

REPORT

CONVERSATION
ON
ACCELERATING
CAPACITIES IN
CIVIL SOCIETIES
AND
NON-PROFITS

31 AUGUST 2021
5 – 7 PM

PRIA@40
SHAPING OUR TOMORROWS, TODAY



Empowering civil society



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- **Organisations improving their capacities can be resilient to challenges** – The non-profits must be able to build resilience through leadership and strategies to adapt to new circumstances. Civil societies must understand and respect the experiences of each other which will help them to respond to large-scale issues like climate change, pandemics, political polarisation etc., which can affect their global interdependence deeply. Multi-sector partnerships and multi-directional learnings are valuable in our interdependent world.
- **People have more faith in civil societies than local authorities** – Civil society organisations should undergo self-assessment for their experiential learning and should articulate values so that they can create changes and visions for better and larger societies.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to be a core belief** – The companies need to make corporate social responsibility part of their core business. The civil society organisation needs to maximise shared value among them and make corporate social responsibility more effective in the issues of financial and material support.
- **Prioritise adaptive management in the civil society** – Civil society organisations must undergo the challenge of ongoing learning from their experiences and express new solutions to the problems they face daily. They must nourish each other with wisdom and collective learning through participatory communication and share the available resources and build on them.
- **Building relationships of trust** – The civil society organisation needs to collaborate and build their trust with the other stakeholders so that it can encourage collaboration and participation determined on mutual accountability and transparency, which can be helped in responding to the issues of the communities.

PROFILE OF THE PANEILLISTS



Ms. NADINE B HACK, CEO, beCause Global Consulting, was named top 100 Thought Leader on Trustworthy Business Behaviour often enough to earn Lifetime Trust Award. She's been a non-executive director on for- and not-for-profit boards. The first female Executive-in-Residence at IMD Business School, she coaches senior executives and facilitates team deep dives. As a Forbes Councils author, she's had articles written about or published by her in the Financial Times, The New York Times, Huffington Post, UN Chronicle.

Mr. ARAVINDAN SRINIVASAN, Lead, Capacity Building, DASRA, loves working with social entrepreneurs and moved to the development sector to be able to contribute his skills to non-profits and give them access to professional management expertise that can multiply the impact of their work. He nurtures more than 200 non-profit organisations annually. His team helps non-profits become stronger institutions and realise their vision by strengthening their leadership, co-creating long term strategic plans, improving management systems and processes and fundraising for sustainability.



Ms. KATHY REICH, Director, Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD), Ford Foundation. Kathy guides Ford's efforts to support the vitality and effectiveness of institutions and networks that serve as pillars of broader social movements. Kathy is a Senior Fellow of the Schusterman Family Philanthropies and has served on several non-profit boards. She currently serves on the board of Repair the World, which mobilises Jews and their communities to take action to pursue a just world, igniting a lifelong commitment to service.

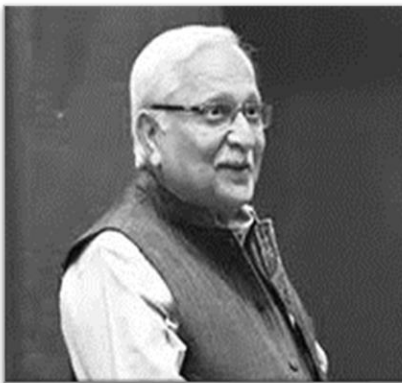
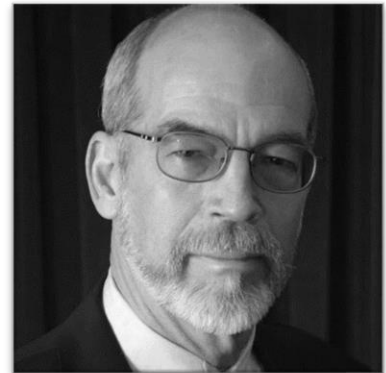
Mr. PETER SARGENT, Chief Executive, INTRAC, has built a career in the international development sector, focussing on the pursuit of operational excellence to help NGOs succeed. He strongly believes that, by building the capacity of individuals and organisations, it will be possible to achieve the ultimate goal of helping people achieve social, economic and environmental justice, wherever they are. In 2020, he went freelance to provide civil society organisations fighting poverty and injustice with support and advice in the areas of governance, finance, people and project management.





