



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/2026/27/August

Roing, Dated 27 August, 2026

PRESS RELEASE NOTE FOR SCROLL

Dear Nolina Minj
Senior Reporter
Scroll.in,

With reference to the questions that you have asked, please see the detailed reply of IMCLS below.

Questions for the Review Board

- 1. What prompted the Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary Society (IMCLS) to develop these research guidelines? Was there a felt need based on past experience?**

That is an important question. The Idu Mishmi Code of Research Ethics (IMCRE) was developed by Idu Mishmi Cultural & Literary Society (IMCLS) in response to a longstanding need to make research involving Indigenous communities more ethical, inclusive and accountable. While community based research protocols and Indigenous research ethics are relatively well established in parts of Africa and the West, such frameworks remain comparatively uncommon in India. Research involving Indigenous communities has often followed an extractive or colonial approach, where information, biological or geological materials are collected, published and used for academic credentials or institutional advancement, with limited meaningful participation of the indigenous community. This includes unethical naming of species without consent and involvement of communities.

The IMCRE was therefore not developed abruptly or merely as a set of rules overnight. It was an outcome of nearly five years of homework, consultations, discussions and collective deliberations. The first edition was launched in February 2024 by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Shri Pema Khandu, followed by a second edition in 2025.

The book draws its inspiration from several instances of unethical and colonial research practices, particularly involving the appropriation of data and the collection of geological and biological samples across Arunachal Pradesh, including the Idu Mishmi areas. IMCLS observed that research is often presented under positive terms such as 'conservation', 'biodiversity assessment', 'discovery', or as



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a government sponsored research, while fundamental questions concerning Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), meaningful community participation, transparency, accountability, disclosure of research objectives, community involvement in decision-making, data governance, equitable benefit sharing, confidentiality, and the potential positive and negative impacts of research have not always received adequate consideration.

On the surface, research proposals may seem inconsequential but when deep dived into the proposals things. There was also a concern about what happens to information after it leaves the community. Research data can influence restrictive policies, sometimes with consequences that are more harmful than beneficial to the communities from which the data originated. Similarly, biological, geological and cultural knowledge arising from indigenous territories has at times received inadequate community recognition. In this sense, data and community knowledge can become valuable research resources while the community itself remains largely outside the decisions concerning their use or as a mere footnote.

IMCLS therefore felt the need for a mechanism through which research proposals could be examined from the community's perspective to understand the actual objectives of research, assess its possible implications, and ensure that the community has an informed opportunity to participate in decisions concerning research conducted within its customary areas.

This led to consultations and village-level discussions (Gram Sabha) in Dibang Valley, through which community concerns and priorities were deliberated. The IMCRE emerged from this collective process. It represents the community's effort to decolonise research practices by moving from a model of conducting research **on** indigenous communities and its resources towards one of conducting research **with** them.

The IMCRE is not intended to replace government laws or institutional ethics procedures. Rather, it is a community developed ethical framework that complements them and communicates the expectations, concerns and priorities of the Idu Mishmi community to researchers and other stakeholders.

IMCLS also recognises that the Code is an evolving initiative and may not be perfect in its present form. Each edition is refined through practical experiences and engagement with new research proposals. Ultimately, the objective is not to prevent research, but to ensure that research is ethical, transparent, participatory, respectful of Indigenous rights and beneficial to both the indigenous community and the wider scientific community.



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2. Four researchers have recently been blacklisted by the IMCLS. What were the specific violations of the Research Code? Could you please walk me through this? Is there a way for them to clear their names?

Four researchers were blacklisted by IMCLS following concerns arising from their conduct and engagement with the Idu Mishmi community. The decision was based on the following broad grounds:

A. Engaging in Research in community areas without consent despite repeated reminders

Researchers from ATREE has failed to respond to the repeated reminders for consent seeking process and were found to be engaged in what IMCLS considers as research activity inside the community area. It is deeply concerning and regrettable that this matter has contributed to a situation where members of different clans within our Idu Mishmi community have found themselves in land conflict. IMCLS is of the view that the circumstances leading to the conflict are, in significant part, connected to the conduct of researchers from ATREE.

