

Community Work :
Theories, Experiences and Challenges

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Introduction

What is this book about?

This book revisits community development especially questioning the meaning of the term community in the changing global and international context. The nature and dynamics of what constitutes community are changing to suit the needs of people living in a technologically advanced nature of life. Communities that were based on face-to-face interactions, sense of belonging and 'we' feelings are being replaced or overtaken by virtual communities. What is seen is that face-to-face human interaction is being minimised by technologically advanced ways of communicating, such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype and various other such mechanisms that have traversed physical boundaries and made human interaction possible. This new development has also been instrumental in generating new ideologies, new ways of working with people and addressing human causes.

We are well aware of the importance and applicability of such an approach in the community development perspective. However, the question before the social work fraternity is how much it values and can replace face-to-face interaction. The book attempts to build on the existing knowledge base on community work and community development and aims to expand our thinking on community development processes in the current context of changing globalised society. The authors in the book primarily drew from their global research and practice experiences in the community development field across South Asia, Australia and elsewhere.

Social workers/community workers are mandated to work with the disadvantaged, marginalised and oppressed in the society and are directed by the professional code of ethics to uplift human rights and justice to all. The key imperative in social work practice thus becomes adopting such approaches that embraced practices which uphold people's rights. The book expands on theoretical understandings of community, community development and illustrates practice approaches such as safety net, micro-finance, self-help, Ubuntu approaches that have wider application to different sectors such as education, economy, health and human settlement.

Bringing together academicians in social work and practitioners who have worked with communities from Australia, India, Africa, Malaysia, this volume is a must-read for academics, and students who are studying human services, including social work, community service, community development, and practitioners.

The book delivers practical advice and shares strategies that are based on the real-life experience of working with communities across the nations. It gives breadth and depth of knowledge on community development theory, practice principles, values and illustrates implications for practice based on research and practice experiences that has wider applicability. All the chapters discuss the community development approach/method as a strategy to bring about change in the society. Following a preliminary discussion by Kalpana Goel of the meanings of community and community development, all the chapters discuss the community development approach/method as a strategy to bring about change in the society.

James Mugisha encounters changes in the structural and institutional fabrics of society as a result of globalisation through the micro-finance institution and illustrates how this has been used as a tool to meet community needs for those who are marginalised due to the effects of globalisation.

Kalpana Goel in her chapter examines the role community-based organisations play in fostering a socially inclusive society based on the principles of community development. The author examines community development theory as a method of social work practice in working with immigrant communities.

Another case of effectiveness of community development as a strategy is illustrated by Abraham Francis who has modelled safety net groups as a user-friendly tool for enhancing community building and community support for people having mental health problems.

Bala Raju Nikku's chapter discusses how the social work profession is challenged in the current changing environment that is affected by forces operational at the global level. Through the illustration of community development work in South Asian countries, his paper addresses two important questions: that is how to organise communities in a turbulent environment and how to prepare social work students as effective practitioners who are equipped with knowledge and skills required to work with communities in this changing environment.

Narayan Gopalkrishnan presents a theoretical framework for community development practitioners who are in an advantageous position to influence the adverse impact of globalisation on communities.

Fredrik Velandar and Andreia Schineanu postulate a culturally secure practice framework to work with Indigenous communities. They illustrate aspects of wise practice and culturally secure community development practice by using a case study of Norseman Aboriginal Community in Australia.

Heather Percey and Peter Orpin have explored community development processes in a rural context. Through a grounded theory study, theoretical insights

have been developed modelling the community processes associated with rural community development. Based on differing aetiologies, the model classifies three types of community: feature, interest and cause based.

The paper by Ndungi Wa Mungai presents the Ubuntu philosophy based on African cultures and philosophy and emphasises that our destiny is both as a collective as well as individuals. This approach helps to understand the importance of extended families diaspora communities as well as those in Africa. It also helps to explain the problems encountered by such communities when they migrate to societies with more individualistic ethics.

Bharath Bhushan Mamidi and Radha R. Chada, on the basis of a case study discuss how to organise the Street vendors utilising community organisation methods and the principles of social work and community development.