Ms. PRITHA VENKATACHALAM, Bridgespan India, Partner; Head of Market Impact, South Asia, advises governments, donors and philanthropies, non-profits, and the private sector across Asia and Africa on global development and social impact. Previously, Pritha established and led the New Delhi offices of Dalberg Global Development Advisors and Cambridge Economic Policy Associates. She is on the Advisory Board of Bahaar Foundation and ILSS (India Leaders for Social Sector).

Prof. L. DAVID BROWN, Chair, PRIA International and Former Professor, Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations, Harvard Kennedy School, USA, is an action researcher on civil society organisation development and cross-sector collaboration in service of development David and his wife Jane started the Institute for Development Research (IDR), a non-profit think tank focused on research and capacity-building for civil society. IDR worked closely with PRIA for many years.



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).



As Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) completes its 40 years of existence, it recommits to facilitate and strengthen the participation of urban informal in the planning, implementation, monitoring and assessment in cities' development and governance. It seeks to strengthen organisations of the urban poor to engage collectively with other stakeholders so that their voices are heard. 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 organised a Samvad (Conversation) in partnership with [International NGO Training and Research Centre \(INTRAC\), Oxford, UK](#) and [Dasra, Mumbai, India](#) on [Accelerating Capacities in Civil Society and Non-Profits](#) on Tuesday, 31 August 2021 to explore the new capacities that are required in the CSOs and the non-profits to address the emerging local and global challenges in the -post-pandemic times.

The webinar focused on the following questions:

- What new capacities are required in civil society and non-profits to address emerging local and global challenges in post-pandemic recovery?
- What efforts civil society and non-profits themselves, philanthropic initiatives and other supporters must make to build these capacities?

The virtual Conversation, attended by 113 participants, was moderated by **Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay (Director, PRIA)**. Dr. Bandyopadhyay began with a short presentation of PRIA's 40 years' journey with a special focus on its various interventions on the theme of Empowering Civil Society. PRIA's contribution to this theme can broadly be categorised into three sections:

- First, building human and institutional capacities in civil society;
- Second, nurturing independent identity and role of civil society;
- Third, enabling an ecosystem for a vibrant civil society and sector.

PRIA, through the [International Forum on Capacity Building of Southern NGOs \(IFCB\)](#), vigorously advocated these institutions for greater investment in capacity building particularly during 1998 and 2002. It defined what 'capacity' entailed from the Southern perspective across Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean region. To know more about PRIA's work on the theme of Empowering Civil Society, click [here](#).

Post his presentation, **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** invited **Ms. Nadine B. Hack** (CEO, beCause Global Consulting, Switzerland) and **Mr. Aravindan Srinivasan** (Lead, Capacity Building, Dasra, India) to set the stage for the discussion.

Ms. Nadine B. Hack's opening statement said, '*we are inextricably interconnected and no one sector or organisation alone can solve the challenges, therefore, we must cooperate*'. In our interdependent world, multi-sector partnerships are the most valuable, however difficult it may be to cultivate and sustain them. We must direct our resources towards building trust and creating a safe space for civil conversations. Multi-directional learning is yet another significant strategy for strengthening civil society organisations and non-profits, given that one cannot know it all. One needs to be open to these multi-directional channels of learning,

especially from the people on the ground as they have better insight into the crude realities. These dedicated civil society leaders need our support in building capacity. While we learn from their vision and actions, they often lack the technology and other material resources to execute their vision as best as they would like to. So, we, who represent the international NGOs, foundations, businesses, governments, must aid our partners on the ground. It is important to take note, COVID-19 and the isolation that followed it has been hard for all of us but it has been worse for the vulnerable and the marginalised. The challenges have only grown post-COVID-19, especially without access to sophisticated technology; it has become difficult for the service providers to communicate with their constituencies. So, in addition to whatever support we are giving to the poor now, it is vital to come up with creative ways to better engage with the communities. However, this connectedness also requires mutual respect and transparency, so one also needs to ensure proper utilisation of the funds through monitoring mechanisms. We must find ways to connect with our local partners using low-tech ways especially now in the post-pandemic time. She concluded, *'Let's find out from our local partners, what are the best ways for them to disseminate information and dispense what is most essential for their communities? Our shared humanity is what binds us together.'*

