



Knowledge. Voice. Democracy.

PRIA
Since 1982

ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26

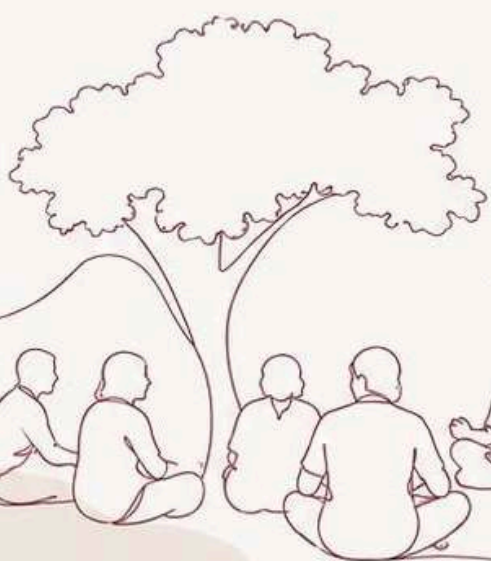
**Knowledge
Democracy,
Climate Resilience:**
Nurturing Global Partnerships



44

YEARS

OF PARTICIPATION
FOR JUST AND
EQUITABLE
SOCIETIES



Knowledge Democracy, Climate Resilience: Nurturing Global Partnerships



Circa 2025 marked **fifty** years of Participatory Research.

Rooted in the early ideas of Participatory Research (PR) in the late 1970s, an international network of 'early' practitioners of this approach were 'midwives' in the '**birth**' of PRIA in 1982. Several Asian practitioners who were connected through a cyclostyled Newsletter earlier encouraged us to name the new baby 'Participatory Research in Asia'. Over the years, PRIA developed an identity as a space where grassroots community organisers, educators, mobilisers and movement-builders could have **mutually respectful conversations** with a new generation of professionally trained and committed experts.

The practice and conversations about Participatory Research gained momentum in the 1990s, in centering local community in design and implementation of socio-economic development projects, especially in the global south. PRIA's methodology of **participatory learning** facilitated development of professionals (in government, civil society and funders) to recognise and value community's own knowledge as a starting point towards empowerment.

The original Mantra of PRIA '**Knowledge is Power**' began to make sense to others. Knowledge as a source of power and control made historical sense in Indian context as Brahmanical world views 'justified' societal inequality and hierarchy. Research with People (not merely research for people) began to make sense to activist-scholars.

At the turn of the millennium, PRIA began to demonstrate that Participatory Research methodology could become a building block of active citizenship and participatory governance. Context specific lived experiences of women, Dalits and tribals, when systematised with them, could become their knowledge to amplify their voices to demand that democracy works for them too. PRIA's extensive national and international campaign towards '**Governance Where People Matter**' was built on the widespread capacity building investments through participatory learning & research.

It was around the end of the first decade of this century that public discussion on 'community engagement and higher education' began to surface in the global north. The launch of UNESCO Chair in PRIA in 2012 gave further push to the efforts towards co-production of knowledge and learning.

Community engaged scholarship (teaching & research) also found acceptance in India's higher education system through a new policy and course on '**Fostering Community Engagement & Social Responsibility in Higher Education Institutions**' in 2020.

Thus, University Grants Commission (UGC) in India invited PRIA to train teachers in Higher Education Institutions to learn (and then teach to students) Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Since then, CBPR methodology is now formally recognised to pursue learning from community in all higher education teaching programs in India.

In 2018, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education launched a unique program to build CBPR capacity for the next generation of students and practitioners, called '**Knowledge-for-Change (K4C)**'. Within the first 5 years, K4C global consortium comprised 25 Hubs in 15 countries. PRIA supported the development of UNESCO Recommendations on Open Science, and its follow-up to inform the next generation of community researchers. From campaign to democratise knowledge, PRIA began to demonstrate practical ways of pursuing Knowledge Democracy in finding new solutions to emerging crises of water, agriculture, health and other climate issues.

Global recognition and demand for integrating Participatory Research in generating sustainable solutions has expanded in the past five years. PRIA has been invited to collaborate with domain experts such that PRIA's expertise can be harvested in diverse domains. As you read this Annual Report, you will find such partnerships on issues of urban water, urban female mobility and youth-led climate resilience. New opportunities for such collaboration may expand the strategic impacts of Participatory Research as next generation of students, teachers and youth learn to integrate community knowledge in diversity of teaching, learning and research contexts.

Recent international research undertaken by PRIA in partnership with IDRC has demonstrated the impacts of community-led research on climate resilience. DECODE project has produced evidence of **indigenous knowledge** and ways to 'weave' it with academic knowledge in finding context-specific knowledge solutions towards climate resilience. Investing in building ethical practices of CBPR and undertaking collaborative research with new domain experts is enhancing the role of **PRIA International Academy (PIA)**.

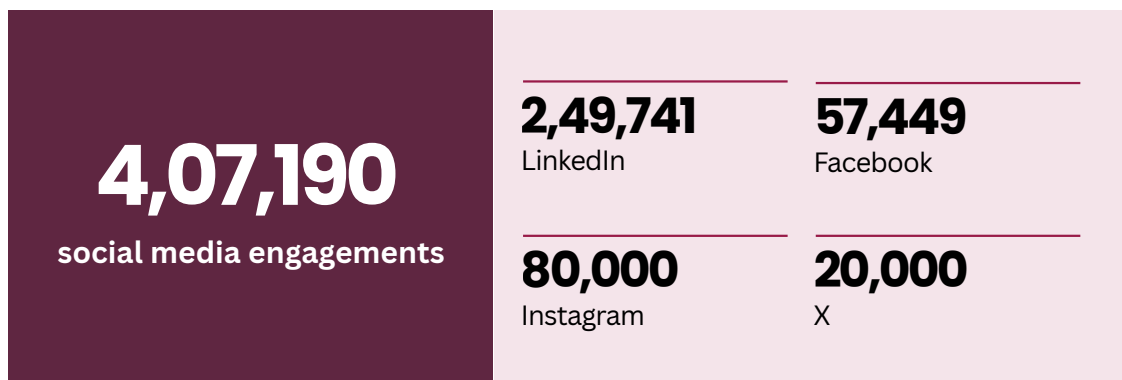
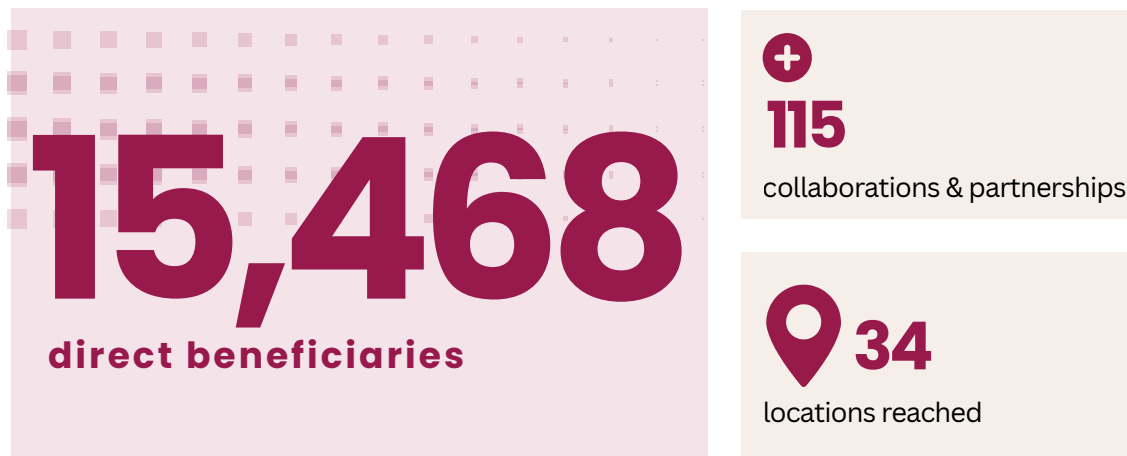
Building Inclusive and sustainable societies will need institutions and people which practice and promote **Knowledge Democracy!**

That is PRIA's strategic contribution in the future.

