

# International Collaboration and Societal Impact: Advancing Participatory Research

Viceroy Hall, Claridges

5 June 2026, New Delhi

On 5th June 2026, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), in collaboration with the German Centre for Research and Innovation (DWIH) New Delhi, a unit of German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), convened a panel discussion **International Collaboration and Societal Impact: Advancing Participatory Research** at the Viceroy Hall, The Claridges, New Delhi.



Figure 1 Panel members

The event was organized on the occasion of the visit of Prof. Dr. Joybrato Mukherjee, President of DAAD, and brought together academics, researchers, practitioners, and institutional leaders to engage in a dialogue on the future of international research collaboration.

The panel featured Prof. Dr. Joybrato Mukherjee, President, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD); Dr. Arjan de Haan, Senior Program Specialist, International Development Research Centre (IDRC); Prof. Dr. Sonajharia Minz, Professor, School of Computer & Systems Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair in Transforming Indigenous Knowledge Research Governance & Rematriation; and Ms Basheera Shaik, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), India. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education.

The panel opened with welcome remarks from Ms Aadishree Jamkhedkar, Head of Programmes, DWIH New Delhi, and Mr Arthur Rapp, Director, DAAD Regional Office, New Delhi and DWIH New Delhi. This was followed by an opening address by Prof. Dr. Joybrato Mukherjee, who underlined the importance of the discussion and set the tone for the evening by noting that “when the world is facing immense challenges such as those we face today, science cannot stay isolated from society.” He connected this to the annual theme of DWIHs worldwide, **Science for Society**, and emphasized that science has a responsibility towards society. This responsibility, he noted, must be fulfilled through genuine partnerships.

Highlighting the importance of citizen science, Dr. Mukherjee argued that greater citizen involvement is needed to guide science and ensure that its benefits are realized by society.

The discussion then commenced with opening reflections from Dr. Rajesh Tandon, who introduced participatory research as a composite of education, knowledge, and action, and as an approach that enables people to take action on issues affecting their lives. Drawing upon PRIA's nearly forty-five years of experience, he highlighted the importance of communities in guiding citizen science and noted that the growing recognition of participatory research should be harnessed to advance the equitable co-creation of knowledge to address the complex challenges of our time. Dr. Tandon emphasized that participatory research is grounded in an important ethical principle: maintaining community ownership.



*Figure 2 The audience engaging with the discussion*

He noted that ownership is often the most important factor determining whether an intervention is adopted and sustained by a community. In this context, he argued that the growing recognition of participatory research practice must be supported through systemic learning opportunities, citing PRIA's collaboration with the University Grants

Commission (UGC) to train the next generation of community-based participatory research practitioners across India and the world.

Building on these reflections, Dr. Tandon invited Prof. Dr. Mukherjee to share his views on the role of participatory research in Germany. Dr. Mukherjee noted that citizen involvement is considered highly important within the German context. He observed that citizens are voters and decision-makers and therefore have a right to influence what public resources are used to fund. Referring to Germany's Excellence Strategy, through which Excellence Cluster funding is provided to leading institutions to undertake research for society, he highlighted the increasing emphasis on supporting programmes that place citizens and communities, along with Participatory Research, at their heart. Such approaches, he argued, have significant potential to generate tangible and actionable solutions emerging directly from the research process.

The discussion then turned to Prof. Dr. Sonajharia Minz, who drew connections between artificial intelligence, computer science, and Indigenous knowledge. Speaking from her experience as a member of an Adivasi community herself, she noted that there exists abundant intelligence within tribal communities. She reflected that it was only when she began to engage more deeply with her own identity that she was able to recognize the ways in which artificial intelligence and Indigenous knowledge intersect, as well as how Indigenous

knowledge systems seek to protect themselves from extraction. Dr. Minz emphasized that participatory research must be embedded within research conducted with Adivasi communities. Illustrating this point, she referred to the extensive sociological and anthropological literature on Santhal communities, noting that while much has been written about them, contemporary Santhal students increasingly critique this work as reductive and disconnected from their realities because this work is done “on them”.



Figure 3 Panel Discussion

Dr. Arjan de Haan followed by discussing the place of participatory research within IDRC and the Canadian research context. He acknowledged the influence of scholars such as Dr. Budd Hall in shaping institutional understandings of research impact and noted that impact must serve as the entry point for research. Emphasizing the importance of justice within the research framework, he argued that research for communities must be conducted “with them” rather than “on them.