"connectedness is essential for capacity building"

Taking the context of COVID-19 and the isolation which Ms Hack talked about, **Mr. Aravindan Srinivasan** (Lead, Capacity Building, Dasra, India) highlighted that a lot of organisations in India are struggling for survival and these harsh realities need to be taken into account when one intervenes to build their capacities. Capacity building is intricately linked to scale – not organisational scaling up but scaling up its impact. The organisations must self-reflect to realise their full potential. This self-assessment needs to be supplemented with a 'future backwards' approach i.e. to determine their end goal. Reflecting on his experience, he stated that typically most of the organisations and the funders start with the bottom which is a never-ending zone because one can put in all the inputs one wants but they will never know where to stop. One needs to flip the structure on its head and start with the apex i.e. understand your goals and then come up with the strategies, capabilities and then start working backwards from there. This needs to be a two-way conversation which would begin with an internal reflection by the civil society organisations and then an open conversation with the funders about their willingness to support. It has to be a holistic approach and for that, both non-profits need to articulate their needs and the funders need to listen to what the non-profit wants to say. This approach needs to be more participatory and it must enable the decision making power to go to the people with maximum visibility.

"capacity building is deeply rooted, multi-year exercise"

Moving on to the next segment of the discussion, **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** requested the panellists to share their reflections on the new capacities that are required in civil society and non-profits to address the emerging local and global challenges in post-pandemic time.

'The idea of diversified finance for NGOs is not a new one', said **Mr. Peter Sargent** (Chief Executive, INTRAC, UK). One crucial aspect would be the long-term relationships between the stakeholders where they cultivate a shared understanding of their contexts, strategies and the values that underpin their work. The NGOs and civil society organisations need to think about sustainable programmes through co-creation and put emphasis on the importance of these relationships and knowledge. The other priority that he highlighted was that of adaptive management. That is to say, when an organisation is struggling to survive, it is faced with a lot of tough decisions. Organisational resilience includes a range of things right from internal management to working with partners. In this context, one of the key

decisions that have to be made is that of exiting responsibly with partners. To do that well, a genuine collaboration between the two is required. Another element of adaptive management is to experiment and adapt to different skill sets and ways of working. Reiterating the point made about 'trust', he added that building trustworthy leadership is a key component of capacity building. COVID-19 has shown us what a chaotic world it can be, hence, long-term planning in that context is very difficult. So, to navigate through these chaotic times requires leadership that people can trust. It is not just about finding direction, but also about delegation and empowerment of teams. The classic example is that of remote working. It is a two-way street where it is important to work alongside the leaders to mentor them and work with them through challenging times. Therefore, access to high-quality local capacity strengthening support is crucial in a chaotic environment.

"leaders also need help to navigate challenging times"

Drawing from the findings of some of the studies done by Bridgespan, **Ms. Pritha Venkatachalam** (Bridgespan India, Partner and Head of Market Impact, South Asia) stated that 'financial resilience' is the most important and an urgent need for capacity building of the civil society organisations and the non-profits. This is followed by equity and an inclusive mindset which is another key element of capacitating the sector. Endorsing Mr. Sargent's remark on 'adaptive management', she said, 'in terms of prioritised needs, I would look at it as collaboration'. For the non-profits of the next century, collaborative mindset and collaborative action is a critical part of their theory of change. Needless to say, that technology plays a significant role as an enabler throughout the process. So, irrespective of what you do or who you are, being connected with the communities requires good use of technology and COVID-19 has only made this crystal clear.