B. Undertaking field activities while community approval was pending

The researchers ventured into community areas and undertook activities while the required final consent and approval from the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB, IMCLS) were still pending. IMCLS considers this contrary to the principle that research within community areas must not commence until the prescribed community consent process has been completed and communicated to researchers.

C. Failure to honour agreed processes and repeated requests for engagement

Members associated with NCBS and ATREE did not adequately honour commitments to participate in in-person meetings convened to address the concerns when they were informed to do so. Despite prior written communication and repeated requests, the concerned individuals failed to attend or engage with the process in the manner expected.

C. Disregard for established community protocols

The conduct was considered inconsistent with several principles of the Idu Mishmi Code of Research Ethics (IMCRE), particularly:

1. Principle 1 – Free, Prior and Informed Consent
2. Principle 4 – Respect
3. Principle 5 – Precautionary Approach and Duty to Care



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4. Principle 6 – Protection and Safeguarding of Collective and Individual Rights
5. Principle 7 – Transparency and Full Disclosure of Facts
6. Principle 10 – Methodology and Processes

D. Concerns relating epistemic injustice

IMCLS is particularly concerned about the assumption that permission obtained from a government department is, by itself, sufficient to conduct research within Indigenous community areas. Government or departmental permission and community consent are distinct processes, and compliance with one does not substitute for the other. The community's own consent seeking and ethical review processes must therefore be respected.

Disregarding these processes risks marginalising the community's authority, knowledge and voice in matters concerning its own territory and resources. It may further reinforce relationship imbalance in which Indigenous communities are treated primarily as sources of knowledge rather than as legitimate participants and rights holders in the production, interpretation and governance of that knowledge. In this context, such practices raise serious concerns regarding epistemic injustice, particularly where the community's concerns, knowledge and authority are not given due recognition in decisions concerning research undertaken within its customary areas.

Is there a way to clear their names?

The purpose of blacklisting is not to permanently close the door to dialogue. If the concerned researchers genuinely wish to resolve the matter in good faith and with good will, IMCLS remains open to reciprocate them. But it doesn't mean one would purposefully disregard IMCRE and put the cart before the horse. They may approach the Executive Members of IMCLS through the official communication channel available to them and seek an opportunity to discuss the concerns directly. Any resolution, however, would require sincere acknowledgement of the issues and a willingness to meaningfully engage with the established community process. The objective should be to resolve the underlying concerns rather than simply characterise them as a "misunderstanding".

3. What happens if researchers continue to conduct research despite being blacklisted? What steps will be taken? Are there legal repercussions?

It is important to recognise that the Idu Mishmi share a deep rooted ancestral relationship with our mountains and rivers, founded on a strong sense of responsibility, stewardship and respect for



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nature. These lands and resources have been protected and nurtured by generations of our forefathers, and we all carry the responsibility to preserve them and pass them on with the same care and respect to future generations.

IMCLS does not intend to adopt unnecessarily confrontational measures by locking horns with research fraternity. The preferred approach is a dialogue and resolution in good faith in tire sense. However, such engagement must be demonstrated through meaningful actions and direct communication.

If a researcher continues to undertake field activities within Idu Mishmi community areas despite being formally blacklisted and without the requisite community permission, IMCLS may take appropriate steps to protect the community's rights and ensure compliance with applicable laws and established procedures.

The intention is therefore not to create confrontation, but to make it clear that blacklisting is a formal community decision and cannot simply be disregarded. Researchers who wish to resolve the matter will always have the opportunity to engage with IMCLS in good faith and through the established process.

4. What are the criteria used in approving or rejecting researchers? How many applications has the Board received since 2024?

Any researcher intending to undertake research involving the Idu Mishmi community, its customary areas, knowledge or resources is required to obtain the Idu Mishmi Code of Research Ethics (IMCRE) from IMCLS office or its official website. The IMCRE provides the relevant ethical framework and application Forms within it. Once the completed application and research proposal are submitted through the IMCLS email, the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) reviews the proposal and interacts with the researchers online for clarification. Depending on the proposal, several rounds of discussion may take place before a final decision is reached.