Rajesh Tandon
August 2026

Participation That Connects People, Places and Possibilities

A snapshot of communities, partnerships and digital conversations reached through PRIA's work



Who we reached

Gender distribution among direct beneficiaries

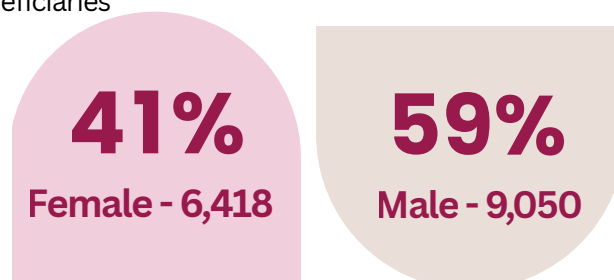


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MobiliseHER: Strengthening Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Urban Mobility

Advancing a women-centred approach to urban mobility

Mobility is fundamental for accessing education, employment, healthcare, markets, recreation, and public institutions. Yet, women and other marginalised groups frequently encounter barriers to safe, affordable, accessible, and reliable mobility. Their travel choices are shaped not only by transport infrastructure but also by safety concerns, social norms, caregiving responsibilities, affordability, physical accessibility, and employment patterns.

The MobiliseHER initiative was established to address these disparities by centring the lived experiences of women, gender minorities, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), migrants, and other marginalised commuters in urban mobility planning. Implemented in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Kochi, through a partnership between the Urban Electric Mobility Initiative (UEMI), WRI India, CEPT Research and Development Foundation (CRDF), and Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), the initiative sought to strengthen participatory processes and promote more inclusive mobility governance. The partnership combined UEMI's global experience in low-carbon mobility, WRI India and CRDF's urban mobility expertise, and PRIA's four decades of experience in participatory research and community engagement.

From community evidence to action

A key achievement of MobiliseHER has been the generation of empirical knowledge on the everyday mobility experiences of marginalised commuters. During the preceding phase, participatory research across neighbourhoods in the three cities used Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Participatory Urban Appraisals (PUAs), including safety and mobility mapping, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Communities identified mobility barriers, analysed their causes, prioritised concerns, and developed locally relevant recommendations.



Building on this evidence, the 2025–26 phase, led by PRIA, shifted from identifying problems to co-creating solutions. Community Ideation Workshops (CIWs) enabled residents and local stakeholders to validate research findings and develop actionable recommendations.

The workshops generated recommendations on bus routes and service accessibility, pedestrian infrastructure, street lighting, shared mobility, fare regulation, and safety and security. These were consolidated into neighbourhood reports and technical notes for policymakers, planners, and civil society organisations (CSOs). The process marked a shift in communities' roles—from respondents in consultation exercises to contributors to knowledge generation, solution development, and mobility planning.



(Glimpses from the co-creation workshops from Ahmedabad)

(Glimpses from the MobiliseHER co-creation workshop with Councillors representing over 50 wards of the Kochi Municipal Corporation)



6000+
People Engaged

25
Community Workshops

500
Voices of Participants

32
CSOs Strengthened



Amplifying community voices and mobility priorities

Engagement processes revealed that women sought transport systems responsive to the complexity of everyday mobility, including multiple destinations, caregiving responsibilities, varied working hours, physical abilities, and financial constraints. Consistent priorities emerged across the three cities:



Together, these priorities provide a community-informed agenda for making public transport more responsive to women's everyday realities.

Strengthening civil society capacity

MobiliseHER strengthened the role of civil society in gender-responsive mobility planning. CSOs across the three cities participated in workshops, consultations, ideation roundtables, co-creation processes, and other stakeholder engagements. 32 CSO representatives demonstrated improved competencies in gender-responsive mobility planning. Existing partnerships were sustained, and additional organisations brought into project activities. CSO representatives also participated in the online EU-India Policy Dialogue, led by UEMI and partners, and the Uddeshya event organised by WRI India and partners.

Strengthened CSO capacity is important because CSOs can connect communities with public authorities by organising community voices, piloting local solutions, and advocating for groups underrepresented in formal planning processes.

Influencing policy and practice

MobiliseHER's evidence and community perspectives were taken into broader policy and practitioner forums.



At the **Kerala Urban Conclave 2025**, PRIA, in partnership with the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), the Centre for Heritage, Environment and Development (C-HED), CRDF, WRI India, and GIZ India, organised a Gender-Responsive Mobility workshop in Kochi on 12th – 13th September 2025. It examined differences in mobility needs among women and gender minorities, identified gender gaps in urban mobility policies and practices, and highlighted the value of gender-disaggregated data and participatory planning.



(Dr. Kaustuv K Bandyopadhyay in a session on 'Inclusive and Gender Responsive Mobility' at the Kerala Urban Conclave 2025)



PRIA also contributed to the **Roundtable on Citizen Engagement for Developing Urban Transport Solutions**, led by CRDF at the 18th Urban Mobility India Conference and Exhibition on 7th November 2025. The discussion emphasised the importance of citizens lived experiences alongside conventional transport data and showed how participatory planning can explain why different groups use—or avoid—transport modes and identify practical improvements.



(Dr. Kaustuv K Bandyopadhyay at the 18th Urban Mobility Conference and Exhibition)

The online **EU-India Policy Dialogue** highlighted that rapid growth in cities has outpaced improvements for women of all ages, including those with disabilities. It stressed the need to address women's perceptions of safety and security and improve lighting, barrier-free access, and comfort at pedestrian infrastructure, bus stops, metro stations, and transit points. Women with locomotor, visual, hearing, and speech disabilities must be able to access education, economic opportunities, healthcare, and social services. These engagements expanded project evidence to planners, government officials, practitioners, researchers, and other decision-makers, creating opportunities for community perspectives to inform wider mobility discourse.



Way forward

MobiliseHER demonstrates that gender-responsive mobility planning can be strengthened when communities are recognised as knowledge holders and co-creators of solutions. The experience demonstrates that improving urban mobility requires more than investment in infrastructure and technology. It requires institutionalising participation, strengthening civic engagement, and creating mechanisms through which lived experiences continuously inform planning and decision-making.

