

Book Review

Some Aspects of Community Empowerment and Resilience

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Abstract

In this case, the authors give a detailed account of Punsari village in western part of India which has transformed itself from an underdeveloped and poor habitat to a “smart village” today. Punsari has attracted lot of positive attention from different quarters recently for its excellent achievements as a village and has own recognition for the same. The authors depict an account of a rural transformation under the visionary leadership of the village headman (Sarpanch) during the last one decade. In a country, where villages still face scarcity of various basic facilities, Punsari has won accolades for providing the most modern facilities to its population. Through effective planning and utilization of Central and state government funds, Punsari has reached outstanding landmarks in healthcare, education, employment and modern facilities. This village now stands as a role model of rural management for the rest of India. The authors have travelled to the village to talk to people and Based on those interviews and information available in open sources, this case was developed. The authors have explored the journey of development to analyze the factors contributing to the success. The authors attempt to present the case of Punsari to be followed as a management model in numerous underdeveloped villages around the globe, especially in developing countries. It is also an example of how leadership and vision can bring about radical changes to a populous social unit. It depicts the significance of rural entrepreneurial leadership in the current economic scenario.

Keywords: Rural Management, Leadership, Employment, Smart Village, Government Funds, Model Village

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The book “*Some Aspects of Community Empowerment and Resilience*” (2015), edited by Venkat Pulla and Bharath Bhushan Mamidi, consisting of sixteen research papers/articles, problematizes and explores the crucial concerns of community rights and empowerment, the book describes their developing hopes, coping and resilience with such ease that a reader unfamiliar to the field will learn from the basics and an expert in the field will surely earn advanced perspectives. The book could prove an important source of knowledge in the field of community studies as it portrays a sketch of the community empowerment and resilience in the developing countries like Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, India and the UK under one umbrella. The book demonstrates a valuable illustration of the increasing indifference, displacement and instability in communities, the need for awareness in students, academics, researchers as well as in communities and the nature of research practices.

The first paper by Venkat Pulla and Bharath Bhushan Mamidi deals with the concepts of Community Empowerment and Resilience Development in modern context, the challenges faced in the process of empowerment and development, differentiating the concepts of *Resilience* and *Coping* as they could be understood as the same. It conveys that the resilience of a group or community also depends on the culture and extent of marginalisation faced. This provides a good introduction to the book. Vishanthie Sewpaul, et. al. discuss the links between the emancipatory social work education and community empowerment. The paper describes the community-based

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arbitration accepting a whole school approach at a disadvantaged school in a town in Durban, South Africa.

The next essay explores how social workers should be trained and should approach community empowerment. Leisha Townson and Pulla deal with the concepts of reflexivity, positionality, privilege, situated knowledge, perceptions that are woven together and their relationship with one another. It concludes that these concepts are essentially interlinked so “the interpretation can be four fifths of the truth, but it is not enough.” (pp 45). Deborah Graham promotes the need to regulate thinking in society based on the study of the indigenous Australians who have been marginalized and discriminated since colonisation, which has resulted in their psychological, physical and social harm on a day-to-day basis, as an outcome of their own and others’ thinking about them. Ndungiwa Mungai discusses the Afrocentric paradigm and its identical principles with Ubuntu exemplifying African values and ethics. It examines the application and manifestation of the Afrocentric social work in Africa. The concepts of *Sankfa* and Ubuntu reflect the foundations for indigenization in Africa.

Pulla and Anne Riggs recognize the visual and performing arts as unexplored cultural asset. They focus on the commonly shared interests between arts and social work and how to collaborate them for community development. Azlinda Azman reviews how the concepts of coping, resilience and hope are interlinked, from the perspective of social work, in helping individual groups and communities to strengthen their lives. Lambert Engelbrecht synthesizes important literature around the context of community empowerment and financial literacy as the foundation for content analysis.

The case study presented by Subhash Chandra Mamadi and Bharath Bhushan Mamadi is a depiction and evaluation of the process utilized by a team of volunteers with limited resources that successfully assisted 370 missing children reunite with their families. It also gives practical measures that are replicable, which consists of the role of the civil societies, NGOs, volunteers, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and media. Rosemary Rae elaborates the issues in creating social workers, the discursive accountability and taking responsibility of our own thinking. It is a case-study of 22 qualitative interviews of service users and carers who participated in prospective social work students.

Goran Basic aims to analyse the retold experiences of 27 supervisors from 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These interviews are then segregated on the basis of themes such as stories of implacability, reconciliation and conditions for reconciliation. On the basis of the interviews discussed in details, the writer concludes that “the possibility for forgiveness usually dies when atrocity occurs...” (pp 204). Antoinette Day and Kalpana Goel conducted research in the field of domestic violence, where they used the eco-systems framework to develop resilience and hope. To get a clear intuition, eight adults with childhood experience of domestic violence were examined through interviews. The paper focuses on the importance of eco systems framework that social workers could use to develop resilience and to help those affected by domestic violence in childhood.

Shawn Somerset deals with the cultural and sustainability dimensions that add resilience to food security for populations in economic transition. It takes its case studies from Australia, Middle-East and South-East Asia to investigate some opportunities to de-commodify food security at the community level. Ndungi Wa Mungai and Pulla attend to the issue of poverty in Asian countries; the writers say that poverty may be declining but is not eliminated. The paper asserts that the economic growth does not correlate in the human rights situation so poverty and inequalities in the society should be regarded as human rights issues

Venkat Pulla and Tulshi Kumar Das discuss the Bangladesh floods and what support was offered to help the victims to cope and adapt to the change on occupational and income generation patterns. Coping strategies the central theme throughout the article. The study took 25 affected households with similar socio-economic backgrounds that live in the *haor* areas. The research concludes that Bangladesh is prone to natural calamities and the affected people have developed their own strategies to cope with the situation of flood that inundates them every now and then. As one of the respondents in the interviews says, “This is every year affair. As the affected we don’t have to lose our dreams and hopes, we need to face it... and move on for survival.” (pp 226). The last paper by Leisha Townson and Venkat Pulla serves as an epilogue of the book as it moves on to extending the understanding of the concept of resilience through the use of auto-ethnography (the use of personal experiences of the writers who are researchers and practitioners).

The papers explore a varied range of themes, issues, case studies and countries, though they are merged into the central themes of community empowerment and resilience, which are interdependent and equally important for community development. The papers focus on the methods, experiences and results of the research practices, though the challenges faced in building empowerment are not being addressed. The book provides elementary and indispensable concepts, their roles-individual and together, relationship with each other, their requirement, usage and benefits; attempting to demonstrate a theory of community empowerment and resilience. The book presents a positive picture of empowerment but it does not address the ethical concerns of the social workers. It does not focus on the conflicts in community empowerment, what happens when conflicts take place during field work,

how they are resolved and other issues faced by social workers/researchers.

Resilience, along with community empowerment, coping and building hope, remains to be the prevailing concept of the book. It should achieve and is beneficial to a wide range of audience from social work students and research scholars to the academicians and social workers, especially those who are working in the area of community development, globally. Due to increasing individualism and modernisation, the industrial and other development remains resourceful to limited mass so much that the “others” are not even aware of their rights. The book evidently represents the commitment of concrete endeavours for community development through the research conducted; moreover, it also accelerates the need and scope for further research in the area.