Researchers are advised not to undertake fieldwork until final consent and approval have been communicated. They are therefore encouraged to apply well in advance of their proposed visit. This allows adequate time for the Board to assess the proposal and for the community to consider its priorities and concerns, while also preventing researchers from incurring unnecessary travel and logistical expenses before approval is obtained.

The entire process follows a two-tier system of mandatory consent and approval: one at the community level through the IMCLS Research Ethics Review Board (RERB) and another at the village level where the research is proposed to be conducted. This ensures that both the community level



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institution, with its ethical and technical oversight, and the concerned villagers have an opportunity to meaningfully participate and make informed decisions. It also provides clarity to researchers on whom to approach for consent at different levels.

Since the launch of the IMCRE and the Research Ethics Review Board (RERB), IMCLS has received more than 44 research proposals, with new applications continuing to be received regularly. These include proposals from researchers and institutions at the national and international levels, as well as from members of the Idu Mishmi community itself. The applications also include birding enthusiasts seeking permission to collect and contribute biodiversity data.

The existence of the RERB and its approval process has been widely communicated through the IMCLS website, village-level stakeholder meetings, engagement with tourism associations, and formal letters to competent district and state authorities. The requirement to obtain community permission has therefore been communicated through multiple channels and is well established.

5. What obligations do researchers have to the community during and after finishing the research process? Eg. Sharing research, returning data.

Researchers are encouraged to fully disclose the aims, objectives, methods and potential implications of their research and comply with the principles of the IMCRE. The use of data, knowledge or materials obtained from Idu Mishmi community areas is subject to prior consent from both IMCLS and the concerned villagers, including sharing relevant drafts before final publication in the public domain. Where researchers are unable to fully comply with certain provisions due to statutory or institutional requirements, they are expected to address community priorities through a mutually agreed MoU, based on mutual respect, trust and equitable benefit sharing.

Where data or materials are found to have been collected in violation of community protocols, the responsibility for their repatriation or appropriate remedial action rests with the researcher and the concerned research institution.

6. Do these guidelines only apply to researchers working with private entities or also government entities? Are there any safeguards to ensure that decision making remains independent from government pressure or influence?

The IMCRE applies equally to all researchers and institutions, including both government and private entities. Its purpose is to ensure that the community's ethical framework is applied consistently and without discrimination. The RERB functions independently of both government and private entities in its review and decision-making. A key measure to ensure impartiality is the management of conflicts



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of interest. If a Board member has a personal or professional association with a researcher whose proposal is under consideration, the member is required to disclose the conflict and recuse themselves from the deliberation and decision-making process.

IMCLS also encourages qualified members of the Idu Mishmi community to be part of RERB and participate in the RERB processes, strengthening community representation and institutional experience. Ultimately, the credibility of the process rests on independence, transparency, and integrity, rather than on the institutional and individual status of the researcher.

7, The Idu Mishmi are perhaps the first Indigenous community to blacklist researchers in the country. Is there a need for a broader policy and legal framework across India regarding Indigenous communities and research protocols?

Yes, there is a clear need for a broader national framework recognising Indigenous communities' rights, participation and ethical protocols in research. Experiences from Indigenous communities in Africa and the Americas demonstrate the value of stronger community-level participation and decision-making.

It is important, however, to distinguish legal authority from ethical responsibility. Research ethics does not depend solely on statutory backing. The basic principle is simple: when research involves a community, its knowledge, territory or resources, researchers have an ethical responsibility to seek informed consent and respect established community protocols. Ethics itself is a general norm and accepted principle.

The Idu Mishmi Code of Research Ethics (IMCRE) is not intended to prevent or ban research. It seeks to promote meaningful, participatory and mutually respectful research, while addressing unethical, extractive or undisclosed practices. It encourages researchers to engage with the community as an equal partner rather than merely as a source of information, data or biological resources.

There is also an international legal basis for such principles. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and subsequent decisions of its Conference of the Parties (COP) recognise Indigenous peoples and local communities, their traditional knowledge and their participation. India is a Party to the CBD.

President

IMCLS

PRESIDENT
IDU MISHMI CULTURAL
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General Secretary

IMCLS

GENERAL SECY
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