PATHWAYS FOR GREATER IMPACT



MobiliseHER has laid important foundations for this approach. By connecting community evidence with civil society capacity, policy dialogue, and collaborative governance, the initiative contributes to a vision of urban mobility that is safer, more accessible, affordable, equitable, and responsive to the diverse realities of city residents.

Engagements and Knowledge Materials

- Panel Discussion on [‘Stay Strong: Global Goals Need Civil Society’](#) under the theme ‘Building Bridges among Civil Society Organisations: Dialogue across Continents’, Voluntary Action Network India (VANI), New Delhi, India
- [EvalFest 2026](#), organised by The Evaluation Community of India, New Delhi
- [‘Capacity Building Workshop on ‘Partnership Approach’](#), PRADAN, New Delhi, India
- Blog: [Navigating the Perceived Dichotomy of ‘Participation’ and ‘Execution’: The Case of Spatially Excluded Vypin Islands](#)
- Blog: [Gender, Disability & Mobility: Why Inclusive Transport Must Move Beyond Ramps and Reserved Seats](#)
- Blog: [Gender, Mobility, and Social Equity: Lessons from Ahmedabad's Streets](#)



Urban Water Governance: Facilitating Multistakeholder Partnerships

Traditional water bodies such as baoris, jhalaras, talabs and lakes have long been part of Rajasthan's urban landscapes. Beyond storing water, they support groundwater recharge, local ecosystems and cultural life. Yet many are deteriorating due to urbanisation, encroachment, pollution, groundwater pressure and climate variability. Their decline is also linked to fragmented institutional responsibilities and weakening community stewardship.

In response, PRIA, with support from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED-UK), undertook action research in Ajmer and Jodhpur to explore how urban water bodies could be rejuvenated through community participation and collaboration among institutions. The work brought together municipal departments, the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), residents, youth and students, academic institutions including Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati University (MDSU) and Jai Narain Vyas University (JNVU), Community based organisations and civil society organisations. The focus was not only on individual restoration, but on understanding how these actors could contribute to more participatory and coordinated urban water governance.

*(Participatory Mapping
of an urban water body
with the SHG women,
Ajmer)*



 **88**

TRADITIONAL
URBAN WATER
BODIES
PROFILED



30

In Ajmer



58

In Jodhpur

The work began with institutional and stakeholder mapping, followed by participatory documentation of urban water bodies. The profiling combined physical and ecological information with institutional responsibilities, cultural associations, traditional knowledge, gendered patterns of use and community perspectives. Women from SHGs, residents and university students participated in mapping, field documentation and community validation.



(Women group and JNV University students presenting findings from water body mapping in Jodhpur)

The approach was then tested through two demonstration pilots in each city, bringing communities, municipal departments, technical agencies and academic institutions together around selected water bodies. PRIA also facilitated the creation of ward- and city-level multistakeholder advisory groups, creating spaces for community representatives, government departments, academic institutions and civil society organisations to discuss local water concerns, coordinate action and strengthen ongoing engagement.

The experience from Ajmer and Jodhpur was subsequently documented through impact stories, city-level water body compendium of both Ajmer and Jodhpur, and a process manual on multi-stakeholder, community-led urban water body rejuvenation. Together, these outputs capture the learning from the field and the approach developed through the initiative, bringing together institutional analysis, stakeholder engagement, participatory socio-ecological profiling and demonstration pilots to strengthen community stewardship and institutional coordination.

The Ajmer and Jodhpur experience is informing PRIA's wider engagement with participatory governance, climate resilience and inclusive urban development. It has reinforced the importance of viewing urban water bodies not simply as physical infrastructure, but as shared socio-ecological spaces whose future depends on relationships between communities, institutions and the environment.

PRIA is taking these field experiences into wider conversations on urban water governance by co-convening dialogues with the **National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), New Delhi**, CSOs, CBOs, community partners and municipal governments.



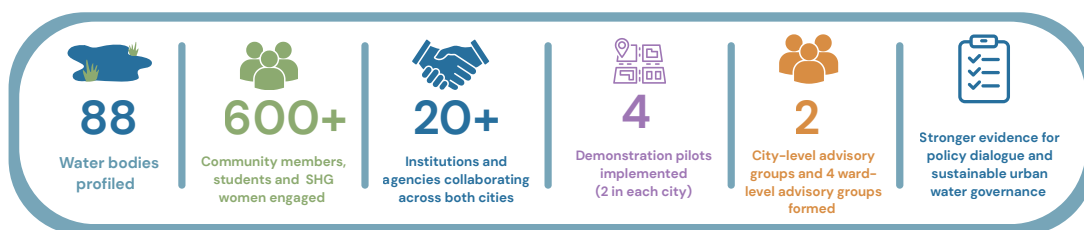
These dialogues provide opportunities to reflect on lessons from Ajmer and Jodhpur and discuss their relevance for wider adoption and scale-up. Read the report of the [National Roundtable](#) on Building Climate-Resilient Urban Water Systems through Gender-Responsive Community Stewardship, held at PRIA.



(Convened a National Roundtable on Building Climate-Resilient Urban Water Systems through Gender Responsive Community Stewardship at PRIA)

Going forward, PRIA will build on this experience to strengthen community leadership, deepen collaboration with urban institutions and knowledge partners, and connect community-generated evidence with planning processes and programmes such as AMRUT 2.0 and City Water Action Plans. Rather than promoting a fixed model, PRIA's future engagement will focus on adapting the approach to different urban contexts and strengthening the institutional conditions for sustained community stewardship.

OUR IMPACT IN 2025-26



Knowledge Materials

- Blog: [When the Community Becomes the Classroom – Why Community-University Partnerships Matter More Than Ever](#)
- Blog: [From Dublin to Ajmer: What Happens When We Let Communities Lead](#)
- Blog: [Lessons from my Internship with PRIA](#)

Bridging Knowledge, Communities, and Local Governance for Climate Resilience



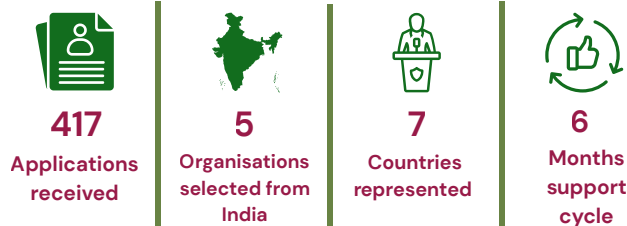
Connecting Youth, Communities and Global Partners for Inclusive Climate Action

The *Climate Democracy Accelerator (CDA)*, in partnership with People Powered, is a hands-on training and support programme that enables government and civil society leaders to design and implement inclusive, participatory processes for a just climate transition. A participatory democracy approach ensures that marginalised communities are included in decision-making from the outset, recognising that climate challenges are complex and locally specific. Solutions therefore need to be grounded in lived realities and local knowledge. Yet communities that hold valuable indigenous knowledge are often excluded from planning and decision-making. CDA seeks to centre these voices, contributing to climate solutions that are more inclusive, equitable, context-specific, effective, and sustainable.

Having commenced in October 2025 and running till August 2027, this year's thematic focus is on renewable energy and regenerative agriculture. A remarkable 417 applications were received from across the globe, including Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa.

AT A GLANCE

An initiative to co-create and use community knowledge for climate-resilient solutions through partnerships with local governments and communities.



