# Research In The Social Sciences In The Global South: An Exploration

Manju S Nair[1*], Abhirami A.[2], Adithya V.K.[3]

[1*]Professor, Department of Economics, University of Kerala
[2]Research Assistant, Department of Economics, University of Kerala
[3]Research Scholar, Department of Economics, University of Kerala

| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| | The recognition of the importance of learning and conducting research in social sciences has grown significantly since the beginning of the twenty-first century. This trend is evident from the inclusion of social sciences in university curricula worldwide, the rising number of researchers, teachers, and students in this field, and the increase in published social science articles and books. However, social scientific knowledge faces significant risks in the Global South, where it is most needed. These risks include disparities in the production sites of knowledge, differences in understanding what constitutes 'knowledge', and uneven distribution of resources for knowledge production. The article aims to explore the landscape of social science research in the Global South, focusing on the risks associated with knowledge production, understanding, and resources. Analysis shows that there is an explicit inequality in the global representation of social science research, particularly on critical issues like inequality and social justice, where majority of publications come from North America and Western Europe. The dominance of the Global North in social science research allows it to set the agenda for what constitutes valuable research, including which issues are studied, which methodologies are used, and which theoretical frameworks are applied. This hegemony forces researchers in the Global South to conform to Western standards to gain visibility, often leading to an intellectual dependency. The limited resources for social science research in the Global South are a primary cause of the disparities in knowledge production. These countries often prioritize natural sciences over social sciences, leading to insufficient capacities for social science research. The case of India goes along with the general trend seen in the global South. The article calls for alternative discourses and knowledge systems informed by Indigenous experiences, philosophies and cultural practices and the need for social science research to focus on local contexts to address the multiple issues that hinder development. |

## I Introduction

Globally there has been an ever-increasing recognition of the need and importance of learning and doing research in social sciences since the beginning of the twenty-first century. This is evidenced by the fact that social sciences are taught in most of universities along with rapid increase in the researchers, professors, lecturers and social science students, as has the number of social science articles and books published in different languages. A large number of social scientists work as researchers and scholars, the advisors of governments are social scientists who have a role in deciding the development path of their economies. Compared to the twentieth century, in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, social sciences expertise remains in high demand from policy-makers, media, and the public (Featherman & Vinovskis, 2009). This is because of the universality of problems faced by the world including climate change, food crisis, and recent episodes of the pandemic. Much is expected from social sciences knowledge and expertise when seeking to solve such challenges (Ferreira, et al., 2020) Even when we speak of the progress in understanding social science's importance, social scientific knowledge is at risk in the Global South world where it is most needed. These risks include risk in the divide in the production sites of knowledge, risk in the divide in the understanding of 'knowledge' and risks in the divide in the resources available for knowledge production (Connell, 2020). These risks affect the accumulation, transmission, and use of knowledge in our societies, to

the detriment of equitable development.  These risks lead to fragmentation of knowledge which hamper the capacity of social sciences to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow (Blokland, 2015). The objective of the article is to navigate the landscape of social science research in the parts of the world where it is more needed (Global South), by elaborating on the risks associated with social science knowledge production, understanding, and resources. The case of India, as a country representing the Global South, is also examined regarding the status of social science knowledge production, and the challenges involved. The paper also highlights the need for an alternative system of knowledge production and understanding suited for the social context and history of a nation.

## II Methods

The article is based on descriptive research methods aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of social science research and funding. Social science journals and articles by regions, major language of social science journals, details of journals where 'inequalities and social justice', as a leading social science issue is featured, etc are enquired upon.  Data were collected from multiple sources, including government reports, funding agency websites, research institution publications, and academic journals.

### III Risks in social science knowledge production, understanding, and resources
### a) Risks in the divide in the production sites of knowledge in social sciences
Risk in the divide in the production sites of knowledge in social sciences is examined by using the data from World Social Science Report based on two databases.- Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) of Web of Science and Ulrich Data base.