"capacity building needs have become more pronounced and varied"

Reflecting on her experience from the BUILD programme of the Ford Foundation, **Ms. Kathy Reich** (Director, Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD), Ford Foundation, USA) emphasised on cultivating resilience. Non-profit organisational resilience is the ability to respond effectively to change and to adapt successfully to new and unforeseen circumstances while staying true to the mission. She further laid down four aspects of resilience - one, resilient strategies i.e. the ability to adapt quickly to opportunities and challenges in profound connection and collaboration with others because no civil society actor is an island. We can be effective only when we work together with other actors. Two, resilient people i.e. building leadership, governance, organisational culture and staff well-being with a profound emphasis on equity to show effectiveness in the work. Only when people are respected and their voices are heard, we can hope to tackle the many challenges facing our world today. Three, resilient finances i.e. building a strong financial foundation for the organisations – adequate funding of reserves and diversified revenue sources. Four, building a resilient system i.e. an essential system in areas like technology, security, communication, organisational learning and impact assessment to ensure that organisations are moving forward in ways that are fully aligned with their mission and their strategy. A strong civil society organisation serves as a conduit and an amplifier for innovative ideas, but to do that they need to be well supported to innovate, to take risks, to fail and to learn.

"cultivate resilience to change and adapt to new circumstances"

Furthering the discussion, **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** requested **Dr. Rajesh Tandon** (Founder-President, PRIA) to share his thoughts on what changes he witnesses in the capacity needs today vis-à-vis capacity needs three to four decades ago.

Reflecting on his journey, **Dr. Tandon** stated that lately, he finds that the competence of people in the sector is high and he advocated to focus efforts on helping the civil society leaders explore their commitments. It is quite the reverse of what it was 45 years ago. To change relations of power, one must understand how politics work locally and what one needs to deal with institutions of governance – both societal and statutory.

“competencies are high; commitment needs attention”

Meet our panellists...



[From top left to right: Prof. L. David Brown, Mr. Peter Sargent, Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Ms. Nadine B. Hack, Ms. Kathy Reich, Mr. Aravindan Srinivasan, Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay and Ms. Priitha Venkatachalam]

Dr. Bandyopadhyay invited the panellists to deliberate on the efforts that civil society and non-profits themselves, philanthropic initiatives and other supporters must make to build these capacities.

Ms. Reich stated that the starting point for any non-profit and civil society organisation must be 'self-assessment'. For non-profit leaders and organisations, it is important to honestly assess their strengths and their challenges amongst themselves. This assessment is not an accountability tool or due diligence but a learning tool. So, they must start by going through that assessment to developing their own set of priorities. The other important strategy to strengthen an organisation is to focus on the 'people/ community' that they serve – keeping people at the centre and developing an inclusive organisation that promotes and nurtures equity, is the key. Flexibility in grant expectation, report publication, enabling them to re-position the funds in whatever way it is needed to respond to the crisis is few other ways in which the funders can help build the capacities of the civil society organisations and non-profits. She concluded, '*It's amazing what you can accomplish when you throw up your own silly rules and structures*'.

Bringing new voices from the participants, **Dr. Bandyopadhyay** opened up the floor for discussion.

'People trust NGOs and faith-based organisations', said **Mr. Richard Holloway** from among the participants. We need to use this to our advantage and think of more proactive approaches. As an organisation, we also need to be more active in fighting corruption. We know how the inner side of development operates and yet we have not been proactive enough in fighting the emerging and burgeoning corruption, which has only become worse with COVID-19. He also emphasised on the aspect of financial sustainability. It would be valuable for civil society organisations and NGOs to set up a for-profit consultancy business owned by their organisation as a way to try and build up some reserve for the days when things become difficult.

