



IDU MISHMI CULTURAL & LITERARY SOCIETY (IMCLS)

Apex body of Mishmi (Idu) community

Roing - 792110, Lower Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh

Registration no: SR/ITA/122 dt. 27/10/1987

Unique identifier of NGO Darpan, NITI Aayog Portal: AR/2018/0218419

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Memo/IMCLS/2026/24/August

Roing, Dated 24th August 2026

PRESS NOTE FOR EAST MOJO

1. Could you explain what led IMCLS to blacklist the four researchers and what specific concerns the organisation has regarding their research activities?

With regard to the team consisting of a current member and a former member of ATREE, despite repeated written and verbal requests by IMCLS/RERB to the researchers to attend a meeting and discuss their proposed field research activities, and seek prior consent from the IMCLS, they repeatedly ignored these requests. There is a specific, community-based and transparent procedure laid out in IMCRE that every researcher is required to comply with before undertaking research activities in areas inhabited by IDU MISHMI community.

The other two researchers from NCBS went ahead with their research activities in the Dibang Valley district while their research proposal was still pending. They subsequently informed the IMCLS/RERB that they would meet in person. While members of the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) were waiting for them in Roing to discuss the matter at the IMCLS office, the NCBS researchers evaded information regarding their whereabouts and eventually left Roing without meeting the RERB members.

The decision to blacklist the four researchers was therefore neither sudden nor based on a single incident. The researchers had been given prior communication and multiple opportunities to comply with the research protocols established under the Idu Mishmi Code of Research Ethics.

Specific concerns: Many institutions, including government-sponsored institutions, assume that they can carry out research activities as and when they deem fit. Researches conducted largely in the name of 'conservation', without meaningful involvement and mutual consent, can harm the community rather than bring any benefit. Collected data may be used against communities to influence policymaking. There are also concerns regarding unethical data mining and the appropriation of data.

Many species are named to appease certain institutions, professors, ETC. Many researchers seek to 'discover' species. However, this is a colonial practice. 'Discovery' is not part of the vocabulary of Indigenous communities. Who is anyone to 'discover' something that has long been known to and understood by the community?

2. What specific provisions of the Idu Mishmi Community Research Code of Ethics (IMCRE) does IMCLS believe were breached?

The IMCRE was developed after five long years of extensive deliberation and consultations and finally its first version was released in 2024. The second edition was released in 2025 after further review and revision.



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The principal provisions concern Free, Prior and Informed Consent, respect for community rights, transparency, protection of community data and resources, and culturally appropriate research practices.

The IMCRE specifically requires consent from the IMCLS RERB and the designated village/community authority (two-tiered permission) before research begins or before data, resources, photographs or other community-related materials are collected. It also makes clear that government permission alone does not constitute community consent.

Depending on the specific misconduct involved, the relevant principles include:

- A. Principle 1 – Free, Prior and Informed Consent
- B. Principle 4 – Respect
- C. Principle 5 – Precautionary Approach and Duty to Care
- D. Principle 6 – Protection and Safeguarding of Collective and Individual Rights
- E. Principle 7 – Transparency and Full Disclosure of Facts
- F. Principle 10 – Methodology and Processes

3. Could you walk us through the timeline of the research in the Mekola Community Conserved Area, from the initial request for permission to the fieldwork and subsequent concerns raised by the community?

Refer the whole contents of the documents indicating the timeline and correspondence shared with you by the IMCLS office secretary.

4. What permissions and consent did the researchers seek, and what, according to IMCLS, was missing or inadequate in that process?

The concern was that research activities were undertaken without the required prior approval from the RERB. The IMCRE explicitly mentions that consent must be obtained before researchers begin data collection or extraction. The Code further requires researchers to make full and prior disclosure regarding the research purpose, funding, methodology, intended use of data and possible impacts so that the community can make an informed decision.

Members from ATREE never sought consent. Members from NCBS sought cosmetic permission to 'discover' some species to give some taxonomic name, which was not finalised by the board. While decisions were pending, they blatantly disregarded the decision and a day after the online discussion happened, the board realised that they were in Dibang Valley, which they never revealed during the online meeting. Even before consent was given by IMCLS, members from NCBS had not disclosed the fact that they were in Dibang Valley. IMCLS only came to know later. Therefore, essentially no permission was ever granted to either party by IMCLS. Only a few days later, the board realised they had sought permission from SP, Dibang Valley, which was not disclosed to the board and which is not relevant to IMCLS too. The only consideration is whether IMCLS has issued final consent or not.