**Table 1: Social sciences journals and articles by region and database**

| Region | % All Ulrich academic journals in 2004 (N = 6,640) | % Ulrich refered journals in 2004 (N = 3,046) | % Thompson SSCI journals 1980-2007 (N= 1,162) | % Thomson SSCI articles 1998-2007 (N = 2,26,940) |
|--------|------|------|------|------|
| Europe | 47.8 | 43.8 | 46.1 | 38.0 |
| North America | 29.4 | 37.0 | 46.5 | 52,2 |
| Asia | 11.2 | 8.6 | 3.7 | 8.9 |
| Latin America | 5.2 | 4.7 | 1.3 | 1.7 |
| Oceania | 3.9 | 4.2 | 1.9 | 4.7 |
| Africa | 2.2 | 1.8 | 0.4 | 1.6 |
| CIS | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 1.2 |

*Source: World Social Science Report 2016*

As Table 1 shows, Europe and North America far outweigh the rest of the world in academic publications. Europe accounts for about 45 per cent of world journal production. North America is behind with 37 per cent of refereed journals in the Ulrich database but equal at 46 per cent according to the SSCI. All the other regions are well behind, with less than 10 per cent of refereed journals or publications each. In terms of papers also North America and Europe represents the maximum per centage.

**Table 2: The ten prevalent languages in social science journals**

| Language | % Ulrich refereed journals in 2004 (N = 3,046) | % Thomson SSCI articles 1998-2007 (N =2,26,984) |
|----------|------|------|
| English | 85.3 | 94.45 |
| French | 5.9 | 1.25 |
| German | 5.4 | 2.14 |
| Spanish | 4.0 | 0.40 |
| Portuguese | 1.7 | 0.08 |
| Chinese | 1.5 | 0.00 |
| Dutch | 1.5 | 0.01 |
| Japanese | 1.0 | 0.06 |
| Polish | 0.9 | 0.00 |
| Italian | 0.6 | 0.01 |

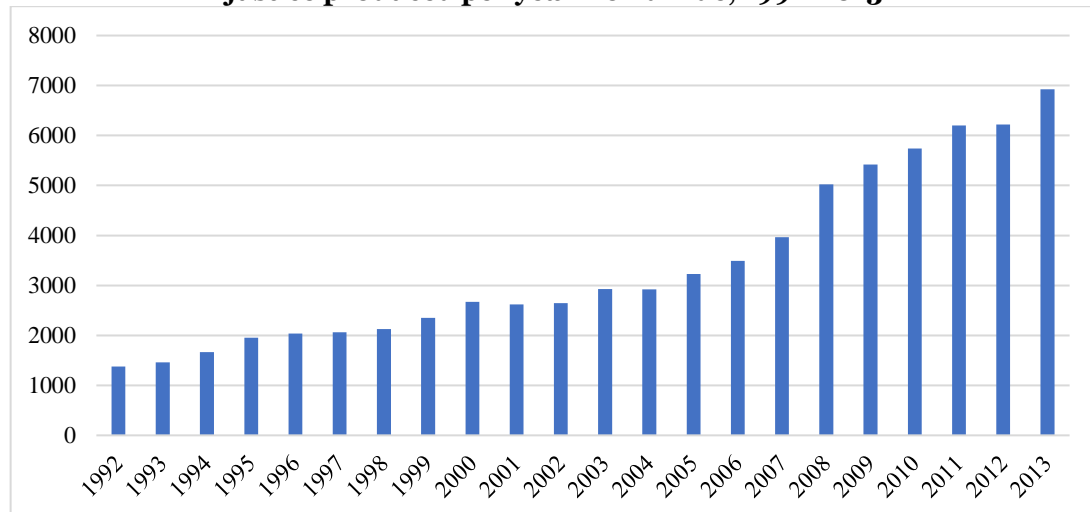*Source: World Social Science Report 2016*

Table 2 shows that the first five languages of Social Science journals are Western ones. English is by far the most used language in social science journals: 85.3 per  cent of the refereed journals covered in Ulrich are edited totally or partially in English. French, German, Spanish and Portuguese follow. This indicates the stronger concentration of English in scientific communities as opposed to the larger intellectual communities, which are naturally more attached to their local languages. If we use the SSCI to consider the languages in which the articles are written, English articles account for around 94 per cent (in the period 1998–2007) of the

total. When we look into the global trends in the production of scientific papers we see that there is a rise of about 21 per cent in the numbers of social science articles between the two periods: the increase dominated by North America and Europe.

Let us take the case of an example with a topic of great relevance in social science research – i.e., inequality and social justice.

Fig 1. shows the number of social science and humanities publications in inequality and social justice in WoS publications, from World Social Science Report.