Joy Penman discusses how to build community capacity through health education at the Grassroots. The University of South Australia at Whyalla has been involved in various community engagements, including health education sessions, which enable community members to build their self-management capacity and increase the human capital of the community. These educational sessions are conducted by staff and invited guest speakers. Joy Penman is an academic and also health director of a local church congregation and this chapter is based on her reflections.

Subhasis Bhadra and Venkat Pulla, in their reflecting on Tsunami present a community development perspective of the various phases of the disaster management cycle focusing on relief, rehabilitation, rebuilding and finally disaster preparedness that attempts to strengthen resilience at individual and community levels. The authors have drawn on their previous work relating to the 2004 Tsunami while explaining the various concepts.

Anne Riggs and Venkat Pulla reflect on arts and social work practices in the field of community work and discuss several shared concerns regarding development options for individuals and communities. While the profession of social work provides coping, resilience and active hope, forms of art would assist in regenerating purpose, rejuvenating life processes and uplifting the affective domain of our client systems.

Abraham Francis, Venkat Pulla and Kalpana Goel in their paper review perspectives currently available for health promotion in social work in relation to mental health. The authors emphasise the importance of strength-based community development perspectives in mental health practice and an attempt is made to put forward an integrated model for addressing mental health issues in a community context. The model looks at highlighting the need for developing and sustaining community spirit and promoting resilience in communities.

Abraham Francis and Venkat Pulla finally in the last chapter attempt to revisit these aspects, namely, globalisation and uncertainty, and their impact on communities.

Our attempt here was to briefly review the processes and challenges facing communities in contemporary society. Along with our colleagues in this collection we have examined the changing concepts of community, its elements and function that has relevance for the community development perspective. How the community development perspective can be utilised to solve some of the crises of 21st century such as the water crisis, food insecurity, unsustainable of food-growing practices, accessing issues and rights of the poor and marginalised require attention. We hope you find the readings here useful.

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Acknowledgements

It is with a great sense of hope; excitement and accomplishment that we would like to present this book to the readers, especially the social work students, human service workers academics and researchers.

A scholarly work is only possible with the zeal, initiative and enthusiasm of researchers and practitioners who are open to share their insights and learned experiences with a community of people interested in the subject matter. The contributors of this volume are people who had spent significant time of their lives in developing insights into issues faced by the communities with whom they have been associated, lived, spoken and listened to. It is their experiences and reflections of what works in working with communities. As the editors of this volume, we owe our gratitude to God who blessed us with some fantastic colleagues and friends to work on this project. We are also indebted to earlier researchers and practitioners who provided valuable theoretical and practical wisdom which has enriched and guided work of many of us who have built further knowledge and suggested frameworks that may be applicable in other parts of the world.

Kalpana Goel wishes to thank her work colleagues who have been inspirational and provided support and encouragement to the editorial team. Kalpana would especially like to thank those who spared their time in the peer reviewing process and that helped the editors to maintain scholarly rigor in this endeavor. Kalpana wishes to convey her heartfelt thanks to both co-editors of this book Dr. Venkat Pulla and Dr. Abraham Francis who worked relentlessly to accomplish the goal of compilation, reviewing chapters and editing of this volume.

As a team we would also thank Bronwyn Ellis, from Whyalla Campus, University of South Australia for professional editing of all the chapters, her unstinted cooperation right up to printing has been fabulous. Likewise, all three of us acknowledge contributions of each one of our families who have provided endless support to us by taking additional household responsibilities and supporting us emotionally. On the production side, we wish to thank Mr Ramesha M.H, the Director of Niruta Publications, Bangalore and his efficient team for their professional support, comments, suggestions and commitment to seeing this work being published.

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Dedication

'I would like to dedicate this book to my late parents Rajendra Prasad Agarwal and Maya Rani Agarwal; whose nurturing and blessings have prepared me as a person with humanistic values and aspirations to move forward'

- Kalpana Goel

'To Srinivas Arka, Philosopher and spiritual mentor and to my wife Nisha Rao who lets me follow my heart in pursuing writing'

- Venkat Pulla

'To my loving wife Mini, children Abhijith and Alka, the source of my strength and the inspiration for all that I do'

- Abraham P. Francis

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