Five organisations were selected from India, namely Unnati- Organisation for Development Education, Orissa State Volunteers and Social Workers Association (OSVSWA), Janamukti Anusthan, Association for Tormented Man's Aid (ATMA), and Voluntary Integration for Education and Welfare of Society (VIEWS). PRIA will be mentoring participants from these organisations while also extending support to global participants from Open Knowledge Nepal, based in Nepal and Armavir Development Center, in Armenia.



Over a six-month period, participants are supported through a combination of mentorship, practical tools and resources, and training sessions. Implementation grants further enable them to translate learning into practice by developing concrete action plans for participatory climate decision-making. These action plans are to be designed in partnership with a civil society organisation (if the participant is from the government) or with a government organisation (if the participant is from a civil society organisation) so as to embed community voices within government processes and broader public decision-making systems.

The programme is rooted in country-specific contexts through partnerships with in-country lead organisations, experienced in participatory democracy and climate action. As the in-country lead partner for India, PRIA plays a pivotal role in both facilitating and shaping the programme. Drawing on its long-standing experience in participatory research and governance, PRIA is developing context-specific curriculum materials, mentoring participants on the design and implementation of inclusive and equitable participatory processes and providing strategic guidance on advocacy and stakeholder engagement. PRIA will be supporting the CDA programme over the next three years.

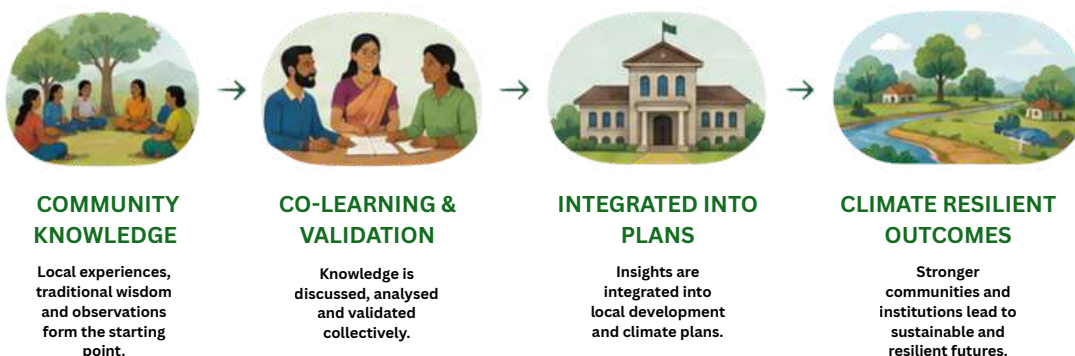
As part of its engagement with the People Powered network, **Nikita Rakhyani, representing PRIA, participated in the People Powered Convening in Nairobi in March 2026**. The convening brought together practitioners and organisations from across the global network to exchange experiences and strengthen collaboration on participatory democracy. PRIA shared its experience in participatory democracy, governance and community engagement, while building connections with a wider global community of practice.

Nikita also **co-facilitated “The Implementation Lab: What Really Works in Inclusive Participation”** with Eva Mackeviča from the Field of Dialogue Foundation and Sherry Muthaura from the Pathways Policy Institute, during the convening. The session brought together new and experienced practitioners to share practical lessons on implementing inclusive democracy initiatives, reflect on what worked and what did not, and learn from how others adapted to challenges in different contexts.



(People Powered Conference 2025, Nairobi, Kenya)

FROM LOCAL KNOWLEDGE TO CLIMATE ACTION



**Stronger
Communities
Greener
Futures**

While CDA provides one avenue through which PRIA is advancing this agenda, its broader aspiration is to deepen its work at the intersection of climate resilience, participatory governance, community knowledge and inclusive decision-making. This aspiration is rooted in the recognition that climate change disproportionately affects tribal communities in India, whose livelihoods, cultures, and well-being are closely connected to forests, water, biodiversity and other natural resources.

WHERE WE WORK



Working across rural and urban communities in diverse ecological and cultural contexts.



Focus on vulnerable regions most impacted by climate change.



Collaborating with Panchayats, ULBs and local institutions.

PRIA aspires to contribute to an enabling ecosystem in which community and indigenous knowledge inform education, governance and climate decision-making, while communities, particularly young people, are empowered to shape and lead responses to climate change. At the same time, PRIA seeks to bring these locally grounded experiences and perspectives into wider national and global climate conversations, challenging approaches that privilege technical expertise over lived experience and community knowledge. Through partnerships, research, learning and participatory practice, PRIA aims to connect communities, institutions, and knowledge systems, contributing to a more inclusive, democratic and locally grounded global discourse on climate resilience.



Community Knowledge for Climate Resilience

The DECODE Knowledge Project: Producing Actionable Knowledge for the Challenges of Our Times

As climate crises intensify globally, there is growing recognition that sustainable and equitable responses cannot rely on scientific and technical expertise alone. Community and Indigenous knowledge systems offer critical insights into understanding environmental change and developing locally grounded pathways for climate resilience.

The **DECODE Knowledge Project**, a global research and policy advocacy initiative of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, was established in 2024 with support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada. Grounded in community-based participatory research (CBPR) and a knowledge democracy framework, the project seeks to understand how communities and Indigenous peoples generate, sustain, co-construct and mobilise knowledge in response to climate and ecological crises. It also contributes to operationalising Pillars 3 and 4 of the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science by strengthening engagement with societal actors and dialogue across diverse knowledge systems.



Foods from the Forest

Himalayan hardworking women are bridging traditional knowledge, science and sustainability in the Himalayan mountains in India.

Cooperative Members of HAKSBS, Shalish Pannar, Garol Khanna, Andaman Karol & Carmon Kuesler
March 29, 2023

(Story map from the DECODE Case study 'Foods from the Forest' from Kaleshwar, India)

Across two research cycles, 10 case studies across nine countries were co-documented and systematised through partnerships with community researchers, participatory data collection and the co-development of research methods. All case studies and their accompanying Story Maps are available, Open-Access, on the DECODE Knowledge Project website.

DECODE'S KNOWLEDGE PRINCIPLES



TRUST

Mutual trust between knowledge holders



RESPECT

Local cultures & languages



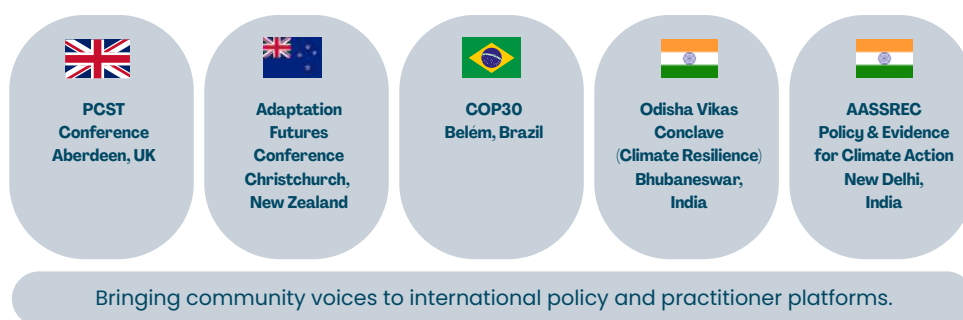
MULTIPLE WAYS OF KNOWING

Recognition of diverse knowledge systems



The cases explore diverse community and Indigenous approaches to climate resilience, including Indigenous Forest stewardship, land-based weather prediction, local food and medicinal harvesting, weaving together of modern and traditional production systems, and community-led waste management to mitigate the impacts of greenhouse gases. Together, they demonstrate how communities generate and apply knowledge in ways that are rooted in local ecologies, cultures and lived experience. The project has also developed ethical and reciprocal approaches to knowledge co-construction, emphasising mutual trust, respect for local cultures and languages, and recognition of multiple ways of knowing.