**Figure 1: Number of publications in the social and human sciences on inequalities and social justice produced per year worldwide, 1992-2013**
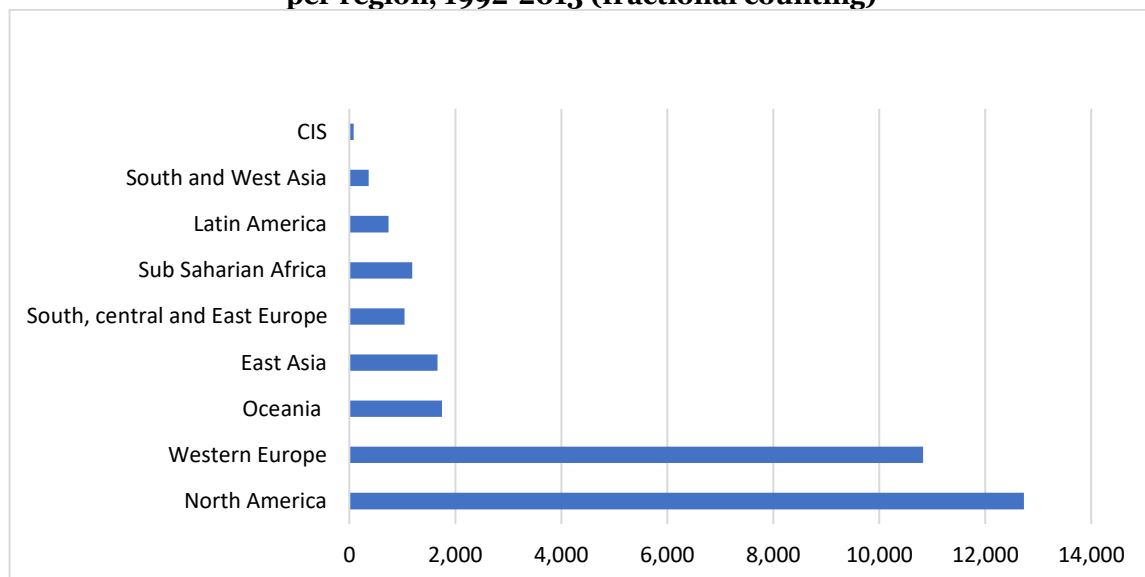


*Source: World Social Science Report 2016*

The number of publications on inequalities and social justice increased in absolute and relative terms, growing from 4.3 to 5.9 percent of all social science and humanities publications in just ten years, from 2003 to 2013. This illustrates an increasing interest in the topic. But the question is who are the researchers who study inequality and social justice in the largest numbers.? Are they located where they are most needed, in areas where inequalities are most acute, as in the Global South?

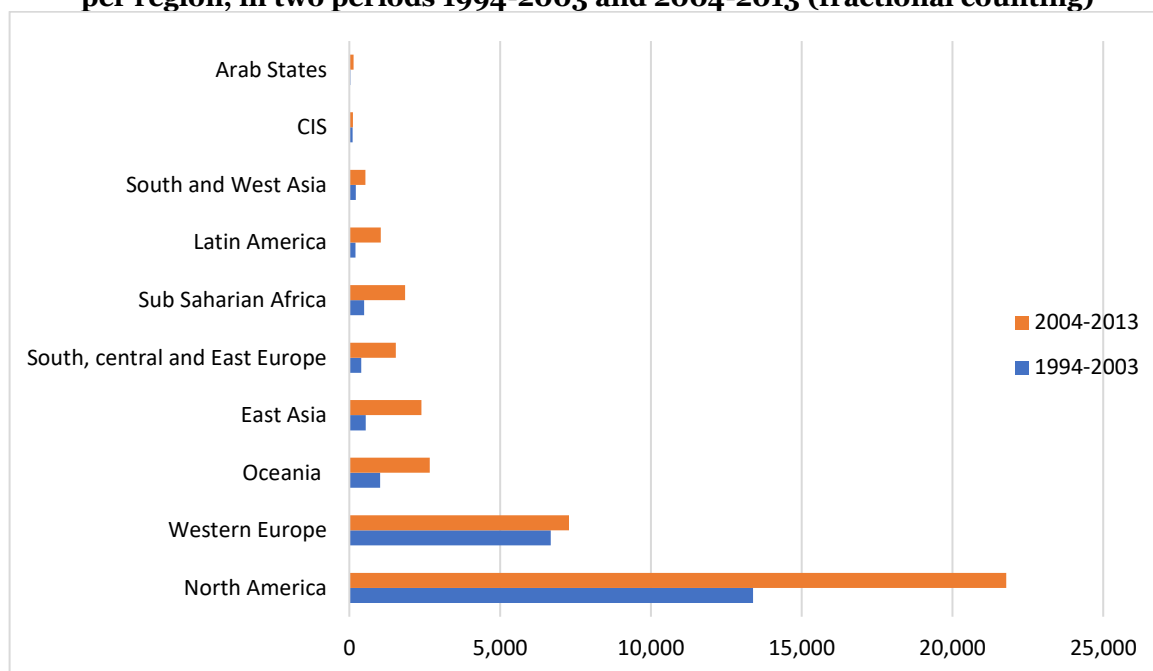Knowledge inequality: where is research on inequality produced?