Ms. Sahana Jose from Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies said, '*we believe that high-quality civil society organisations deliver high-quality outcomes. You cannot have one without the other*'. One needs to be willing to invest in organisation building, people and processes. We have to be willing to make multi-year commitments with long term funding. We must accept the fact that we do not know it all, we need to listen to our partners, support good leadership, allow for flexibility when it comes to metrics for impacts and provide non-monetary support be it through learning sessions, connections, mentoring and structured capacity building sessions. These processes must be co-created with our grantees and partners. We need to make space for participatory conversations to challenge power relations and promote social change from the bottom up. She concluded, '*as a community we must collectively create a condition to nourish each other with wisdom and collective learning*'.

Mr. K S Gopal stated that one of the urgent needs is to have a capacity-building programme that can reboot our values, joy of our work and solidarity. We believe that impact and scale should go through a vertical structure process whereas if we took the democratisation of development as the road map, possibly that would lead to a better unleashing of human energies as well as resilience, especially in times such as COVID-19 when we are facing financial distress.

Ms. Venkatachalam stressed that this change towards stronger and more resilient non-profits requires a movement constituting multiple actors who could be role models or even set some standards across the sector. Unless this is taken on by the funders, non-profits and the intermediaries at a much more scaled-up level, it is just going to be a ripple as opposed to a wave that can really change the sector. Having a common language as well as toolkits that the sector could use to invest in building capacities is a must. One needs to be true to the cause and put the money where the mouth is. Lastly, the role of communities is key and COVID-19 has brought that to light. For instance, in Mumbai slums, which were a hotspot of the virus during the first wave, a lot of government initiatives like preventative health check-ups, the test, and treatment protocol were not effective and it did not reach the community till they cooperated with the local NGOs. We witnessed a shift where several funders who had never supported healthcare or community-based work pivoted to listening to the communities and addressing their needs. For any capacity building, therefore, there is a real need to put the community at the centre of our work.

Responding to **Ms. Venkatachalam's** remark on the need for standardisation, **Mr. Srinivasan said**, '*efforts at standardisation is detrimental to the cause*'. The most important thing about capacity building is changing the mindset itself and that is very hard to measure. We have to create space for the organisations to take risks and figure out what works for them or what does not. They should have the space to say that they attempted but it did not

go as planned and that is why their capacities are needed to be built. We need to be more flexible than standardised in our approach.

Sharing his reflection on the remark of interconnectedness, **Mr. Sargent** stated that it is important to ensure the responsiveness of organisations. An adequate feedback mechanism between the different actors in the system, as everyone has an important role to play, is crucial. This would result in better interconnectivity between the stakeholders. The other challenge facing us today is the challenge to demonstrate our innovation to ensure that we are not staying the same. Re-finding the purpose and meaning behind what we are doing and bringing real responses to what is happening right now, is of utmost importance.

Bringing corporate social responsibility (CSR) into the discussion, **Ms Hack** said, '*there is not a single company on the face of this that does not have a beautiful mission statement that says we care about people, planet and profit*'. Sadly, however, for most of them, it is exactly those words and very few have actually done the work to integrate them. Often, the CSR is like their 'out-house' that is to say that they have their main business and CSR is on the side. Hence, it is imperative that the companies make CSR a part of their core business by making it a part of their KPIs. On the comment of involving academic institutions, she responded by saying that education at every level is important and these institutions are one of the important players, when we talk about multi-stakeholder engagement because they sit on a huge body of research, data and information that in turn keep us informed. It is important to us, no matter what level we operate at, to bring all the stakeholders, who have a different vantage point, together. She said, 'no one sector/ organisation/ nation/ person, no matter how great, can do it alone'. Therefore, creating real coalitions where there is real multi-directional respect and engagement is significant.

Mr. Jagadananda of CYSD said that the challenge right now is the new breed of community-based organisations (CBOs) that are emerging from the ground and their relationship with the intermediary organisations. One needs to take note that there is a range of capacities and institutional requirements which are needed at that end. These institutions on the ground and the communities deserve special attention. The need of the hour is not to consider them as beneficiaries of our services but work towards strengthening their institutional base.