KEY GLOBAL ENGAGEMENTS



The findings and emerging lessons from DECODE were shared through a series of major international engagements. At the Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST) Conference in Aberdeen, 27th – 29th May 2025, Prof. Budd Hall led a panel on the DECODE Knowledge Project, while Dr. Rajesh Tandon delivered the closing keynote, bringing questions of knowledge democracy, community participation and the communication of diverse knowledge systems into wider discussions on science and society.

At the 8th Adaptation Futures Conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, Dr. Rajesh Tandon presented DECODE findings through a keynote lecture on Community-led Research and Climate Resilience: Emerging Lessons from DECODE; connecting DECODE with wider discussions on adaptation and knowledge democracy.



(Dr. Rajesh Tandon and Dr. Sandy Morrison at the 8th Adaptation Futures Conference, New Zealand)

A second session, organised in partnership with **Dr Sandy Morrison**, an Indigenous scholar and practitioner in New Zealand, connected the histories of participatory research in the Global South with those of Māori and Pacific communities.

DECODE findings were also represented at **COP30 in Belém, Brazil**. The project contributed to two IDRC-led panels: Just and Localised Nature-Based Solutions: A Learning Exchange from the Front Lines and Justice-Centred Adaptation: Locally Led Climate Action Across Knowledge Systems and Contexts. These engagements brought experiences from DECODE case studies into global climate policy discussions and highlighted the importance of locally led approaches to adaptation. The *DECODE COP30 Manifesto* reaffirms the project's key messages, strengthens its commitment to ecologies of knowledge and calls for more inclusive approaches to climate research and action.

5-DAY DECODE PROJECT GATHERING

1–5 December 2025 | PRIA, New Delhi

WHO CAME TOGETHER?

Global DECODE research team

- University of Victoria
- IDRC
- Community researchers
- Indigenous researchers

WHAT HAPPENED?

Reflected on 10 case studies
 Cross-case learning
 Reflection on knowledge cultures
 Arts-based methods
 Knowledge mobilisation



(Prof. Budd Hall facilitating a session at the DECODE Project Gathering, PRIA)



(DECODE Delegates at the Gathering, PRIA)

DECODE findings were also presented at the 26th Biennial Conference of the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (AASSREC) in New Delhi. The DECODE panel highlighted the imperatives of community-led climate resilience, while the Asian DECODE team also developed a paper, Building Climate Resilience through Community-Led Research in Asia: Emerging Lessons from the DECODE Research Project. The team further contributed the policy brief to the AASREC Working Policy Papers Series- Weaving Wisdom Across Borders: Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Sustainable and Inclusive Development in the Asia-Pacific, highlighting implications for policy and research systems in the region.



(Ms. Paloma Aguilar, DECODE's Latin America Regional Coordinator, Ms. Saanya Sodhi, Mr. Shailesh Panwar, Secretary, Himalayan Action Research Centre (HARC), Dr. Rajesh Tandon and Dr. Arjan de Haan, Senior Program Specialist, IDRC at the 26th AASREC Conference, New Delhi)

In addition to these key engagements, the project's findings and broader questions around knowledge democracy and community-led research were used by the Co-Chairs in a range of international advocacy spaces. **Prof. Budd Hall** shared DECODE-related insights through engagements including the **Gyeonggi Global Lifelong Learning Leadership Conference** in South Korea; **UNESCO** in Paris; **Rethinking Radical Approaches to Community Education Leadership and Lifelong Learning** in Nottingham; **The Association of Commonwealth Universities**; the **7th International Colloquium of CRISES** in Montreal, and the **50 Years of Participatory Research** event at the **Institute of Development Studies**.

These engagements helped connect DECODE's findings with wider conversations on participatory research, lifelong learning, Indigenous and community knowledge, and the future of knowledge production.

Dr. Rajesh Tandon also brought DECODE's findings into policy and practitioner spaces in India and globally, including the *Odisha Vikas Conclave 2025*; Dialogue with the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO; *The Global Network of UNESCO Chairs and UNESCO 80: Dialogue with the Director-General of UNESCO*, *Professor Khaled El-Enany*.

The project's research is now being carried forward through several knowledge mobilisation and policy initiatives. The UNESCO Chair is set to publish a composite "Guidelines for Funders of Community and/or Indigenous-Led Participatory Research" along with a global consultation with research funders to reflect on the implications of community- and Indigenous-led knowledge systems for climate research. DECODE learnings are also informing the Chair's engagement with the Global Research Council,



(Dr. Rajesh Tandon at the Odisha Vikas Conclave 2025, Bhubaneswar, Odisha)

whereby a side event at the 14th Annual GRC meeting in Bangkok is being codesigned with IDRC to explore how open science can move beyond access to meaningfully engage diverse knowledge systems and societal actors.

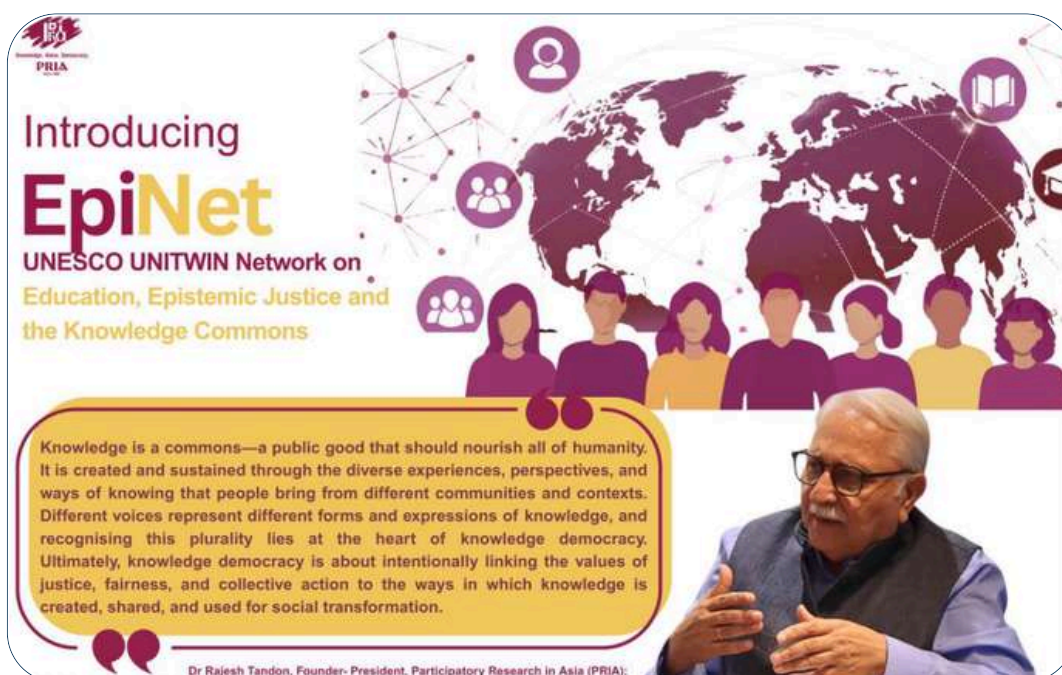


(In conversation with the IDRC Delegation - Dr. Arjan de Haan, Senior Program Specialist, Mr. Kapil Kapoor, Regional Director, Asia, Ms. Maggie Gorman Velez, Vice-President, Strategy, Regions and Policy and Dr. Rajesh Tandon —with the PRIA and MFF teams on 13th February 2026)