**Figure 2: Number of social and human science publications on inequality and social justice per region, 1992-2013 (fractional counting)**

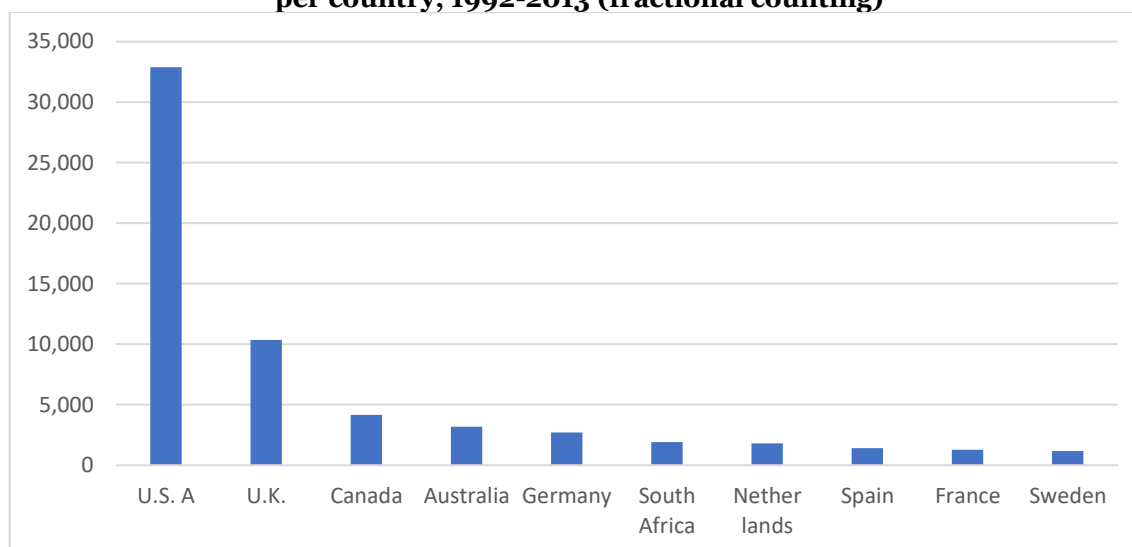

*Source: World Social Science Report 2016*

Nearly half of all publications (49.3 per cent) on the theme of inequality and social justice between 1992 and 2013 were produced in North America. Another 32.4 per cent was produced in Western Europe. Far behind came other regions

**Figure 3: Number of social and human science publications on inequality and social justice per region, in two periods 1994-2003 and 2004-2013 (fractional counting)**



*Source: World Social Science Report 2016*

**Figure 4: Number of social and human science publications on inequality and social justice per country, 1992-2013 (fractional counting)**



*Source: World Social Science Report 2016*

In terms of country, the USA produced the largest number of SHS publications during the period 1992– 2013 (43.8 per cent) followed by the UK (13.7 per cent), Canada, Australia, Germany and South Africa. In other words, the institutions of two countries produced 57 per cent of all publications on this theme between 1994– 2003 and 2004–13.

## b) Risks in the divide in understanding of knowledge

The Global North is the main contributor to world social science production and publishing. This leading position gives the West a major role in defining which research outcomes deserve to be published, particularly a) which research issues are of interest? b) Which research methodology will produce robust knowledge and c) which theoretical concepts should be referred to?

How does the global south respond? It responds by internalizing Western knowledge production norms in order to be visible on the international scientific scene. To cite an example from the disciple of Economics, research and knowledge production in Economics can be seen as an example that illuminates Western hegemony in social sciences. The global South's economics still suffers from its intellectual dependency on Western production. Researchers from the global South are often more devoted to empirical studies and data collection, whereas the theoretical implications of these works are discussed in studies by researchers in North-

Western countries. General economic theory is regarded as universally valid, and social realities from all over the world are analysed with its tools, which are essentially produced in the North. For example the one-size-fits-all development policy of globalization, liberalization and privatization and setting tight the fiscal belts has dominated Western economic theories and thoughts from the Washington Consensus- The global south was forced to adopt this one size fits all development policy resulting in failures.

