Some Aspects of Community Empowerment and Resilience

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The book 'Some Aspects of Community Empowerment and Resilience' edited by V. Pulla and B. B. Mamidi, published by Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, India in 2015 consists of sixteen chapters which have mostly discussed some of the core issues of community development approach such as coping and resilience, human rights, community empowerment and building hope. The authors have identified, explained and analysed the significance of those issues in developing communities on the basis of their extensive research, practice and teaching experience in social work and related disciplines in the context of India, Bangladesh, Australia, Africa and the UK. This book could be considered as a valuable source of knowledge for many professionals with espoused commitment to human rights — social workers and human services workers to fulfill their professional obligations. Catalysts, who can never be undervalued in community development, should also be considered as stakeholders in this arena. The effort made by the authors to bring out such a book is a timely contribution, which has equal importance in both the developing and the developed societies.

Now-a-days in a globalised world, many new features of community life such as apathy, indifference and detachment seem to be growing high instead of stability, safety and security, which have been clearly stated in the book. Simultaneously, the book also has stated the necessity of rekindling, reconnecting and re-rooting the communities by offering some fresh and refined approaches such as Emancipatory social work, Afro-centric social work, Community education, Strengths based social work on aspects of coping, resilience and hope, community empowerment and human rights in addressing the needs and problems of disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Implications of those aspects in social work practice, especially in community development practice are considered most prominent throughout the book. The authors have acknowledged that social work with its historical involvement in community development is well suited to undertake human-rights based approach to ensure social justice, empowering communities to build on their own coping strategies, reducing vulnerabilities through the development of climate change policies and eco-friendly lifestyles, challenging structural inequalities from the grass-roots, etc. which have been described with practical examples in different chapters in the book. This collection of papers would be helpful for social workers and human

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services workers to oblige their professional responsibilities and create vibrant and expectant communities.

Venkat Pulla and Bharath Bhushan Mamidi in their first chapter sketch the contours of Community Empowerment, Resilience Development in the context of modern day challenges of community empowerment. They mention that though the components of the process of coping and resilience closely resemble, resilience is more effective than coping. The difference between coping and resilience is that resilience necessarily implies successful adaptation and coping does not. They further mention both successful adaptation or resilience and empowerment of community have some commonalities but are not the same rather resilience is central to the discourse on community environment and sustainability. Vishanthie Sewpaul et al. discuss in their paper the links between emancipatory social work education and community empowerment. The paper describes community-based intervention adopting a whole school approach at an extremely disadvantaged school in a township in Durban, South Africa. Community-based social work to strip itself from its colonial legacies and imbue with meanings consistent with an emancipatory approach that has—at its heart—people centred empowerment, consciousness raising, participation and ecological development.

Leisha Townson and Venkat Pulla utilise an auto-ethnographic and grounded theory approach in their paper in deconstructing their professional and personal experiences. The authors reiterate that all individuals bear multiple social identities. Reflection on these needs to occur on an ongoing basis especially when working with people in a social work role has nicely been presented. In this conceptual paper, the authors explore the concepts such as reflexivity, positionality, privilege, situated knowledge and perceptions and discuss their intricate relationships and what it means to have an unbiased view. Deborah Graham in her paper impels us to examine thinking and actively promotes the need of self-regulated

thinking of all individuals in a society. How we think about other people affects them and how people see themselves is largely made up of reflected appraisal. Her paper provides examples of racism linked to automatic thinking (and the harm that it can do) along with some strategies aimed at increasing equity and social justice for Indigenous Australians. Rosemary Rae in her paper addresses the intricate issues in the making of social workers. Rosemary examining the notion of discursive accountability suggests that as we engage with "the world", we acknowledge that we have to take responsibility for the possibility that our own understandings (and the ways of expressing and working with our understandings) might affect outcomes.