He further highlighted IDRC’s investments in ‘research on research’, through which the organization has found that research conducted with communities not only leads to more sustained impact but also results in stronger research and technical quality.

Ms Shaik from UKRI then concluded the first round of discussions by reaffirming that research of the highest quality requires the involvement of communities. Highlighting UKRI’s community funding approaches, which position lived experience as a starting point for research, she stressed the importance of investing in communities as partners rather than treating them as short-term projects.

Dr. Tandon then pivoted the discussion to the importance of language, noting that Indigenous and community knowledge are deeply embedded within linguistic traditions. Turning to Mukherjee, a trained linguist, he presented the question of whether the loss of languages also results in the loss of knowledge systems embedded within them. Dr. Mukherjee responded by describing languages as cultural repositories of knowledge and communities of practice. He argued that documenting and preserving languages, including smaller and endangered languages, is critical for preserving the knowledge they contain.

Additionally, elaborating on DAAD's funding approach, he shared the example of a Centre of Excellence in Latin America that emphasizes justice and direct engagement with civil society to ensure that research remains relevant to the communities it seeks to serve.

Dr. Minz then reflected on both her lived and empirical experiences within the Indian higher education system, noting that many young people wish to engage in research that is solution-oriented and socially relevant. At the same time, she highlighted a growing dilemma arising from the saturation of research conducted 'on' communities, which has often created fatigue and an unwillingness among people to share their knowledge with outsiders. She argued that while extensive ethical protocols exist for research involving laboratory animals, comparable frameworks for research involving people remain underdeveloped. Consequently, she called for robust research ethics policy governing research with living communities that clearly establishes the rights and responsibilities of both "the researcher and the researched".



Figure 4 Dr De Haan Speaking about the RQ+ framework

Building on this point, Ms Shaik emphasized the importance of flexibility when working with different communities and highlighted the need to move beyond rigid research structures and requirements. Concluding this segment, Dr. de Haan introduced IDRC's Research Quality Plus (RQ+) framework, which evaluates research not only on the basis of rigour but also through its

positionality for use and its contribution to accountability, collaboration, and socially responsive research practice. Drawing on the Canadian context, he particularly stressed the importance of the direct involvement of Indigenous peoples and communities in research processes, noting that meaningful and lasting change is only possible when those most affected by the issues being studied are active participants in generating knowledge and shaping solutions.

The session then moved into a rich question-and-answer discussion between the panellists and the audience. The first question was directed towards Dr. Minz and sought her views on the role of artificial intelligence in either preserving or eroding Indigenous knowledge systems. In response, Minz noted that cultures and languages are dynamic and adaptive, and therefore possess a resilience that will enable them to respond to the challenges posed by AI. She further emphasized that Indigenous communities exercise sovereignty over how and when their knowledge is shared beyond the community. While acknowledging that it is impossible to fully predict the long-term implications of AI, she expressed confidence that Indigenous communities will continue to adapt and respond to emerging challenges,

particularly given their awareness of the extractive practices that have historically shaped engagements with their knowledge systems.

The second question focused on how the societal impact of participatory research can be assessed, while a third question explored the challenges associated with embedding participatory research approaches within institutional programmes and structures. These questions generated a lively discussion among the panellists and audience members, drawing together many of the themes that had emerged throughout the evening, including accountability, community ownership, research quality, and the relationship between knowledge and action.

Concluding the discussion, Dr. Tandon reflected on three key ideas that had emerged most strongly from the conversation. First, he noted that strengthening the societal connection of science through participation enhances accountability. Second, he emphasized that stories hold significant forms of knowledge that are often neglected or left behind in conventional research processes. Third, he observed that while knowledge solutions are needed locally and globally.

Bringing the discussion to a close, Dr. Tandon remarked that one form of knowledge is not the enemy of another. Rather, he argued, the conversation served as a reminder of the importance of returning to the idea of ecologies of knowledge and reaffirmed the relevance of the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science in fostering more inclusive and participatory approaches to knowledge creation. The panel culminated in a vibrant networking dinner that brought together participants from diverse institutional and disciplinary backgrounds and served as an opportunity to continue the conversations initiated during the panel, exchanging perspectives on participatory research, international collaboration, and the role of knowledge in addressing societal challenges. The informal interactions provided an important space to build new connections, strengthen existing partnerships, and explore future avenues for collaboration.



Figure 5 The panellists with the organizing team