In parallel, the Knowledge Democracy and Participatory Research (KDPR) Open Access Platform, developed with the University of Victoria, will provide a longer-term home for DECODE's case studies, publications, teaching materials and audio-visual resources along with over 50 years of Knowledge Material of KDPR.

Furthermore, the project will culminate in the international webinar “Co-Constructing Knowledge for Climate Resilience: Global Lessons from the DECODE Knowledge Project”, bringing together researchers, practitioners, community leaders, funders and policymakers to reflect on the project's global lessons. An audio-visual product will also support the return of DECODE's knowledge to participating communities.

The UNESCO Chair is also preparing to launch **EpiNet**, a UNESCO UNITWIN Network on Education, Epistemic Justice and Knowledge Commons. The two pillars of the UNESCO Chair, along with 4 other global partners are the founding members of this network, focused on strengthening and connecting scholarship and practice around epistemic justice, knowledge democracy and socially responsible research. This network will serve as a platform to take forward the lessons from DECODE.



Through its research, partnerships and global advocacy, DECODE has demonstrated that communities and Indigenous peoples are not simply beneficiaries or sources of information in climate research. They are knowledge holders, co-researchers and agents of change. By bringing their knowledge and experiences into research, policy and open science discussions, DECODE contributes to more participatory, contextually grounded and equitable approaches to climate research.

Engagements and Knowledge Materials

- [50 Years of Participatory Research: Rajesh Tandon in Dialogue with Budd Hall](#), University of Victoria, Canada
- [Orientation Programme](#) for Cohort of Post-Graduate Programme in Development Management, Class of 2026, Indian School of Development Management (ISDM), Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India
- [‘From Theory to Practice: Competencies for Community Engagement’](#), a week-long workshop organised by CIFAL Victoria, University of Victoria, Canada
- Panel Discussion on [‘Re-examining Participatory Action Research: Past, Present and Future’](#), Annual Conference on “From Margins to the Mainstream? Celebrating and Challenging Participatory Action Research”, University of Durham, United Kingdom
- [AAHVAAN: NGO-CSR Conclave 2026](#), Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi



COMMUNITIES ARE NOT JUST BENEFICIARIES

They are knowledge holders,
co-researchers and agents of
change.



Community-Engaged Learning & Research: Promoting Knowledge Democracy through Global Partnerships

For PRIA, community-engaged learning and research is not a new area of work, but part of a longer journey to democratise knowledge and make the higher education ecosystem more socially responsible. The work has evolved through PRIA's relationships with communities, civil society organisations and universities, and through its engagement with the UNESCO Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. Over time, Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) has provided a practical way of bringing these relationships together, communities are not treated simply as beneficiaries or sources of information, but as partners in generating knowledge, interpreting experience and shaping responses to social challenges.

This journey has increasingly connected local experience with national and global conversations. PRIA's role has been to create spaces where different forms of knowledge can meet, community experience, academic research, practitioner learning and institutional perspectives, and where learning from one context can inform another. This is visible most clearly through the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium, coordinated by PRIA under the UNESCO Chair. During 2025-26, the consortium connected 38 hubs across 22 countries, bringing universities, civil society organisations and communities into a shared learning network.



The K4C model has grown around a simple proposition, higher education can become more relevant to society when communities participate as equal partners in producing knowledge and developing solutions. Across the network, this has taken different forms- collaborative research, faculty mentoring, student engagement, curriculum innovation, community-engaged teaching and institutional partnerships. The diversity of contexts has also made the network a space for cross-regional learning on climate adaptation, environmental justice, public health, urban governance and Indigenous knowledge systems.

PRIA's engagement has also been about making the experience of participatory research teachable and transferable. The publication *Teaching Community-Based Participatory Research: Socially Responsible and Ethically Anchored* published in 2025, brought together practical tools, pedagogical approaches and experiences from K4C hubs, helping educators and practitioners think about how CBPR can be embedded in teaching and research rather than treated as an additional activity.

The December 2025 meeting of K4C Regional Centres and Hubs at PRIA's provided another opportunity to step back from individual initiatives and learn across the network.



(Book Launch of Teaching Community-Based Participatory Research: Socially Responsible and Ethically Anchored)

Mentors and coordinators from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia reflected on how CBPR is being institutionalised through mentor training, micro-credentials, faculty development, community-led initiatives and collaborative research. The discussions around *DECODE* initiative further reinforced the importance of documenting community experiences,

sharing them across regions and creating stronger pathways through which community-generated evidence can enter research and policy conversations. The DECODE Knowledge Project aims to enhance the role of locally grounded, contextualised and actionable knowledge in addressing community-identified challenges.



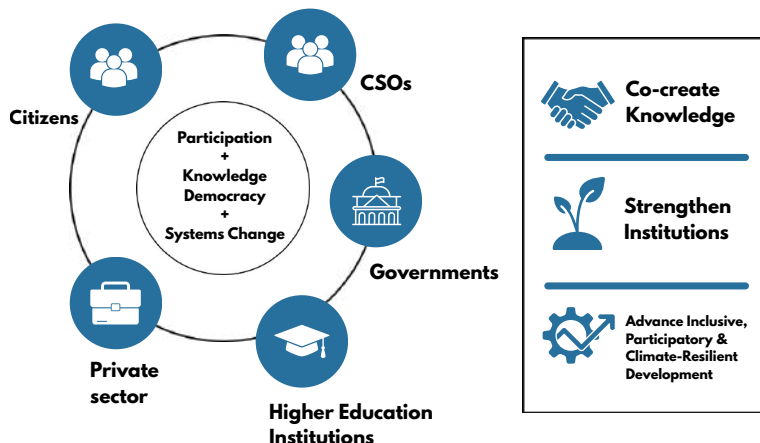
(Prof. Irma Flores sharing her learnings from Columbia K4C Hub at the K4C Regional Centres and Hubs Meeting, PRIA)

(Prof. David Monk sharing his learning from the Gulu K4C Hub at K4C Regional Centres and Hubs Meeting, PRIA)



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

A collective approach to knowledge democracy and inclusive development.



