

# Foreword

I am pleased to introduce a volume focused on the community not only as a topic of research, but as a partner in creating new knowledge to address the challenges facing communities—small and large, urban and rural, socially and economically diverse—all around the world. As Deputy Director of Programs, Community Resilience, Land and Housing Campaigns for the Huairou Commission, I am glad that we have this opportunity to learn about the research of clinical sociologists who engage communities on their own grounds, promoting the recognition and value of local knowledge and practice as tools for advocacy, policy change, and real community development.

The Huairou Commission is a global membership and partnership coalition of women's networks, non-governmental organizations and grassroots women's groups in 50 countries. The global secretariat is in Brooklyn, New York (USA). The Huairou Commission supports grassroots women's organizations to steadily enhance their community development practice and collectively secure public leadership on issues that affect their lives and well-being at local through global levels. Established in 1954 at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, Huairou aims to close the gap between poor communities and development decision-makers. We facilitate strategic partnerships among women-led grassroots groups and individuals and institutions that share a commitment to reducing poverty, empowering women, and transforming development so that development is people-centered, equitable and sustainable.

At the Huairou Commission, we believe that peer exchange—be it between members of a specific community or between communities as entities—builds on the idea of empowerment, chipping away at the traditional hierarchy of teacher-learner education that can repress and oppress individuals and their communities from trusting in their own knowledge and capabilities. This horizontal approach encourages organization and self-empowerment providing an opportunity to affect change where often there is little or no access to traditional channels of power for individual community members.

As you will read in the following chapters, partnership—for example, in research and development—does not have to be a top-down model with practitioners or academics imposing their knowledge on local communities. Instead, specific and

needed community interventions can come about through carefully fostered relationships in which community members bring their knowledge, leadership, drive, and capacity and the partner researchers/organizations bring their knowledge, access to decision-making spaces and links to sources of power. Effective, responsible partnership is a matter of equality among partners.

At Huairou, we are focused on women as the core constituents of our focus communities in terms of our work on AIDS; community resilience; land and housing; and governance. This book focuses on two of these topics—community resilience and governance. I welcome this valuable book because it shows the necessity of empowerment, organizational development and participatory research in establishing and developing communities that are just, inclusive, safe and sustainable

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