There is a growing recognition of the fact that knowledge depends on the context. People and place-based research can contribute to a greater understanding of the wide range of alternatives to current economic development models. All knowledge is situated knowledge, and the best way of increasing the robustness of knowledge is to multiply the diversity of the experiences of those producing scientific knowledge – for example if we speak of environmental change as a challenge that affects societies it is equally important to recognise that changes in the environment are closely linked to dynamic economic, social, cultural, ecological, institutional, technological and political contexts. These contexts often call for responses that address multiple stressors and respond to interlinked challenges. Consequently, there is a need to facilitate access to knowledge that is relevant to the contexts in which people are living and experiencing environmental change. Separating issues of development, poverty reduction etc  from environmental change and considering it as a separate 'box' that can be addressed through research and policies independent of other social processes will most probably lead to a dead end.

## c) Risk in the divide in the resources available for knowledge production.

Why are the first two risks happening – It is mainly because the resources available for social science research production are extremely limited for the global south. Generally, these countries give higher importance  to the natural sciences than to the social sciences, implying that the capacities to conduct social science research is less in these countries (Moletsane, 2015).

When assessing national or regional capacities to conduct social science research, it may be useful to separate the three levels (Pahl-Wostl, 2009; Nchinda, 2002).

**At the individual level** - Have enough researchers the necessary education and professional skills to conduct research, using quantitative or qualitative research methods? Do they have the ability to identify research themes that are relevant to society, and to develop research questions? Increasingly also, researchers are requested to develop research proposals: do the researchers have the necessary skills to do this? Can they lead research teams, and can they communicate research results to improve public understanding, inform debate and advise policy?  Definity only a very minority in the global south possess these capabilities.

**At the organizational level** -Well-trained researchers cannot do research unless there is demand for their skills, and unless they work in reasonably resourced organizations. Are there enough research positions available to form a critical mass or a community of researchers in one or more institutions?  How many and which institutions are sufficiently well-funded to offer adequate infrastructure and an enriching research environment? The assessment of challenges at this level would look at issues like the type of research organizations (universities versus research centres and institutes), their status (are they centres of excellence, are they considered world-class or not?), their track record in terms of managing research programmes and publishing, their staff (are they stable, committed and available in sufficient numbers?), the quality of the infrastructure, the way they are financed, and last but not least, the opportunities they provide to publish and to collaborate and exchange information with other researchers at national, regional or international level.

In the first two cases, funding is a central issue, and needs to be considered from several angles. Is funding sufficient to allow fieldwork, recruitment of assistants, attendance at conferences and workshops, spending time abroad, and publishing? Do researchers bid for grants from national funding agencies? How dependent are they on funds from international agencies? How accessible are such funds? Is the level of financing sufficiently stable to allow research projects to be carried out over several years? What mechanisms of peer review and accountability are employed, and how does this impinge on capacity development?

**At the research system level and the overall national and regional contexts**

Of concern here are the broader policy framework and socio-political context within which social science research operates. The first element concerns research policy. Is there a national policy that defines priority areas? Are there any indications of genuine interest in research on the part of the authorities or wider society? The second element concerns the working conditions of researchers and their salary levels. Do researchers have sufficient incentives to continue carrying out research rather than joining the private sector, or leaving their country? Another series of questions relates to the incentives that may exist to encourage researchers to publish. The third element concerns the degree of academic freedom: freedom to teach, freedom to publish and freedom of the press. What tradition of academic freedom does the country have, if any? Unsatisfactory conditions in any of these areas may reduce the scientific production, and may tempt academics to leave the country. – All these have implication in the global south.

