
- 46th Annual EAIR Forum 2024, University College Cork, Ireland
- European Evaluation Society 2024 Conference, Italy
- Asia-Pacific ARA-TLS Knowledge Synthesis Symposium, Sri Lanka
- 12th Indian Social Work Conference, Sonipat
- ASPBAE Regional Strategic Planning Workshop and 60th Anniversary Celebration, Vietnam
- Action Research Roundtable Series, Ireland
- National Event 'Capacity Building for Citizen-centric Governance', New Delhi
- #Aahvaan: NGO-CSR Conclave 2025, New Delhi
- Global Forum 2025 – Azim Premji University, Bengaluru
- Indo-German Forum: Research, Innovation & Transfer, New Delhi



INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE



PRIA Governing Board Members

The membership of the Governing Board for 2024-25 is as follows:

Chairperson: Ms. Rita Sarin, Former Country Director, The Hunger Project, New Delhi.
Treasurer: Shri. Ravi Seth, Chartered Accountant from ICAI.
President: Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, PRIA, New Delhi

- Shri. Satinder Singh Sahni, retired IAS Officer, based in Gurgaon.
- Ms. Sheela Patel, Founder-Director, The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), Mumbai
- Shri. Ashok Kumar Singh, Founder-Director, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra (SSK), Lucknow
- Shri. Binoy Acharya, Executive Director, UNNATI (Organisation for Development Education), Ahmedabad.

Advisors

- Dr. Aditya V. Bahadur, Director, Red Cross and Red Crescent Climate Centre, School of Public Policy, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi.
- Ms. Kavita Nair, Independent Director, Advisor, Entrepreneur and Beginner Potter.
- Mr. Sandeep Mogalapalli, Chartered Accountant & Management Consultant (Freelancer).
- Dr. Gayatri Menon, Consultant & Adjunct Professor, The Ramalingaswami Centre on Equity and Social Determinants of Health, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), Bengaluru.
- Dr. Sonajharia Minz, Professor, School of Computer & System Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and Co-Chair, UNESCO Co-Chair in Transforming Indigenous Knowledge Research Governance & Rematriation.

COMMITTEE ON GENDER AWARENESS & MAINSTREAMING IN PRIA

Adhering to its commitment to gender-justice, PRIA formed a Committee Against Sexual Harassment (CASH) in December 1998, which then in 2001 evolved into becoming the Committee on Gender Awareness and Mainstreaming in PRIA (CGAMP). Led by Nandita Pradhan Bhatt as its Presiding Officer, the other members of the committee include Anshuman Karol, Bindu Baby, Soja Saramma Mathew, Surjeet Singh and Bharti Sharma (Chairperson, Local Committee of the District of Southeast Delhi as Third Party Member).

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ANNUAL REPORT

FROM INNOVATION TO MAINSTREAM:

50 years of Participatory Research

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