Ndungi wa Mungai talks about an Afro-centric paradigm in his paper that has identical principles with Ubantu exemplifying African values and ethics in the service of humanity. The paper is a critical review on how Afrocentric social work could be applicable to Africa and how this would be manifested in social work practice. The Afro-centric paradigm and the concept of Sankofa and Ubuntu show that Africa has the foundations for indigenisation of social work. Mungai claims that this framework is very useful in understanding and meeting the needs of immigrant African populations throughout the world. Venkat Pulla and Anne Riggs discuss the role of arts in community development in their paper. The authors have identified commonalities and shared concerns between arts and strengths based social work to present a practice narrative. This paper includes voices from the marginalised individuals and communities to strengthen their argument for consideration of arts practice within the prevailing ethos of social work and community development. Shawn Somerset in his paper presents a food security dimension while he adds broader sociocultural dimensions of culture and environmental sustainability to food security. A further broadening of the context reflects the notion that food insecurity is often considered as a standalone reflection of social wellbeing. Lambert K. Engelbrecht

reveals in his paper the significance of community education in contributing towards the facilitation of vulnerable households' strengths, resilience and hope instead of single lectures on financial education by reviewing literature regarding the topic. Engelbrecht addresses questions of financial illiteracy that has long been recognised as a major challenge for the inclusion of financially vulnerable households and communities. Although the paper draws on South African contexts, the topic finds resonance in other contexts across the world. Goran Basic shows in his paper how survivors of the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina have made reconciliation with their former enemies. The author identifies that in spite of prominent implacability of the respondents the possibility of reconciliation is still present. Basic scores forgiveness as the key element for reconciliation and this he believes occurs as an exchange of emotions between people. Subhash Chandra Mamidi and Bharath Bhushan Mamidi explain the tragic situation of missing children in India and the possibility of child protection, and address the problems of missing children with active support of civil society and involvement of the NGOs. The authors also suggest practical measures that are replicable; prominent amongst these are the role of civil societies, volunteers, media and the ICT.

Azlinda Azman presents in her paper a review of the intertwining and the interlinking nature of three important concepts—coping, resilience and hope in helping individuals, groups and communities to enhance their development, particularly from the social work perspectives. In doing this, the author stresses the concept of "person-in-environment" as the main focus of intervention. Venkat Pulla and Tulshi Kumar Das focus on the condition of a group of people who live in an area of Bangladesh called 'Haor' and who constantly suffer from perennial floods. The authors highlight that people living in the *Haor* have developed their own indigenous strategies to cope with the situation of recurring floods that inundates them every now and then, but they always fight back. They firmly stand up and go ahead with their new

mission, the mission of survival. This is an ever-present event in the Haor area, which goes generation to generation and has become a part of their culture. Antoinette Day and Kalpana Goel in their paper seek to gain an understanding of the role of eco-systems in building hope in the context of children surviving domestic violence. Day and Goel mention hope is an important element in the development of resilience. Although adversity and trauma can have a devastating effect on people and their world views by diminishing hope, these are also the situations that give birth to hope. The authors reiterate the importance of an eco-systems framework that social workers could use to develop resilience, research and practice in building hope in this field. In the final chapter, Venkat Pulla and Richard Hill deal with entirely a contemporary issue. The authors are both researcher and practitioner in resilience and have utilised autoethnography to reflect on and to draw from their personal experiences to extend understanding on resilience to begin with and finally attempt to create some transformational pathways to hope.

The book could be highly demanding in the Asian region to address some of the major crises of the 21st century. A paper in this direction has been written by Ndungi Wa Mungai and Venkat Pulla. The authors explore in their paper the challenges and opportunities in addressing the issues of human rights and poverty in Asia in the 21st century as this century is often referred to as the 'Asian Century'. They claim that social work profession is committed to human rights and has an advocacy role for the disadvantaged and voiceless in society. Supporting and empowering the marginalised contributes to building resilience for the community to demand human rights and a dividend in the economic growth. I found it an entirely a timely approach to challenge the major crises of Asian region in the 21st century.

I think the book is very useful one for the students and scholars of applied social sciences as well as for the social workers and human

services workers, particularly in community development field across the globe. Overall, I would like to congratulate all the authors for their effective endeavour and for the discussions and analysis that have been made in each chapter of the book, which will be a valuable source of knowledge for those who teach and practice community development across the nations. The price of the book seems to be reasonable.