## IV Social Science Research in India

India dominates the social sciences in South Asia, partly because it is the largest country in South Asia. In addition, it is the only country in the region where the relevance of social sciences for policy-oriented research and as an academic discipline has long been recognized and institutionalized. In general, four types of institutions conduct social science research in India: - educational institutions comprising social science departments at universities and postgraduate colleges under universities, - research institutes set up by government departments, - government-funded, but legally autonomous, specialized research institutes and research units and programmes set up or funded by private agencies, foundations, and NGOs (Kumar, 2009). In India, universities and publicly funded research organizations are still the main actors in knowledge production. The University Grants Commission (UGC), the main body administering universities, has played a crucial role in promoting social science research in India (Kaur & Nagaich 2019). The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), which is the second most important funding agency, was established in 1969. Its main objective was to nurture academic social science research by establishing autonomous research institutes in different parts of the country. So far, twenty-nine such institutions have been set up with funding from central and state government according to the data provided in the ICSSR official website. In the post-liberalization and globalization period a number of non-governmental research institutes and private consultancy firms have been founded to carry out specific goal-oriented research. Public universities and research institutes continue to be the main academic research actors, but they find it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves on public funds alone. They have to attract private and international funding, and combine sponsored and consultancy research with academic research. However, it is surprising that despite a large base of students, faculty, and institutions in the social sciences, only a small number of institutions could make their presence felt at the international level through their research publications (Iyer, 2016)

   As the ICSSR Report (2007, p. 20) observes: while the scale and range of social science research in the country have been expanding, the nature, scope and quality of research output, as well as its contribution to a better understanding of socio-economic processes and shaping public policy is widely perceived to have fallen short of expectations. The issues identified in this regard are there has been no significant growth in the number of public research institutions. Since the 1969 founding of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), which houses twenty-nine research institutes, there has been no major expansion of public research institutions. Many of these institutions have recently come under critical public scrutiny and evaluation. As Partha Chatterjee (2008, p. 39) notes, 'only half dozen or so ICSSR institutes are today genuinely viable as research and training institutions in the advanced academic disciplines of the social sciences. Only a small proportion, 15 to 20 per cent, are teaching and research-based universities, while 80 per cent can be regarded as teaching universities only. Another issue is autonomy from political interference. Objectivity is problematic in social science research, and Major research projects on, and funding for, politically loaded subjects such as religion, caste and ethnicity both become subject to political steering. Scholars generally agree on the need to delink the ICSSR in particular, and social science research in general, from political interference. Barring some centres of excellence in India, social sciences as a whole are accorded low priority in the whole South Asian region This leads to social scientists having a low status and limited career opportunities. The funding availability for social science research is also limited, UGC has stopped funding research projects and the amount of funding available from ICSSR has remained quite limited and it is mostly confined to urban-based universities. India has a Science Technology and Innovation Policy where social science is not considered (Ghosh, 2010).

## IV The need for alternative discourses

There is a need for a revolution involving alternative discourses and knowledge. Alternative discourses can be defined as discourses which are informed by indigenous historical experiences, philosophies and cultural practices which can be used as sources for alternative theories and concepts in social sciences. It does suggest, that the social sciences, like any form of knowledge, take place in a social and historical context, and must be relevant in the context. Social science research on local issues focusing on the context is important because vulnerable people suffer multiple inequalities which thwart their development (Sinha, 2020). These inequalities are mainly sustained by unequal relations with groups that hold economic, social, political, environmental and cultural power, and which impose an exclusive way of constructing knowledge. When these aspects are not taken into consideration then knowledge is created in a decontextualized way, as if knowledge were a commodity that can be taken out of where it is produced and consumed. Context specific knowledge is what is needed (Papa, 2010).

Additionally, in India, the knowledge of the most vulnerable populations have traditionally been made invisible by economically and politically powerful groups. The knowledge of indigenous people, peasants, or rural people has been devalued by being categorized as tacit knowledge which is transmitted through experience, orality, practice, and imitation. But more recently there is increasing recognition of alternative efforts to challenge global problems such as climate change, chronic disease, water management and new agricultural methods by prioritising the local knowledge through research processes studying collective wisdom. The work of Co-operatives in the field of agroecology, tribal knowledge, disease management is worth mentioning. A key condition is the existence of community collectives responsible for making knowledge dynamic, safeguarding it and appropriating it, and this is the main focus of co-operatives or solidarity economies that supports the horizontal exchange of common knowledge. This exchange allows the knowledge produced by those

communities throughout their history to be recognized, documented and visualized. Social scientists work with young people, children and women from indigenous, coastal communities to create and retrieve the telling of local stories. The documentation and recovery of this community know-how is as vital as the organizational processes themselves. The local knowledge now being documented is able to be recognized, re-encountered and reappropriated as a common good of the people. Social scientists in the global south have a greater role here in supporting and popularising the alternative knowledge that is created (Srivastava, 2013).