5. IMCLS has raised concerns about camera traps and the collection and sharing of community-related data. Could you explain specifically what data was collected, how it was used or shared, and why IMCLS believes this was a breach of research ethics?

ATREE facilitated one of the Idu Mishmi clans in facilitating a Community Conserved Area (CCA) in Lower Dibang Valley. While IMCLS does not oppose the idea of a CCA, ATREE did so without a basic



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understanding of the community's legal landscape and community ownership. Later, other clan members from Hunli and Desali complained to the DC, Roing, about the meddling of the Bengaluru-based NGO, ATREE, in community affairs. ATREE was a contributory factor in this regard, and it shared the data unethically collected from community land with the Department of Forest for its own academic and institutional credentials, thereby undermining research ethics. This data was publicly shared on its website and at one of the meetings in Pasighat. ATREE talks about community-based conservation, but without meaningful involvement and without the permission of the CBO of the Idu Mishmi community. This kind of problem arises when there is parachute research without the meaningful participation of IMCLS and when the system in place is breached, and when entities and individuals seek to conduct 'research' under the garb of 'conservation' by disregarding community research ethics or protocols. Therefore, ATREE was clearly conveyed on several occasions to engage with IMCLS, which it did not do. Now, ATREE takes pride in facilitating the notification of a CCA in Lower Dibang Valley, but this was based on primary data collected without prior community consent. Community consent does not mean mere consent from specific, limited clans without understanding the whole picture.

Moreover, the IMCRE treats research broadly. It covers not only conventional academic research but also activities involving the collection, use, or appropriation of tangible and intangible resources, information, and data relating to the Idu Mishmi community. The Code requires all community-related data and information to be protected and used only for the purposes approved by the RERB. It specifically provides that data and information shall not be shared with another person or institution without the express written permission of the RERB.

The issue, therefore, is not simply the use of a particular research instrument, such as a camera trap. The ethical concern arises where data or information concerning the community, its territory, or its resources is collected, used, or shared without the appropriate prior consent, disclosure, and authorisation.

6. There are also concerns about researchers entering or conducting work in areas while permissions were reportedly pending. Could you clarify what happened and what documentation IMCLS has regarding this?

IMCLS maintains all documents of communication with it. Pls refer the documents shared with you.

Also, the IMCRE is clear that researchers should not begin research or data-extraction activities while permission is pending. It specifically states that where research has already commenced before permission is sought, the RERB is not bound to approve the subsequent application. In the present case, the concern was that some researchers proceeded with conducting their research activities despite permissions not having been formally granted, and also some of them still proceeded to Dibang Valley District, where all research activities were completely banned at the time by the Idu community.

7. Before the decision to blacklist the researchers was taken, were they given an opportunity to respond to the allegations or address the concerns raised by IMCLS? If so, what was their response?

Yes, on ample occasions. They even agreed to cooperate. In The Print news outlet, dated 21 August, it was stated by NCBS that "however, the NCBS authorities claim that permissions had indeed



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been obtained." "We are trying to understand what could be the reason for IMCLS to take such a decision (blacklisting). There appears to be some misunderstanding. We are committed to regulatory compliance and work without violating the guidelines of IMCLS. Once NCBS has all the information, appropriate measures will be taken to address IMCLS concerns and regain their confidence," said NCBS director, Professor L. S. Shashidhara.

It is not surprising that this is the version they offer despite knowing what they have assured and stated to IMCLS, as indicated in the document shared with you. This is not a 'misunderstanding' they are trying to portray.

ATREE also added in the same news outlet that: "We are working with members of the Mekola clan of the Idu Mishmi community to support the formulation of a Community Conserved Area (CCA) on their clan lands. We take cognisance of the decision adopted by the IMCLS, and are seeking to understand the circumstances and events that led to this action. We have reached out to the apex body for a dialogue," Goswami told The Print. He added that ATREE held ethical research practices in high regard and were committed to respecting the community guidelines too. "Once we have a clear understanding of the situation, we will take appropriate measures to address the concerns raised by IMCLS and work towards strengthening our community-led conservation work," said Goswami.