The same story is unfolding in India through PRIA's partnership with the University Grants Commission (UGC) and collaborating Malviya Mission Teacher Training Centres MMTTCs). In 2025–26, five Faculty Development Programmes introduced 199 faculty members from different disciplines to CBPR, participatory methodologies, ethical community engagement, community-engaged pedagogy, course design and assessment. More importantly, the programmes created an entry point for universities to consider how community engagement can become part of teaching, research, and institutional practice. Follow-up through mentoring, peer learning and collaborative action has been intended to help move this from a training experience towards institutional practice.



(Glimpses from Faculty Development Programmes in Sonipat and Hyderabad)

Seen together, these strands show the evolution of PRIA's engagement from promoting participatory methods, to building networks and capacities and increasingly towards helping institutions create the conditions in which community knowledge and academic knowledge can work together. The work therefore sits at the intersection of higher education, participatory research and knowledge democracy, while remaining grounded in PRIA's longer experience of connecting people, institutions and knowledge across local, national and global levels.

This body of work is closely connected to the direction set out in PRIA's Strategic Plan for 2027– 2031. The Theory of Change places 'Building Resilient Communities and Institutions through Participation, Knowledge Democracy and Systems Change' at the centre of PRIA's future direction. It sees a development ecosystem in which citizens, civil society organisations, governments, higher education institutions and the private sector collaborate to co-create knowledge, strengthen institutions and advance inclusive, participatory and climate-resilient development.

Within this framework, PRIA's work on community-engaged learning and research has a particular strategic role. The Theory of Change identifies the continuing disconnection between higher education and communities, and the dominance of institution-led evidence generation, as important challenges. Strengthening community-engaged learning and research directly responds to these challenges by helping universities bridge knowledge with practice and by creating opportunities for communities to contribute to evidence, learning and decision-making.

The future direction is therefore not simply to conduct more training programmes or expand the number of partnerships. It is to help build an ecosystem in which participation, knowledge cocreation and continuous learning become part of how institutions function. PRIA's future strategy approaches participation, Knowledge Democracy, participatory research, capacity strengthening, gender equality, youth leadership, institutional strengthening and multistakeholder partnerships provide a useful lens for understanding this next phase. For higher education, this means moving beyond isolated community-engagement activities towards stronger and more sustained relationships between universities and communities. PRIA is building on the experience of K4C, the UNESCO Chair and the UGC partnership to strengthen mentor networks, develop practice-oriented learning, support universities in institutionalising community-engaged teaching and research, and create repositories and platforms through which experiences and community-generated evidence can circulate. The immediate experience of the FDPs already points in this direction, developing a larger pool of resource persons and regional mentoring systems can help move community engagement from individual champions towards institutional capacity.

The work also connects with PRIA's wider future agenda around climate resilience, democratic governance, and the democratisation of evidence. The strategy emphasises that climate resilience cannot be built through technical solutions alone, it requires local knowledge, citizen stewardship, participatory governance, and collaboration across institutions.

Community-engaged learning and research is a distinctive way in which PRIA works. It connects knowledge with practice, local experience with wider systems, and learning with institutional change. The longer-term opportunity is to strengthen this connecting role so that communities, universities, civil society and public institutions can learn with and from one another while responding to increasingly complex challenges. The work is moving from building awareness and individual capacity towards strengthening networks, institutional practice, and knowledge ecosystems. That trajectory places Knowledge Democracy at the centre, not as a slogan, but as a practical approach to how knowledge is generated, valued, shared and used for more inclusive, accountable and resilient development.

LOOKING AHEAD: OUR FUTURE DIRECTION

FROM

Individual champions

Isolated engagement

Training

Individual initiatives

Institution-led evidence

Awareness & capacity

TO

Institutional capacity

Sustained university-
community relationships

Practice-oriented learning

Networks & mentoring
systems

Community-generated
evidence

Knowledge ecosystems

**Building a just, resilient and inclusive world-together.
Through partnerships. Through practice. Through people.**

Engagements and Knowledge Materials

- [National Workshop on 'Strategies for Enhancing Own Source Revenue \(OSR\) of Panchayats'](#), organised by NITI Aayog, Government of India, New Delhi.
- [Annual Convocation Ceremony](#) of the Development Management Institute (DMI), Patna, Bihar, India.
- [ARC 10 Policy Dialogue and the Meeting of the ASEM Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\) and Education](#), Bucharest, Romania.
- [CSR-CSO Exchange Roundtable on 'Parenting Quality Education'](#), INDIAdonates and Mantra4Change, New Delhi.
- [Inaugural Professor P. R. Gopal Memorial Lecture on 'Social Justice in India'](#), 13th Indian Social Work Conference 2025, Centurion University of Technology and Management, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
- Conference on ['Democratizing Digital: Bridging Access, Equity and Empowerment'](#), organised by SRF Foundation, EduBridge and AADHAAR, New Delhi, India.
- Session on ['Breaking the Wheel: Dismantling the Cycle of Autocratic Control'](#), The Asia Democracy Assembly 2025, Bangkok, Thailand.
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- Blog- [Open Science Critical for Climate Resilience & Sustainability](#).
- Blog- [Why Should Gram Panchayats Engage with Higher Educational Institutions?](#)

PRIA International Academy: Where Learning Meets Practice

PRIA has more than four decades of experience in participatory learning through its programmes and initiatives. Building on PRIA's longstanding experience in experiential and action learning, PRIA International Academy (PIA) has evolved as a dedicated platform for translating this knowledge into structured learning opportunities for diverse stakeholders. Over the years, PIA has developed expertise in facilitating online and in-person learning, capacity building, and education within the development and non-profit sectors in India. Its learning programmes draw on PRIA's extensive field experience and engage civil society practitioners, organisations, researchers, academicians, students, and other development stakeholders.

PIA is grounded in the philosophy of lifelong learning, recognising education as essential for both personal and professional growth. The Academy offers learning opportunities that combine academic rigour with practice-based insights, enabling learners to connect concepts, experiences, and practice.



During the year, PIA strengthened its learning ecosystem through the launch of a new website, an upgraded Learning Management System, and expanded learner-centric capacity-building opportunities. Through online and in-person platforms, the Academy continued to provide accessible, participatory, and practice-oriented learning experiences for diverse stakeholders.

PIA's learning initiatives included training workshops, structured online courses, Learning Circles, customised training programmes, and exposure visits for higher education institutions. These experiences were designed and facilitated by academicians and experienced development practitioners, with a focus on bridging the gap between theory and practice in the development sector.

The Academy also continued to provide institutional strengthening support to organisations through Participatory **Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PPMEL)** and **Participatory Impact Assessment**. These engagements supported NGOs and civil society organisations in strengthening competencies in participatory methodologies, governance, community engagement, programme planning and implementation, and evidence-based learning.

PIA's approach enables organisations to move beyond compliance-oriented evaluation processes towards reflective learning, adaptive action, and long-term institutional strengthening. Through facilitation, dialogue, and collaborative learning processes, the Academy also supported convergence across stakeholders and sectors, strengthening individual and institutional capacities to build an effective and efficient non-profit sector grounded in strong value systems, an essential foundation for sustainable, inclusive, and equitable development.