## Conclusion

The increasing acknowledgment of the importance of social sciences highlights the critical role they play in addressing the world's complex challenges. However, this recognition has not uniformly translated into equitable development of social science research across the globe, particularly in the Global South. The production, understanding, and resource allocation of social science knowledge remain heavily skewed towards the Global North, creating significant barriers to effective and relevant knowledge generation where it is most needed. Our exploration reveals a pronounced divide in the sites of knowledge production, with Europe and North America dominating academic publications and setting the standards for research topics, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks. This dominance has led to a homogenization of knowledge that often fails to account for the diverse social and cultural contexts of the Global South. In particular, the case of India highlights both the potential and the struggles of social science research in the region. Despite a robust academic infrastructure and a large pool of researchers, the country faces significant challenges, including political interference, limited funding, and a lack of visibility on the international stage. The imperative for alternative discourses and knowledge systems is clear. Social sciences must become more context-sensitive, drawing on indigenous historical experiences, philosophies, and cultural practices to generate knowledge that is both relevant and impactful. The inclusion of local knowledge, particularly that of marginalized communities, can offer fresh perspectives and solutions to global problems like climate change, food security, and social justice. To bridge the existing divides, there needs to be a concerted effort to enhance the capacity for social science research in the Global South. This includes improving educational and professional training for researchers, ensuring stable and sufficient funding, and fostering environments that encourage innovative and locally relevant research. Moreover, it is crucial to support and popularize alternative knowledge systems that reflect the unique experiences and wisdom of local communities. By fostering a more inclusive and diverse knowledge production landscape, we can better equip ourselves to tackle the pressing issues of our time and promote equitable and sustainable development globally.

## References

1. Blokland, H. (2015). Creating Useable Knowledge for Tomorrow's Democratic Societies: The Academic Background of Social Science Works. *Potsdam. socialscienceworks. org*.
2. Chatterjee, P. (2002). Institutional context of social science research in South Asia. *Economic and political weekly*, 3604-3612.
3. Connell, R. (2020). *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Routledge.
4. Featherman, D. L., & Vinovskis, M. A. (Eds.). (2009). *Social science and policy-making: A search for relevance in the twentieth century*. University of Michigan Press.
5. Ferreira, C. M., Sá, M. J., Martins, J. G., & Serpa, S. (2020). The COVID-19 contagion–pandemic dyad: A view from social sciences. *Societies*, *10*(4), 77.
6. Ghosh, P. S. (2010). Social Science Research in India: An Institutional Analysis of the ICSSR Experiment. *IASSI Quarterly*, *29*(1), 23-51.
7. ICSSR. (2007). *Restructuring the Indian Council of Social Science Research*. GOI.
8. ISSC, IDS and UNESCO (2016), World Social Science Report 2016, Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World, UNESCO Publishing, Paris.
9. Iyer, P. K. (2016). Mapping The Changing Context And Orientation of Social Science Research In India: Some Observations. *Indian Journal of Applied Research, 6*(5).
10. Kaur, B., & Nagaich, S. (2019). Analysis of Social Science Research in India: A Mapping Report. *Available at SSRN 3397916*.
11. Kumar, A., & Modi, I. P. (2009). Indian Sociological Society Secretary's Report (2007). *Sociological bulletin*, *58*(2), 287-292.
12. Nchinda, T. C. (2002). Research capacity strengthening in the South. *Social science & medicine*, *54*(11), 1699-1711.
13. Mishra, R. K., & Raveendran, J. (2015). Indian and International Social Science Research: Trends, Issues and Initiatives in Performance Orientation. In *Social Science Research in India and the World* (pp. 1-52). Routledge India.
14. Moletsane, R. (2015). Whose knowledge is it? Towards reordering knowledge production and dissemination in the Global South. *Educational Research for Social Change*, *4*(2), 35
15. Pahl-Wostl, C. (2009). A conceptual framework for analysing adaptive capacity and multi-level learning processes in resource governance regimes. *Global environmental change*, *19*(3), 354-365.

16. Papa, T. S. (2010). Social Science Research in Globalising India: Historical Development and Recent Trends. *IASSI Quarterly*, *29*(1), 10-22.
17. Sinha, D. (2020). *The social sciences in a global age: decoding knowledge politics*. Routledge India.
18. Srivastava, R. (2013). Social Sciences in India in the Emerging National and Global Scenario. *IASSI-Quarterly*, *32*(2), 1-17.