Mr Rajkamal had a meeting with forest officials and villagers from AOHALI Village to discuss the possibility of establishing AOHALI CCA, which was also attended by two members from RERB (IMCLS). He assured that future research would follow the required permission process and FPIC. However, Mr. Goswami and Ms. Avika Danda never ever sought official permission from IMCLS despite repeated requests. Subsequently, when they were asked to meet IMCLS RERB and seek appropriate permission, they never did. Instead, they have used members of Mekola CCA, which again amounts to a conflict of interest. When RERB insisted on a discussion on the matters with Mr. Goswami he sent Mr. Benjamin (a colleague that also in online mode). Meaning, one way or another, both Mr. Goswami and Ms. Aavika avoided IMCLS.

The decision therefore followed repeated communication and opportunities to address the concerns rather than being an immediate or unilateral response to one incident. Unfortunately, these blacklisted persons are misleading the reporters, claiming that IMCLS sat over their proposals. Research ethics also states that communities need to be given adequate time to introspect their priorities. Pls refer the documents shared with you.

8. Could IMCLS share any relevant notices, correspondence, permission records, meeting minutes or other documents that support the concerns and the decision to blacklist the researchers?

Members of ATREE and NCBS who were blacklisted took IMCLS for granted and blatantly disregarded IMCRE. Pls refer the above documents. For IMCLS it does not matter from which authority one has taken permission from, but final consent has to be sought from IMCLS.

9. What does IMCLS want researchers and research institutions to understand about the community's research ethics framework going forward?

Many question whether the IMCLS has the 'legal backing' to blacklist anyone. Any mindful researcher would understand what research ethics means. Ethics does not require legal backing, as it is a principle



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or norm in itself. It requires that if someone wants to conduct any activity in another person's place or community, they must seek the necessary permission. This is a matter of basic common sense.

Secondly, the objective of the Idu Mishmi Code of Research Ethics (IMCRE) is not to ban any research activity; rather, it is about promoting meaningful and participatory research based on mutual respect and consent. It is also about decolonising research. It is unfortunate that some members of renowned research institutions do not follow it but instead disrespect it for their own convenience.

Now that they have been blacklisted and harm has been caused, they shall not be permitted to conduct any future research in Idu Mishmi areas. Henceforth, any researcher affiliated with ATREE or NCBS approaching any person within the Idu Mishmi area will be subject to strict scrutiny regarding their intent and purpose.

The IMCLS wants every researcher to understand that research in Idu Mishmi territory is expected to be based on consent, transparency, respect, participation, reciprocity and accountability. The IMCRE is not intended to prevent legitimate research or restrict academic freedom.

The Code expressly describes its purpose as balancing academic and community interests while regulating unethical, extractive or undisclosed research practices.

Researchers should therefore engage with the community as equal partners rather than merely treating it as a source of data or biological resources for conducting research.

10. What does this episode tell us about how scientific and conservation research should be conducted in Indigenous territories, particularly regarding community consent, participation and data sovereignty?

It is quite evident from this episode that there should be more debate, discussion, and awareness within Indian mainstream academia regarding research ethics. Where guidelines exist, they are often institution-based research guidelines that do not adequately prioritise community interests and priorities. Research methodology is taught, but it is vastly different from community research ethics. Such incidents also highlight the importance of participatory research, meaningful cooperation and participation, transparency, full disclosure of facts, data regulation, prohibition of the unethical use of research data, and the decolonisation of research.

The scientific or conservation objectives should not override the rights and interests of Indigenous communities. Research should begin with Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), meaningful community participation, transparency regarding how information and resources will be used, protection of community data, and equitable benefit-sharing.

The IMCRE was developed precisely because the community had experienced unethical concerns relating to research impacts, data appropriation and resource extraction. The purpose of its creation is to



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provide a framework for constructive engagement between researchers and the community rather than to discourage research.

Hence, Researchers are expected to uphold the ETHICS, avoid misappropriation and use data only for the purposes for which permission was granted.

PRESIDENT
IDU MISHMI CULTURAL
& LITERARY SOCIETY

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IMCLS

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