In the context of capacity enhancement and strengthening, **Dr. Tandon** emphasised on the importance of one's ability to use one's capacity. He said, '*the context may limit one's ability to use one's capacity*'. We need to build relationships of trust, we need to reach out to other multi-stakeholder groups. It is for the civil society actions to determine how accountable, transparent and pro-inclusion, the dominant forces of governance will be? This destructive pandemic has brought forth the fact that the real actions to save the lives of people were local and decentralised. Therefore, to bridge the local and the global in that sense, we need to navigate through the contested relations of power which we challenge in a manner that is conducive to the democracy that we are aspiring to be. This is where resilient relationships come into the picture. It requires an investment of time and effort. Building and nurturing relationships are not without time and effort and if you are putting time and effort there is a cost attached to it. The new generation of civil society that has come forward is committed, is willing to listen, engage, contribute and learn. The politics of contestation and conflicts and how one navigates and finds a common purpose, common solution, despite uncommon beliefs and value systems, is the challenge. He concluded, '*the practice of inclusion is not easy in today's context*'.

'Democracy, solidarity and freedom is all a buzzword for the civil society', said **Prof. Shree Bhagwan Roy** of IBRAD. No civil society organisation can work in any country if it does not follow the Constitution of the country. Maybe some of the policy is not conducive, so one can fight to make the policy conducive but cannot act against the Constitution of the country. Endorsing the idea of standardisation, he expressed that although it is difficult but some degree of standardised framework of working and impact assessment is very important. He concluded, *'can we think of developing an interdependent civil society where the unorganised organisations and self-help groups can come together to form an interdependent landscape?'*

Summing up the conversation, **Prof. L. David Brown (Chair, PRIA International)** shared a few key takeaways. We are living in the context of rapid social change – nationally and globally. It includes things like climate change, pandemics, technological change, the rise of artificial intelligence and concentrations of wealth, the rise of autocracy and political polarisation in a lot of different countries. The wave of corruption and cynicism is affecting many of us and among other things, these patterns reflect global interdependence. Further, he emphasised on the importance of civil society organisations' role as articulators of values, as catalysts of change, for societies – they can articulate both problems and goals for a society. He said, *'I think that as NGOs and civil society organisations create visions for what might be a better society, they serve a role for a much larger communities'*. There is a lot of potential and innovations that have not yet been articulated and developed. One of the challenges for the civil society organisations is to think about the ways to make CSR more effective than it is now and also explores new innovative ways that might tap into the kind of resources that are being held by stakeholders. The next challenge is that of ongoing learning i.e. learning new ways of overcoming day to day crises. It is imperative that they co-learn from each other's experience to articulate new ways to do things and to come up with new solutions to problems, as they are the brain trust of societies. He concluded, *'I do not want to say that the fate of the world depends on civil society organisations, but I must say to some extent I think it does. A lot of what we do has implications far beyond the villages or towns in which it starts'*.

"civil society is the brain trust of societies"

5.00 pm to 5.15 pm

Welcome and Introduction to PRIA@40 Programmes and Conversation

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

5.15 pm to 5.30 pm

Setting the Stage

- Ms Nadine B. Hack, CEO, beCause Global Consulting, Switzerland
- Mr. Aravindan Srinivasan, Lead, Capacity Building, Dasra, India

5.30 pm to 6.00 pm

Deep Dive Conversation (opening round)

- Mr. Peter Sargent, Chief Executive, INTRAC, UK
- Ms Kathy Reich, Director, Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD), Ford Foundation, USA
- Ms Pritha Venkatachalam, Bridgespan India, Partner, Head of Market Impact, South Asia
- Dr Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), India

6.00 pm to 6.20 pm

Open Discussion

6.20 pm to 6.45 pm

Deep Dive Conversation (closing round)

6.45 pm to 6.55 pm

Key Takeaways

Prof. L David Brown, Chair, PRIA International and Former Professor, Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations at Harvard Kennedy School, USA

6.55 pm to 7.00 pm

Vote of Thanks and Closure

Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Director, PRIA, India

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
30 September 2021	Investing in Civil Society Innovations	Empowering Civil Society
1 Oct 2021	Community-led Adaptation: Water is Life	Decentralised Community Governance