Learning Circles

PIA facilitated a series of Learning Circles were facilitated to deepen understanding and practice of participatory approaches among practitioners and stakeholders. The sessions focused on:

- [The Story of Participatory Research – 14 participants](#)
- [Learning Mapping for Data Collection](#)
- [Multiple Stakeholder Engagement – 07 participants](#)
- [Participatory Safety Audit – 10 participants](#)
- [Arts-Based Methodologies – 17 participants](#)



(Glimpses from the Learning Circles: Arts- Based Methodologies & The Story of Participatory Research)

Training Workshops and Capacity Building Initiatives

During the year, we conducted several training workshops and institutional learning engagements to strengthen capacities of community groups, youth, practitioners, and development organisations and faculty. Key initiatives included:

- Water Quality Testing Training for Self-Help Group (SHG) women, in collaboration with the Municipal Corporation of Kishangarh
- **Gender Sensitisation Workshop** for students at O.P. Jindal Global University
- Participatory Research Methodology Workshop for students at the Indian School of Development Management
- **Theory of Change and Strategic Planning Workshop** for the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation
- **Empowering Youth for Evidence-Led Development: 3PE Public Policy and Programme Evaluation Workshop** for the Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement (GRAAM)
- Youth-Led Policy Advocacy and Accountability Learning Collaborative, in partnership with Education Out Loud and Oxfam Denmark

These initiatives provided structured and practice-oriented learning opportunities for diverse stakeholders, strengthening their engagement with evidence-based and participatory development practice. Recognising the evolving capacity-building needs of the development and non-profit sector, PIA continues to strengthen and expand its learning offerings to respond to emerging challenges and changing requirements. This includes developing customised learning experiences for organisations, higher education institutions, and development practitioners, combining knowledge, hands-on exposure, and mentorship to support the application of learning in real-world contexts.

Institutional Learning through Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PMEL) and Impact Assessments

Beyond training and structured learning, PIA supported organisations through **Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PMEL)**, participatory assessments, and institutional learning processes. These engagements enable organisations to reflect on their programmes, generate evidence, strengthen internal capacities, and use learning to inform future action.



(Glimpses from the training workshops at PRIA)

Major engagements during the year included:

- Kickstart Equality: Bridging the Gender Gap - Endline and Impact Assessment Study for CEQUIN
- Development of a Comprehensive Participatory Learning Report on Health and Nutrition Interventions for Child in Need Institute (CINI)

Through these engagements, PIA continued to strengthen participatory approaches to monitoring, evaluation, learning, and impact assessment while supporting organisations to translate evidence into improved practice.



(Glimpses from the training workshops at PRIA)

Global Learning Initiatives

PIA expanded its global reach and built partnerships to exchange knowledge and provide institutional support through trainings and Participatory MEL expertise, engaging learners from South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, Pacific, South America, North America and Africa. Key engagements included:

- Partnership with Oxfam Denmark to facilitate a Learning Collaborative in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and develop a Toolkit on Participatory Tools and Youth-Led Advocacy Practices used by Asia-Pacific Education Out Loud Grantees.
- Learning Circle on Arts-Based Methodology in partnership with the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education.

These global initiatives brought together different development contexts and equipped practitioners and partner organisations with practical tools and MEL learnings.

The Road Ahead

The experience of PIA's learning and capacity-building work provides an important foundation for PRIA's emerging priorities and future direction. As the development and non-profit sector responds to increasingly complex social, institutional, and environmental challenges, the need for continuous learning, adaptive capacities, evidence-informed practice, and stronger organisational systems is becoming increasingly important.



In response, PIA seeks to strengthen and expand its learning and capacity-building ecosystem to address the evolving needs of practitioners, institutions, communities, and the wider development sector. The Academy will continue to expand access to structured, high-quality, and practice-oriented learning opportunities, while developing customised programmes that respond to specific organisational and institutional needs. Through these opportunities, PIA seeks to contribute to a highly skilled and reflective development workforce, equipped with the competencies and practical knowledge needed to strengthen programme quality, social impact, and adaptive practice.

PIA will also continue to strengthen partnerships and aims to support more resilient, accountable, and sustainable organisations, with stronger governance, strategic planning, financial resilience, human resource systems, and organisational learning. Engagement with higher education institutions will further seek to bridge the gap between theory and practice, enabling students, faculty, and development practitioners to apply knowledge in real-world contexts.

Building on its work in participatory monitoring, evaluation, learning, and impact assessment, PIA will continue to promote approaches that enable organisations to generate evidence, reflect on their programmes, learn from experience, and use learning to inform future action.

The Academy seeks to contribute to a development ecosystem where continuous learning, knowledge sharing, and innovation become embedded in organisational and sectoral practice, rather than being limited to individual programmes or projects.

Through flexible, participatory, and context-responsive learning and institutional support, the Academy will continue to share knowledge, tools, and innovations while creating opportunities for practitioners and organisations to learn from one another.

The **Martha Farrell Award for Excellence in Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality**, instituted in memory of Dr. Martha Farrell, former Director of PRIA and a pioneer in gender justice and participatory learning, seeks to recognise and strengthen gender-transformative practice. Supported by PRIA and organised by the Martha Farrell Foundation, the Award recognise inspiring journeys of change-makers who work towards creating more inclusive and equitable societies.

Since its inception in 2016, the Awards have received 1,452 nominations across the individual and organisational categories. The 2025 edition received 187 nominations from 25 states and union territories of India, including 100 nominations in the individual category and 87 in the organisational category. The nominees represented diverse fields such as grassroots activism, education, media, social development, government, and civil society. The 9th Martha Farrell Awards were held on 20th September 2025 at the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), New Delhi



(In image: Ms. Rita Sarin, Chairperson of PRIA's Governing Board and Founder-Director of Martha Farrell Foundation, Ms. Jayanti Buruda, Ms. Archana K. R. Ms. Alamelu V from Rural Women Development Trust (RWDT), Tamil Nadu, Ms. Nirmala Devi from Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS), Himachal Pradesh and Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Chairperson of Martha Farrell Foundation)

Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President of PRIA and alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Calcutta, was conferred the **Distinguished Alumnus Award 2025** during IIM Calcutta's 65th Foundation Day celebrations on November 14, 2025. The award recognised his outstanding contributions to participatory development, social responsibility, and the creation of knowledge systems that advance public good.

In his acceptance address, Dr. Tandon reflected on the importance of participatory leadership, inclusive knowledge creation, and empowering communities as active partners in shaping democratic processes. He reaffirmed PRIA's continued commitment to strengthening democracy through citizen participation, community-led solutions, and collaborative approaches to social change. The honour celebrates his lifelong journey of bridging knowledge and practice to promote more inclusive and responsive societies.



(Dr. Rajesh Tandon receiving the Distinguished Alumnus Award 2025 during IIM Calcutta's 65th Foundation Day celebrations)

Institutional Governance

PRIA Board Members

The membership of the Governing Board for 2025-26 is

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.

Members:

- **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, Maharashtra.
- **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
- **Shri. 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 and Mainstreaming in PRIA (CGAMP).

Led by 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 **Bindu Baby** as its **Presiding Officer**, the committee comprises Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Praveen P.V., Linu Rachel Chacko, Sumitra Devi, Surjeet Singh, and Dr. Neelam Singh (Chief Functionary, VATSALYA, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh) as an external member.



ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26

Knowledge Democracy, Climate Resilience: Nurturing Global Partnerships

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